



Savannah stories by the riverbank

An adaptation of *Wind in the Willows* by Kenneth Graham
Illustrated by Fidelis Phene

English-Swahili translation

The Meerkat had been working very hard all morning cleaning his little home. First with brooms, then with dusters, then on ladders and steps and chairs until he had dust in his throat and eyes and an aching back and weary arms. When he suddenly flung down his brush on the floor, said, "Bother!" and "O blow!" and also "Hang cleaning!". He bolted out of the house without even waiting to put on his coat. So he scraped and scratched and scabbled and scrooged, and then he scrooged again and scabbled and scratched and scraped, working busily with his little paws and muttering to himself, "Up we go! Up we go!" till at last, pop! his snout came out into the sunlight and he found himself rolling in the warm grass of a great meadow.

"This is fine!" he said to himself. "This is better than cleaning!" Excited to be out of his secluded burrow, he made his way across the meadow where he found himself next to a lively, overflowing river. It was like a long, wiggly snake, twisting and turning, always on the move and it seemed to bubble with joy.

As he sat on the grass and looked across the river, a dark hole in the bank opposite, just above the water's edge, caught his eye. Looking closer, he noticed a brown little face with whiskers, small ears and thick silky hair. It was the Water Rat. The two animals stood and regarded each other cautiously.

"Hello, Meerkat!" said the Water Rat.

"Hello, Rat!" said the Meerkat.

"Would you like to come over?" enquired the Rat. The Rat stooped and unfastened a rope and hauled on it, then lightly stepped into a little boat which the Meerkat had not observed. It was painted blue outside and white within, and was just the size for two animals. Despite not understanding its function, Meerkat was captivated by the little boat.

Rat held up his paw as the Meerkat stepped gingerly down. "Lean on that!" he said. "Now then, step lively!" and the Meerkat to his surprise found himself actually seated in the stern of a real boat. I've never been in a boat before in all my life."

"What?" cried the Rat, open-mouthed. "Never been in a—you never—well I—what have you been doing, then?"

"Is it as nice as all that?" asked the Meerkat shyly, though he was quite prepared to believe it as he leant back in his seat and surveyed the cushions, the oars, and all the fascinating fittings, and felt the boat sway slightly under him.

"Trust me, there is absolutely nothing—nothing at all—that is as delightful as just having fun in boats," mused the Water Rat with a dreamy expression.

"Look ahead, Rat!" cried the Meerkat suddenly. It was too late. Rat lay on his back at the bottom of the boat, his heels in the air.

"—with boats—or without them," the Rat continued calmly, brushing himself off with a cheerful chuckle. Listen! If you don't have any other plans this morning, what do you say we drift down the river together and have a splendid, leisurely day?"

The Meerkat wriggled his toes in delight and with a satisfied sigh, leaned back blissfully into the plush cushions. "What an absolutely splendid day I'm experiencing!" he exclaimed. "Let us start our adventure right away!"

After some half an hour or so had passed, Meerkat remarked "And you really live by the river? What a wonderful life!"

"Oh, the adventures we've shared! In winter or summer, spring or autumn, it always offers amusement and excitement," replied Rat.

"What lies over *there*?" asked the Meerkat, waving a paw towards a background of woodland that darkly framed the water-meadows on one side of the river.

"That? O, that's just the dense jungle," said the Rat shortly. "We don't go there very much, we river dwellers."

"Aren't they—aren't they very *nice* people in there?" said the Meerkat a trifle nervously.

"W-e-ll," replied the Rat, "let me see. The tree squirrels are all right. *And* the spring hares—some of 'em, but spring hares are a mixed lot. And then there's Honey Badger, of course. He lives right in the heart of it; wouldn't live anywhere else, either, if you paid him to do it. Dear old Honey Badger! Nobody interferes with *him*. They'd better not," he added significantly.

"Why, who *should* interfere with him?" asked the Meerkat.

"Well, of course—there—are others," explained the Rat in a hesitating sort of way.

"Wildcats—and servals—and striped polecats—and so on. They're all right in a way—I'm very good friends with them—pass the time of day when we meet, and all that—but they break out sometimes, there's no denying it, and then—well, you can't really trust them, and that's the fact."

The Meerkat knew well that it is quite against animal-etiquette to dwell on possible trouble ahead, or even to allude to it; so he dropped the subject. "And beyond the dense jungle again?" he asked, "where it's all blue and dim, and you can see what may be hills or perhaps they may not, and something like the smoke of towns, or is it only cloud-drift?"

"Beyond the dense jungle comes the wide world," said the Rat. "And that's something that doesn't matter, either to you or me. I've never been there, and I'm never going, nor you either, if you've got any sense at all. Don't ever refer to it again, please. Now then! Here's our backwater at last, where we're going to lunch."

