

The Boy who Cried Leopard

By Nathan

Once upon a time, a boy was set to watch over some goats. Being young and foolish, he was soon terribly bored with his task of sitting, staring, and listening to the sound of the savannah breeze rustling through the tall grass of the country in which he and his tribe presided, for not even a honey badger stirred in the afternoon. Now he had been told by his father, who was very wise in the ways of the world, that if he were to see a leopard, he was to shout out and the other tribesmen would hasten to his aid with spears and clubs.

He then began to muse, “Wouldn’t it be fun to have the whole tribe come marching out of the village, then I would have somebody to converse with and thus while away the tedious and monotonous time that lies before me.” So he cried out in a loud voice that resounded for about a mile across the savannahs of Kenya, “LEOPARD!” So the villagers all gathered up their thorny acacia clubs and sharp flint spears and shields and rushed out to the pasture in such array that is resemblant to an army who had just heard the cry of battle and had hastily gathered their paraphernalia and charged out to meet the foe. When they arrived, the young lad was so overjoyed to see them that their anger was somewhat abated and they left him, not with a flogging, but only a warning not to do it again. And he was content.

But after a while, in the afternoon, when the sun was shining hot down on the savannah and lions were sleeping and zebras and antelope lay in the shade shaking off the flies and other minute annoyances that plague any who are caught unguarded at this time of day, the lad felt his solitude and abandonment, like a sailor, placed on a desert island, surrounded by an endless sea of waving grass as

far as the eye can see. So he began to call out again, “LEOPARD! OH HELP! THE LEOPARD IS HERE!” The villagers again rushed out with the clubs and shields. When the young lad was found alone, but for the goats and a solitary cattle egret, the villagers were extremely exasperated and ordered the lad NEVER to do it again, or he would receive a flogging with the three- thonged whip cord. And so he conceded.

Later, in the early reaches of evening when the sun was sinking slowly into the horizon like a great shining golden orb lying on a brilliant carpet of silk of different hues -- maroon, scarlet, orange, white, pink, and lavender -- and the elephants were drawing close to the watering hole once more to drink, the boy saw, stalking through the golden-gray grass, a spotted leopard heading for a goat. Quickly he cried “LEOPARD! LEOPARD! LEOPARD! HELP HEEEEEEEEEEEEELP! LEOPARD!” But the tribesmen paid no heed to the cries of the boy and merely went on about their tasks, believing it to be another prank. But the boy’s screams continued on, and the villagers began to wonder if there really were some danger. So they crept cautiously up the slope and to the thorn tree under which the boy had been sitting, but they found nothing there but goats, zebras, and a solitary jet-black hair from the boy’s head.

The End