

When The Stones Were Soft

by Alan David Perkins

based on stories from the book "When The Stones Were Soft;
East African Fireside Tales" by Eleanor B. Heady.

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6 NARRATORS

MAMA SEMAMINGI

4 SCHOOL CHILDREN

MBWA THE DOG

TOPI THE HARTEBEEESTE (A BIG ANTELOPE)

TEMBO THE ELEPHANT

SIMBA THE LION

MAN

BAOBAB TREE

2 GREAT WIND PEOPLE

MUNGU (GOD)

2 RAIN PEOPLE

MKUNGA MBURA (GOD OF THUNDER & LIGHTNING)

CHIEF KINYANGA

7 VILLAGERS

1 BLACK CLOUD PERSON

RAINBOW PERSON

NARRATOR #1

In the village of Kituru in the eastern part of Africa,
there lived a grandmother who was very old. She was known
to the children as Mama Semamingi, the teller of many
tales.

NARRATOR #2

She knew a story for every day, a story about everything
that happened. She told tales of the long ago when animals
could talk to each other and to men. She knew why the
baobab tree grew so strangely and why dogs lived with man.

NARRATOR #3

The children said that Mama Semamingi had been on earth
when the stones were soft. She must have been, to know so
much about those long-ago times.

NARRATOR #4

Evening was the favorite time for storytelling. The school
children were home; the heardboys were in from the bush
with their goats and cattle. After the evening meal was
over there was time to sit around the fire circle in the
center of the village and listen to the stories of Mama
Semamingi.

NARRATOR #5

The names of the people and animals in an African language, called *Swahili*. Swahili is the most commonly spoken language in that part of the world. Today we would like to teach you some of the Swahili words you will hear. *Jambo* means "hello." *Karibu* means "welcome." *Mzuri* means "good." And *totos* means "children."

NARRATOR #6

It was evening. The children gathered at sunset around the fire circle in the center of the village. Mama Semamingi was there, sitting on the gaily decorated stool that had been given to her by the villagers.

BOY #1

Guess what, Mama Semamingi? My dog has three new pups. They came today.

MAMA S

Pups? They are always good luck for a boy. May we see them?

BOY #1

Soon. Father says we should leave them with their mother until they are stronger.

MAMA S

Your father is right. They are very young. We'll see them after a few days. What shall our story be tonight, *totos*?

GIRL #1

Do you know any story about pups, Mama?

MAMA S

Not about pups, but I know one about a dog.

FOUR CHILDREN

Na sema, na sema; tell us, tell us!

MAMA S

Mzuri, good. Here it is. Long ago there was a dog.

MBWA

I'll be afraid alone in the bush without my friends. I need someone to protect me.

TOPI

Good morning. I am Topi the Hartbeeste, sort of a large Antelope. And who are you?

MBWA

I am Mbwa, the dog. I have just parted from my cousins, the jackal and the wild dog, and I have nowhere to go.

TOPI

That's sad. Shh, what's that?!

MBWA

Are you frightened, Topi? You shouldn't be. You look very strong to me.

TOPI

There is a very dangerous creature in this country. He is small but fierce. He has four legs but walks on only two.

He uses his two front legs to throw sharp pointed things at other animals. He can kill anything. If he should see us now, he might kill us both.

MBWA

He sounds very strong indeed. What is his name?

TOPI

He is called "man."

MBWA

I shall watch out for him. Thank you for telling me, Topi ... wimp. (meets TEMBO) Good morning, great Tembo.

TEMBO

Who spoke to me?

MBWA

It is I, Mbwa the dog. I have nowhere to go and no friends. May I stay with you?

TEMBO

(Shakes his head "no") I cannot be responsible for another. I have trouble enough protecting myself.

MBWA

You have trouble? But you are surely the strongest creature alive!

TEMBO

Indeed I am not. There is a very dangerous creature in this country. He is small but very fierce. He has four legs., but walks on only two, using this front legs to throw sharp pointed sticks at the other animals. He can kill anything.

MBWA

Surely he could not kill one so large as you.

TEMBO

He certainly could, Mbwa. He is very strong. Watch out for him.

MBWA

Thank you for the great advice, Tembo. (to the audience)
An even BIGGER wimp. (meets SIMBA) Good morning, sir.
What is your name?

SIMBA

I am Simba, the lion, king of the bush. What do you want with me?

MBWA

I am only Mbwa, the dog. I'm looking for a home and a friend.

SIMBA

A friend, you say? Well, if you'll promise not to be a bother, you may tag along with me.

NARRATOR 1

So Mbwa, the dog, and Simba, the lion, became friends and would hunt all day together.

MBWA

Wuff! Wuff wuff wuff!

SIMBA

Who made that noise?

MBWA

I only barked to let you know I was behind you!

SIMBA

Don't do that. It frightens me. I thought you were that terrible creature, man.

MBWA

Aww, don't tell me you're afraid of him too!