Leaving the mainstream, they now passed into what seemed at first sight like a little landlocked lake. Green turf sloped down to either edge and brown snaky tree-roots gleamed below the surface of the quiet water. Ahead of them was a foamy tumble of a weir and a water-wheel that filled the air with a soothing murmur. It was so very beautiful that the Meerkat could only hold up both fore-paws and gasp: "O my! O my! O my!"

The Rat brought the boat alongside the bank and once moored helped the still awkward Meerkat safely ashore and brought out the picnic basket. The Meerkat

begged to be allowed to unpack it all by himself. The Rat was very pleased to indulge him, sprawling on the grass while his excited friend shook out the picnic rug and removed from the picnic basket all the mysterious packets one by one, gasping: "O my! O my!" at each fresh revelation. When all was ready, the Rat said, "Now, pitch in my friend" and the Meerkat was indeed very glad to obey, for he had started his cleaning at a very early hour that morning, as people *will* do, and had not paused for a bite to eat and he had been through a very great deal since that distant time which now seemed so many days ago.

"What are you looking at?" said the Rat presently, when the edge of their hunger was somewhat dulled, and the Meerkat's eyes were able to wander away from the picnic. "I am looking," said the Meerkat, "at a streak of bubbles that I see travelling along the surface of the water. That is a thing that strikes me as funny."

"Bubbles? Oho!" said the Rat, and chirruped cheerily in an inviting sort of way. Above the edge of the bank, a wide and shimmering snout appeared, and the Otter pulled herself out of the water, shaking droplets from her sleek coat.

"Well, well, aren't you greedy beggars!" she remarked, heading towards the food. "Why didn't you invite me, Ratty?"

"This was a spontaneous gathering," explained the Rat. "By the way, let me introduce my friend, Mr. Meerkat."

"Pleased to meet you, I'm sure," said the Otter, and instantly the two animals became friends.

"What a commotion everywhere!" the Otter continued. "Seems like the whole world is out on the river today. I sneaked up this quiet backwater hoping for a moment of tranquillity, and then I stumbled upon you chaps! Well, not exactly stumbled, I apologise for my choice of words, you know."

From the dense undergrowth behind them, where last year's withered grasses and shrubs still clung together, there was a quiet rustling sound and a sturdy figure emerged. It was Honey Badger, her robust body blending harmoniously with the natural hues of the surrounding landscape.

"Come on, old Badger!" shouted the Rat.

The Badger trotted forward a pace or two, then grunted, "H'm! company," and turned her back and disappeared from view.

"That's *just* the sort of creature she is!" observed the disappointed Rat. "She simply hates company! Now we shan't see any more of her today. Well, tell us, *who's* out on the river?"

"The mischievous Toad is on the loose," responded the Otter. "He's cruising about in his shiny new boat, dressed in fancy clothes from head to toe!"

The two creatures exchanged glances and burst into laughter.

"Once upon a time, all he cared about was sailing his dhow," said the Rat. "Then he grew bored of that and became obsessed with his canoe. He insisted on going canoeing day in and day out, and let me tell you, he created quite a mess of it."

Last year, it was his hand made mahogany boat, and we all had to go boating with him, and pretend we liked it. It's all the same, whatever he takes up. He gets tired of it, and starts on something fresh."

From where they sat they could get a glimpse of the main stream across the island that separated them, and just then a motor boat flashed into view, the captain—a short, stout figure—splashing badly and rolling a good deal, but working his hardest. The Rat stood up and hailed him, but Toad—for it was he—shook his head and settled sternly to his work.

"He'll be out of the boat in a minute if he rolls like that," said the Rat, sitting down again.

"He sure will," chuckled the Otter, his laughter echoing through the air. "Have I ever shared with you the delightful tale of Toad and the river guide? It unfolded in this manner. Toad..."

The Meerkat peered down, the sound of the Otter's voice still ringing in his ears, but the spot where the Otter had sprawled was now conspicuously vacant. Not a trace of the Otter could be spotted, even on the distant horizon. However, a streak of bubbles emerged on the river's surface, hinting at the Otter's presence.

The Rat hummed a cheerful tune, and the Meerkat recollected that animal etiquette prevented him from commenting on the sudden disappearance of friends—for whatever reason.

"Well, well," said the Rat, "I suppose we ought to be moving. I wonder which of us had better pack the picnic basket?" He did not speak as if he was frightfully keen. "Oh, please let me," said the Meerkat. So, of course, the Rat let him.

Preparing the basket was not quite as delightful a task as unpacking it. It rarely is. Yet the Meerkat was determined to savour every moment. Just when he had successfully packed and tightly secured the basket, he noticed a plate gazing up at him from the grass. And after redoing the job, the Rat pointed out a spoon that should have caught anyone's eye. Lastly, to everyone's surprise, the jar of Pili pili sauce revealed itself, unknowingly sat upon by the Meerkat. Nevertheless, despite these small mishaps, the task was eventually completed with a sense of accomplishment.

The afternoon sun was getting low as the Rat rowed gently homewards in a dreamy mood, murmuring poetry to himself, and not paying much attention to Meerkat. But the Meerkat was very full of lunch, and self-satisfaction and already quite at home in a boat (so he thought). Presently he said, "Ratty! Please, I want to row, now!"

The Rat shook his head with a smile. "Not yet, my young friend," he said; "wait till you've had a few lessons. It's not as easy as it looks."

The Meerkat was quiet for a minute or two. However, he began to feel more and more jealous of Rat, sculling so strongly and so easily, and his pride began to whisper that he could do it every bit as well. He jumped up and seized the oars so suddenly that the Rat, who was gazing out over the water, was taken by surprise and fell backwards off his seat with his legs in the air for the second time, while the triumphant Meerkat took his place and grabbed the oars.

"Stop it! cried the Rat, from the bottom of the boat. "You can't do it! You'll have us over!" With a flourish, the Meerkat tossed the oars behind him and thrust them into the water. However, his aim went awry as he completely missed the surface. His legs soared above his head, and he unexpectedly landed on top of the fallen Rat. Filled with sudden alarm, he desperately reached for the side of the boat. And in the blink of an eye—Splloosh!

Over went the boat, and he found himself struggling in the river. Oh my, how cold the water was, and Oh, how very wet it felt! How it sang in his ears as he went down, down, down! How bright and welcome the sun looked as he rose to the surface coughing and spluttering! How black was his despair when he felt himself sinking again! Then a firm paw gripped him by the back of his neck. It was the Rat, and he was evidently laughing—the Meerkat could *feel* him laughing, right down his arm and through his paw.

The Rat got hold of an oar and shoved it under the Meerkat's arm, then he did the same by the other side of him and, swimming behind, propelled the helpless animal to shore, hauled him out, and set him down on the bank, a squashy, pulpy lump of misery.

After the Rat had given him a quick rub-down and squeezed some of the moisture from his fur, he exclaimed, "Alright now, my dear friend! Run back and forth along the path until you're warm and dry once more. Meanwhile, I'll dive down to retrieve the picnic basket."

The dejected Meerkat, damp on the outside and feeling embarrassed within, trotted around until he was reasonably dry. Meanwhile, the Rat plunged back into the water, retrieved the boat, restored it to its proper position, secured it firmly, gradually brought his belongings back to the shore, and ultimately dove triumphantly to retrieve the picnic basket, struggling to bring it safely to land.

With everything prepared for their journey to resume, the Meerkat, still weary and dispirited, settled himself in the boat's stern. As they began their voyage, he spoke softly, his voice trembling with emotion, "Oh, Ratty, my dear and generous friend! I am truly and deeply sorry for my foolish and ungrateful behaviour. My heart trembles at the thought of how I could have lost that splendid picnic basket. I have acted like a complete fool. Will you find it in your heart to forgive me this once, and allow us to continue as we were before?"

"That's perfectly fine!" replied the Rat with a cheerful tone. "A little dampness means nothing to a Water Rat like me. I spend more time in the water than out of it most days. Don't worry any longer about it. It would be best if you came and stayed with me for a little while. My home is simple and nothing like Toad's extravagant house, but you haven't seen that yet. Still, I can ensure you will be comfortable. I'll teach you how to row and swim, and before long, you'll be as adept on the water as any of us."

The Meerkat was so touched by his kind manner of speaking that he could find no voice to answer him, and he had to brush away a tear or two with the back of his paw. However, the Rat kindly looked in another direction, and the Meerkat's spirits revived again. When they got home, the Rat lit the fire in the kitchen and planted the Meerkat in an arm-chair in front of it, having fetched down a dressing-gown and slippers for him, and told him river stories till supper-time. Thrilling stories they were too, to an earth-dwelling animal like Meerkat. Stories about weirs, and sudden floods, and leaping fish and about adventures down drains, and night-fishings with Otter, or excursions far-a-field with Badger.

Dinner was a most cheerful meal, but very shortly afterwards a terribly sleepy Meerkat had to be escorted upstairs by his considerate host to the best bedroom. Feeling content, Meerkat soon laid his head on his pillow, knowing that his new-found friend, the River, was lapping the sill of his window. This day marked just the beginning of countless river adventures.

Discussion Questions based on the QAR strategy

Right There

1. What is Meerkat doing at the beginning of the chapter?
2. What does Meerkat discover while exploring with Rat?
3. What are some characteristics of Rat?

Think and Search

4. In what way is nature important in Meerkat's adventures?
5. How are Mole and Rat different from each other? How do their personalities affect the way they become friends and go on adventures together?
6. How does the river and the countryside where Mole and Rat live make you feel when you read the story?
7. Why do you think Mole wanted to escape from his normal life and go on an adventure?

The Author and You:

8. How does Meerkat's sense of adventure change throughout the story?
9. In what way is the river important to the story?
10. This chapter provides us with a vivid picture of the environment in which the story is set. How does the author's description of the setting contribute to the story?