SIMBA

Indeed, I am. He is small but very strong and fierce. He can kill anything.

MBWA

You're not king of the bush, you're king of the wimps! (to the audience) Who needs this. I'll find this "man," because he is the strongest creature in the land and I will become his friend. (to the MAN) Good morning.

MAN

Good morning. You are a friendly creature. What is your name?

MBWA

I am Mbwa, the dog. I'm looking for a friend. May I stay with you?

MAN

Can you hunt?

MBWA

Yes, I could help you in all you do.

MAN

Can you fetch the paper?

MBWA

The what?

MAN

Never mind. I'll teach you that later.

NARRATOR 2

Mbwa was happy with the man. The two became friends. Then, while hunting one day ...

MBWA

Wuff! Wuff wuff!

MAN

Don't do that! It will frighten the game!

MBWA

It didn't frighten you?

MAN

Of course not! I'm not frightened of any creature. I knew it was only you barking. Just don't do it while we're hunting!

MAMA S

At that moment Mbwa, the dog, decided that he would always stay with man because man was indeed the bravest and strongest creature in the whole world.

GIRL #2

That was wonderful, Mama Semamingi. Tell us another story.

BOY #2

Yes, Mama Semamingi. Tell us another!

MAMA S

What should our next story be, tolos?

GIRL #1

Whatever you wish to tell us.

MAMA S

(Looks around) I know what it shall be.

FOUR CHILDREN

What?

MAMA S

A story about the tree, the great baobab tree.

BOY #1

You mean that big gray tree with the scraggly limbs and hardly any leaves?

GIRL #1

Do you mean the tree that gives so little shade?

BOY #2

Do you mean the tree who's wood is soft and useless?

GIRL #2

Do you mean the tree whose fruit tastes so bad?

GIRL #1

My father says there is something wrong with that tree.

BOY #1

It must have been a mistake!

BOY #2

Tell us, Mama Semamingi.

MAMA S

Mzuri, good. Here it is. At the beginning of time when the stones were soft, the great god Mungu made all living animals and plants.

MUNGU

Animals, I give you legs and wings. You may move from place to place. Choose any place you like to live. Now for the plants, you will have to stay where I put you. Therefore, I take pity on you and will allow you to choose your homes. Beautiful baobab tree, where do you wish to live?

BAOBAB

Put me in the low veld where it is warm. I don't want my beautiful leaves killed in the frost.

MUNGU

Very well. I will plant your roots in the soil of a warm low valley. When the rains come your leaves will grow thick.

NARRATOR 3

Then came the time of no rain. Every day was hotter than the one before. The beautiful leaves wilted, many of them fell to the ground.

BAOBAB

Mungu, hear me. I am dying of the heat. I cannot live in this low veld where no cool winds blow. Help me! I am dying!

MUNGU

What would you have me do?

BAOBAB

Move me, please. Move me to the high plain where it is cool. I cannot live here another day.

MUNGU

I will take pity on you. Great winds, pull him up and replant him on the cool high plains!

(WINDS come in and move BAOBAB.)

NARRATOR 4

Then came the rains. At first this made Baobab very happy. But the rains kept coming. There was no sun. Baobab shivered in the cold. Once again he called out ...

BAOBAB

Mungu, hear me. I am dying of the cold. I cannot live on the high plain where no sun shines and the bitter wind and rain make my leaves tremble. Help me! I am dying!

MUNGU

And what do you want this time?

BAOBAB

Please, oh great one, move me back to the low veld. It is better to be hot than cold! Help me! I am freezing.

MUNGU

Very well, for the last time. Winds, pull him up and carry him to the valley.

NARRATOR 5

In the valley, Mungu dug an enormous pit and replanted the Baobab upside down with this great roots in the air.

BAOBAB

What are you doing?!

MUNGU

Planting you with your mouth in the earth, so I shall no longer be troubled with your complaining.

MAMA S

To this very day the baobabs look as they were growing upside down.

(2 RAIN PEOPLE and BLACK CLOUD PERSON run out, making it rain.)

GIRL #1

Mama Semamingi! Mama Semamingi! It is raining!

MAMA S

Quickly, inside.

(They run into a hut.)

MAMA S

Karibu, welcome to my hut. We will be dry here.

BOY #2

What will you tell us about now?

MAMA S

Watch as the rain leaves.

(RAIN PEOPLE and CLOUD leave.
RAINBOW person comes out.)

FOUR CHILDREN

Oooh! Look at that! Isn't that pretty?

GIRL #2

Did you see the rainbow?

MAMA S

Indeed I did.

BOY #1

Tell us a story about the rainbow, Mama Semamingi. Do you know one?

MAMA S

Ndio, yes. I know a story about the rainbow.

FOUR CHILDREN

Na sema, na sema; tell us, please!

MAMA S

Mzuri, good. Here it is. Many years ago there was a time of great trouble.