On Your Own:

9. Imagine you are Meerkat. How would you describe the feelings and emotions you would experience when you first stepped out of your burrow?
10. Reflect on a time when you discovered something new and exciting, just like Meerkat did when he ventured out with Rat. How did it make you feel? In what way were your experiences similar and different to Meerkat's?
11. Reflecting on the themes of friendship, adventure and the power of nature that are evident in this chapter, what are some connections you can make in your own life with the themes in this story?

Nguchiro alikuwa akifanya kazi kwa bidii sana asubuhi nzima akiosha nyumba yake ndogo. Kwanza alitumia fagio, kisha akatumia kitambaa cha vumbi, halafu ngazi, madaraja na viti hadi vumbi likamjaa kooni na machoni, na mgongo wake ukaanza kuuma pamoja na mikono yake kuchoka. Aliporusha brashi yake sakafuni ghafla, alisema, "Aah, kero!" na "Ole wangu!" na pia, "Acha kabisa usafi huu!"

Akatoka mbio nyumbani bila hata kungoja kuvala koti lake. Akaanza kujigaragaza, kujikuna, na kuchimbachimba ardhini kwa mikono yake midogo, tena na tena, akichapa kazi kwa bidii. Akajisemea, "Twende sasa! Twende!" hadi hatimaye, pua yake ikatokeza nje kwenye mwanga wa juu, na akajikuta akijibiringisha kwenye majani ya kijani ya uwanda mkubwa wenye joto la kupendeza.

"Hii ni nzuri!" alijiambia. "Hii ni bora kuliko kufanya usafi!" Akiwa na furaha kutoka kwenye pango lake la faragha, alitembea kwenye uwanda hadi akajikuta kando ya mto wenye uhai na uliokuwa umefurika. Ulikuwa kama nyoka mrefu anayejizungusha na kujipinda kila mara, ukiwa katika mwendo usiokoma, ukionekana kana kwamba unafurika kwa furaha.

Alipokuwa ameketi juu ya nyasi akiangalia kuvuka mto, aliona shimo jeusi katika ukingo wa pili, juu kidogo ya maji. Ghafla, kichwa kidogo chenye manyoya kilitokeza na kuangalia kwa tahadhari.

"Hallo, Nguchiro!" kilisema kichwa hicho — kilikuwa ni Panya maji.

"Je, ungependa kuja upande huu?"

Nguchiro alisimama kwa furaha huku akiangalia jinsi Panya alivyoisukuma na kufungua kamba ya mashua yake ndogo aliyokuwa ameifunga. Mashua hiyo ilikuwa nyekundu na nyeupe, na ilikuwa saizi kamili kwa watu wawili kwa ajili ya mlo wa mchana. Nguchiro alivutiwa sana na mashua hiyo ndogo.

Panya alinyanya kidole chake cha mguu wakati Nguchiro aliposhuka taratibu. "Egemea hapo!" alisema. "Sasa basi, hatua ya haraka!" Na Nguchiro, kwa mshangao wake, alijikuta ameketi kabisa upande wa nyuma wa mashua halisi. "Sijawahi kupanda mashua maishani mwangu!" "Nini?" Panya alipiga kelele kwa mshangao, mdomo wazi. "Hujawahi kuwa kwenye—hujawahi—vema, basi, umekuwa ukifanya nini?" "Ni nzuri hivyo kweli?" Nguchiro aliuliza kwa aibu, japokuwa tayari alikuwa amejiandaa kuamini hivyo alipojiegemeza kwenye kitu chake na kuangalia mito laini, makasia na kila kitu kilichopangwa kwa kuvutia, huku akihisi mashua ikitetemeka kidogo chini yake. "Niambie, hakuna kitu chochote kinachowenza kufurahisha zaidi ya kuburudika kwenye mashua," Panya maji alisema kwa mawazo ya ndoto. "Tazama mbele, Panya!" Nguchiro alifoka ghafla. Lakini tayari ilikuwa kuchelewa. Panya alikuwa amelala chali chini ya mashua, visigino juu angani. "Iwepo mashua au isiwepo," Panya aliendelea kwa utulivu huku akijipangusa vumbi kwa kicheko cha furaha. "Sikiliza! Kama huna mipango mingine

asubuhi ya leo, unasemaje tuachwe twende pamoja na mto na tufurahie siku nzuri na tulivu?"

Baada ya takriban nusu saa kupita, Nguchiro aligusia, "Na mnaishi kweli kando ya mto? Hayo ni maisha mazuri mno!" "Ah, mambo tuliyoshirikiana huko!" Panya alijibu kwa shauku. "Wakati wa baridi, kiangazi, masika au vuli, huwa kuna burudani na msisimko kila wakati." "Nini kiko pale nyuma?" aliuliza Nguchiro huku akionyesha kwa mguu wake kuelekea msitu ulioja miti nyuma ya malisho ya mto. "Huko? Huko ni pori kubwa la msitu," Panya alijibu kwa kifupi. "Hatupendi kwenda huko sana; sisi ni wakazi wa mito." "Je, kuna viumbe wema huko?" Nguchiro aauliza kwa hofu.

"Naam," akasema Panya, "Kuna baiseli wa miti—hao wako salama. Na kuna sungura wa masika—baadhi yao—na pia sungura wa majira ya kuchipua ni mchanganyiko. Pia kuna nguchiro mmoja, bila shaka. Anaishi katikati kabisa ya msitu huo, na hapendi kabisa kuishi sehemu nyingine. Nguchiro yule mzee mpendwa! Hakuna anayemuingilia, na ni bora hivyo," aliongeza kwa maana. "Kwa nini mtu amuingilie?" Nguchiro aauliza. "Naam, kuna wengine pia," Panya akaendelea kwa sauti ya tahadhari. "Kuna paka mwitu, chui, na wanyama wengine wa porini. Wengi wao ni marafiki zangu wazuri—tunajumuika mchana—lakini mara nyingine wanapigana. Hapo, huwezi kuwategemea. Ndivyo ilivyo

Nguchiro alifahamu vyema kuwa si desturi nzuri kwa wanyama kuzungumzia matatizo yanayoweza kutokea au hata kuyagusia, hivyo akaamua kuachana na mada hiyo. "Kisha, baada ya msitu ule mnene kuna nini tena?" aliuliza, "kule ambapo kila kitu kinaonekana cha buluu na hafifu, na unaweza kuona vilima – au labda si vilima – na kitu kinachofanana na moshi wa miji, au ni mawingu tu yanayozunguka?" "Zaidi ya msitu mnene kuna dunia kubwa pana," akajibu Panya. "Na hilo si jambo la maana kwangu wala kwako. Sijawahi kufika huko, na wala huna sababu ya kwenda, kama una akili timamu. Usilitaje tena kabisa, tafadhalii. Sasa basi! Hii hapa ni sehemu yetu ya nyuma ya mto, ndipo tutakapokula chakula cha mchana."

Walipotoka katika mkondo mkuu wa mto, walipitia mahali palipoonekana kwa mtazamo wa haraka kama ziwa dogo lililozungukwa na nchi kavu. Nyasi za kijani ziliteremka kwa mteremko kuelekea pembezoni, na mizizi ya miti ya kahawia yenye kutetemeka iling'aa chini ya uso wa maji tulivu. Mbele yao palikuwa na maporomoko madogo ya maji ya povu na gurudumu la maji lililokuwa likizunguka kwa sauti ya kuvutia. Mahali hapo palikuwa pazuri sana kiasi kwamba Nguchiro alinyanya mikono yake ya mbele na kusema kwa mshangao: "Ewe! Ewe!"

Nguchiro alitingisha vidole vya miguu kwa furaha, kisha akapumua kwa msisimko wa kuridhika na kujiegemeza kwa raha juu ya mito laini. "Aisee, ni siku nzuri ajabu ninayopitia!" alipaza sauti kwa furaha. "Hebu tuanze ujasiri wetu mara moja!"

Panya aliendesha mashua kupitia njia ya nyuma ya mto hadi walipofika ufukweni salama. Nguchiro, akiwa bado ameshika kikapu cha chakula cha mchana, aliruka nje

kwa furaha na kuanza kuomba aruhusiwe kufungua kila kitu mwenyewe. Panya, akiwa ameridhika sana na tabia ya Nguchiro, alimruhusu. Nguchiro alishangaa kwa furaha kila alipofungua kila sahani ya chakula, akisema, "Lo! Lo!" kwa kila kifurushi alichokifungua, akivutiwa na kila kitu kilichokuwemo. Kila kitu kilionekana kama ni cha kuvutia sana, kana kwamba kilikuwa kitu cha zamani sana, ambacho watu walikisahau. Alisimama kwa muda, akiwa amenyosha miguu yake kuelekea nyasi za kijani huku akiwa na furaha kubwa, na akasema, "Sasa, chukua blanketi, rafiki yangu," na Panya, ambaye alikuwa amekaa tayari, akajibu, "Sawa, anza kuchagua sehemu ya kuweka blanketi. Tuko tayari kabisa!"

"Huna la kuangalia?" Panya akauliza kwa upole wakati njaa yao ilikuwa imepungua kidogo, na macho ya Nguchiro yalianza kuangalia mbali na chakula cha mchana. "Ninaangalia," Nguchiro akajibu, "mfululizo wa Mapovu ninayoona yakitembea juu ya uso wa maji. Hilo linanicheckesha." "Mapovu? Oho!" Panya akasema kwa furaha na kwa sauti ya kualika. Juu ya ukingo wa mto, pua pana na inayong'aa ilionekana, na Kifaru alitoka kwenye maji, akitupa matone kutoka kwenye ngozi yake laini. "Ah, nyinyi ni wanyonge wenye tamaa sana!" Kifaru alisema, akielekea chakula. "Mbona hakuiti, Panya?" "Hili ilikuwa mkusanyiko wa ghafla," Panya alieleza. "Kwa njia, nafurahisha kukutambulisha rafiki yangu, Bwana Nguchiro." "Nafurahi kukuona, nina hakika," Kifaru alisema, na mara moja wanyama hao wawili wakawa marafiki. "Ni vurugu kila mahali!" Kifaru akaendelea. "Inaonekana dunia yote iko kwenye mto leo. Nimejitokeza kwa hila hapa nyuma ya mto kwa matumaini ya kupata utulivu kidogo, kisha nikakutana nanyi nyote! Naam, si kweli kabisa nikakutana, naomba msamaha kwa maneno yangu, unajua.

Kutoka katika vichaka vyenye msitu mnene nyuma yao, ambako majani na vichaka vilivyokauka vya mwaka uliopita bado vilikuwa vikishikana pamoja, kulisikika sauti ya mnong'ono kimya na sura imara ikaonekana. Ilikuwa ni Pundamlia, mwili wake mzito ukiendana kwa maelewano na rangi za asili za mandhari inayomzunguka

"Twende, Mbweha mzee!" alipiga kelele Panya. Mbweha alitembea hatua moja au mbili kwa kasi kidogo, kisha akakemea, "H'mm! Kampuni," na kumsukuma mgongo wake kisha alitoweka katika macho ya Panya. "Huyo ndio aina ya mnyama!" alisema Panya aliyefadhaika. "Anapenda kabisa kuwa peke yake! Sasa hatutamwona tena leo. Sawa, tuambie, ni nani yuko mtoni?"

"Yule Chura mcheshi ametoroka tena," alijibu Fisi-maji. "Anazurura na boti yake mpya inayong'aa, akiwa amevalia mavazi ya kifahari na akijaa majivuno."

Wanyama hao wawili walitazamana kwa mshangao.

"Hapo zamani, alikuwa anajali tu kuhusu kuendesha dau lake," alisema Panya.

"Kisha akachoshwa na hilo na kuanza kupenda sana kuendesha mtumbwi. Alisisitiza twende naye kila siku, na kweli alisababisha vurugu kubwa.

Mwaka jana, ilikuwa ni boti yake ya mninga aliyoitengeneza mwenyewe, nasi tulilazimika kwenda kupanda nayo na kujifanya tunafurahia. Kila mara ni kitu kipyka kwake. Akishachoka na kitu, huanza kingine kipyka."

Kutoka walipokuwa wameketi, waliweza kuona kwa mbali mkondo mkuu wa mto upande wa pili wa kisiwa kilichowatenganisha, na ghafla, mashua ya mota ikaonekana. Nahodha wake – kiumbe mfupi na mnene – alikuwa akichafua maji vibaya sana huku akijitahidi kwa nguvu zote. Panya alisimama na kumpungia mkono, lakini Chura – kwa maana alikuwa ndiye – alitikisa kichwa na kurudi kwenye kazi yake. “Atatoka ndani ya mashua hiyo ndani ya dakika moja tu kama ataendelea kuendesha namna hiyo,” alisema Panya huku akiteti tena. “Hakika atatoka!” akacheka Fisi-maji, kicheko chake kikisikika hewani. “Je, nimeshawahi kukuambia hadithi ya kuvutia ya Chura na mwongoza mto? Ilikuwa hivi...”

Nguchiro alitazama chini, sauti ya Fisi-maji bado ikisikika masikioni mwake, lakini mahali ambapo Fisi-maji alikuwa amelala sasa palikuwa wazi kabisa. Hakukuwa na dalili yoyote ya Fisi-maji kuonekana, hata kwenye upeo wa macho wa mbali. Hata hivyo, mistari ya viputo ilitokea juu ya uso wa mto, ikiashiria uwepo wa Fisi-maji. Panya alianzisha wimbo wa furaha kwa kunong’ona, na Nguchiro alikumbuka kwamba adabu za wanyama hazikumruhusu kutoa maoni kuhusu kutoweka kwa ghafla kwa marafiki – kwa sababu yoyote ile.

“Vema, vema,” alisema Panya, “Nadhani tunapaswa kuanza kuondoka. Najiuliza ni nani kati yetu anafaa kufunga kikapu cha pikiniki?” Hakusema kana kwamba alikuwa na hamu sana. “Oh, tafadhali niache mimi nifanye,” alisema Nguchiro. Basi, bila shaka, Panya akamruhusu. Kuandaa kikapu hakukuwa kazi ya kufurahisha kama kukifungua. Mara chache huwa hivyo. Hata hivyo, Mbweha wa Jangwani alikuwa amedhamiria kufurahia kila wakati. Mara tu alipokuwa amefunga vizuri na kukilinda kikapu kwa usalama, aliona sahani ikiwa inamtazama kutoka majani. Na baada ya kurudia kazi hiyo, Panya akaonyesha kijiko ambacho kingevutia jicho la mtu yeote. Mwishowe, kwa mshangao wa wote, chupa ya mchuzi wa pilipili ilijitokeza, akiwa amekalia bila kujua. Hata hivyo, licha ya hitilafu hizo ndogo, kazi ilikamilika hatimaye kwa hisia ya mafanikio.

Jua la mchana lilikuwa likielekea kupungua huku Panya akivuta kasia taratibu kurudi nyumbani akiwa kwenye hali ya ndoto, akinong’ona mashairi kimyakimya, na hakuwa akimpa Nguchiro umakini mkubwa. Lakini Nguchiro alikuwa ameshiba chakula cha mchana, akijisikia ameridhika, na tayari alihisi kana kwamba alikuwa nyumbani kabisa ndani ya mashua (au ndivyo alivyodhani). Muda si mrefu akasema, “Panya! Tafadhali, nataka kuendesha mashua sasa hivi!” Panya alitikisa kichwa huku akitabasamu. “Bado si wakati, rafiki yangu mdogo,” akasema; “subiri kwanza upate mafunzo machache. Siyo rahisi kama inavyoonekana.”

Nguchiro alikaa kimya kwa dakika moja au mbili. Hata hivyo, alianza kuona vivu zaidi na zaidi kwa Panya, aliyekuwa akivuta kasia kwa nguvu na kwa urahisi mno, na kiburi chake kikaanza kumnong’oneza kwamba hata yeye angeweza kufanya hivyo vilevile. Akasimama ghafla na kushika makasia kwa haraka. Ghafla, Panya aliyekuwa akitazama juu ya maji, alishikwa na mshangao na akaanguka nyuma

kutoka kwenye kitu chake huku miguu yake ikiwa juu hewani kwa mara ya pili, wakati huo huo Mbweha wa Jangwani aliyejewa akishangilia ushindi wake alichukua nafasi yake na kushika makasia

"Punguza!" alipiga kelele Panya kutoka chini ya mashua, "Huwezi kufanya hivyo! Utatufanya tuanguke!" Kwa mbwembwe, Nguchiro alirusha makasia nyuma yake na kuyasukuma ndani ya maji. Hata hivyo, alikosea kabisa shabaha yake na makasia yakapita mbali na uso wa maji. Miguu yake ikapaa juu ya kichwa chake na bila kutarajia akaangukia juu ya Panya aliyejewa ameanguka. Akiwa amejawa na hofu ya ghafla, Panya alijaribu kwa haraka kufikia upande wa mashua. Na kwa sekunde chache tu—shwaa

Mashua ilipinduka, naye akajikuta akihangai na ndani ya mto. Ee Mungu wangu, maji yalikuwa ya baridi ajabu, na lo! alihisi baridi sana! Jinsi yalivyo vuma masikioni mwake alipokuwa akizama chini, chini, chini! Jinsi juu liliyoonekana la kung'aa na la kupendeza alipoinuka juu ya uso wa maji akiwa anakohoa na kupuliza! Lakini alihisi kukata tamaa jinsi alivyo hisi tena akizama! Kisha, ghafla, mkono thabiti ulimkamata kwa nyuma ya shingo yake. Alikuwa ni Panya, na waziwazi alikuwa akicheka—Nguchiro aliweza kuhihi akicheka, kuanzia mkononi hadi mguuni mwake

Baada ya Panya kumnyonyesha kwa haraka na kumkausha unyevu fulani kutoka kwenye manyoya yake, alisema, "Sawa sasa, rafiki yangu mpandwa! Kimbia mbele na nyuma kwenye njia hii hadi upate joto na kukauka tena. Wakati huo huo, mimi nitazama chini kuleta kikapu cha pikiniki."

Panya alikamata kasia la kuendeshea mashua na kulificha chini ya mkono wa Nguchiro, kisha akamfanya vivyo hivyo huyo. Kisha, alimsukuma akitokea pembedi mwake na kuogelea nyuma, akamchochea mnyama asiye na msaada hadi kufika kwenye ufukwe, akamtoa kwenye maji na kumweka chini kwenye ncha ya mto iliyokuwa laini, yenyenye harufu mbaya na yenyenye unyevunyevu mwingi wa mateso.

Nguchiro aliyejewa amehuzunika, akiwa na unyevu nje na kujihisi aibu ndani, alikimbia huku na huko hadi alipokauka kidogo. Wakati huo huo, Panya aliruka tena ndani ya maji, akafuta boti, kairudisha mahali pake pa kawaida, akaiweka vizuri, hatua kwa hatua alileta vitu vyake kando ya mto, na hatimaye aliruka kwa ushindi kuleta kikapu cha pikiniki, akijitahidi kukileta salama ardhini.

Baada ya kila kitu kuandaliwa kwa ajili ya kuanza tena safari yao, Nguchiro, ambaye bado alikuwa mchovu na mwenye huzuni, aliketi kwenye sehemu ya nyuma ya boti. Walipoanza safari yao, alizungumza kwa sauti ya chini, na sauti yake ikitetemeka kwa hisia, "Ah, Panya, rafiki yangu mpandwa na mwenye moyo mkuu! Kwa dhati na kwa kina moyo wangu nasikitika sana kwa tabia yangu ya upumbavu na kutokushukuru. Moyo wangu unatetemeka nikifiria jinsi nilivyoweza kupoteza kikapu kizuri cha pikiniki. Nimethubutu kuwa mjinga kamili. Je, utaniweza msamaha moyo wako mara hii moja, na kuturuhusu tuendelee kama tulivyokuwa awali?"

"Hiyo ni vizuri kabisa, rafiki yangu!" Panya akajibu kwa sauti yenyeye furaha. "Unyevu kidogo haumaanishi chochote kwangu. Mimi hupata muda mwangi wa kuogelea ndani ya maji kuliko nje yake, siyo hivyo? Usijali kuhusu hilo. Ningependa ikiwa ungeweza kubakia pamoja nami kwa muda kidogo. Nyumba yangu ni rahisi na haina kitu cha ziada kama vile nyumba za Vipepeo, lakini bado ninaweza kuhakikisha utajisikia vizuri. Nitakufundisha jinsi ya kuendesha mashua na kuogelea, na si kwa muda mrefu utaweza kuwa mtaalamu kwenye maji kama sisi wote wawili."

Nguchiro aliguswa sana na jinsi Panya alivyomzungumzia kwa upole kiasi kwamba hakuweza kupata sauti ya kumjibu, bali alilazimika kufuta machozi au kuzipiga kwa mkono wake wa nyuma. Hata hivyo, Panya kwa huruma alimtazama upande mwininge na roho ya Nguchiro ikaamka tena. Walipofika nyumbani, Panya aliwaka moto jikoni na kupanda mimea ya mboga za majani. Nguchiro alikaa kwenye kiti cha mkono mbele yake, akiwa amevalia gauni la kuva majira ya joto na kuanza kumwambia hadithi za mto, hadi wakati wa chakula cha jioni. Hadithi hizo zililusiana na wanyama wa makazi ya ardhini kama Nguchiro. Alisimulia pia hadithi za visima, mafuriko ya ghafla, wavu wa samaki, na mbwembwe za usiku na nguchiro-maji, au matembezi ya kuwinda usiku na fuko-miti.

Chakula cha jioni kilikuwa cha furaha sana, lakini mara moja baada ya hapo, Nguchiro alihisi usingizi mzito. Alilazimika kupelekwa ghoroni kwa mwenyeji wake mwenye huruma, katika chumba bora kabisa cha kulala. Akiwa na furaha, Nguchiro alilaza kichwa chake kwenye mto wake, akiwa na fahamu kuwa rafiki yake mpya, Mto, alikuwa akilipiga maji kwenye madirisha yake. Siku hiyo ilikuwa ni mwanzo wa mengi ya safari za kupendeza za mto.

Discussion Questions based on the QAR strategy

Moja kwa moja

1. Nguchiro anafanya nini mwanzoni mwa sura?
2. Nguchiro anagundua nini anapokuwa anachunguza pamoja na Panya ?
3. Ni tabia zifi baadhi za Panya ?

Fikiri na Tafuta.

4. Kwa njia gani asili ni muhimu katika maisha ya kusimua ya Nguchiro?
5. Fuko na Panya wana tofauti gani kati yao? Jinsi tabia zao zinaathiri jinsi wanavyokuwa marafiki na kwenda pamoja kwenye maisha ya kusimua?
6. Mto na eneo la mashambani ambapo Fuko na Panya wanaishi vinakufanya uhisi vipi unaposoma hadithi?
7. Kwa nini unafikiri Fuko alitaka kutoroka kutoka maisha yake ya kawaida na kwenda kwenye maisha ya kusimua?

Mwandishi na Wewe

8. Je, hisia za Nguchiro za kusisimua hubadilika vipi katika hadithi yote?
9. Mto ni muhimu kwa hadithi kwa namna gani?
10. Sura hii inatupatia picha hai ya mazingira ambayo hadithi hii inatokea. Maelezo ya mwandishi kuhusu mazingira hayo huchangiaje katika hadithi?

Kwa Juhudi Zako

9. Fikiria wewe ni Nguchiro. Ungelifafanua vipi hisia na hisia za ndani unazopata unapotuachia mara ya kwanza shimo lako?
10. Tafakari kuhusu wakati ulipogundua kitu kipyra na cha kusisimua, kama alivyofanya Nguchiro alipokuwa anamchunguza Panya. Ililikufanya ujisikieje? Kwa njia gani uzoefu wako ulikuwa sawa au tofauti na wa Nguchiro?
11. Ukiwa unatafakari juu ya mada za urafiki, Ziara na nguvu ya asili zinazojitokeza katika sura hii, ni uhusiano gani unaweza kuufanya katika maisha yako binafsi na mada zilizopo katika hadithi hii?