

THE MAN WHO SHARED HIS HUT

by Jomo Kenyatta, 1938

In the middle 1800s European powers began dividing up the continent of Africa into colonies by adopting a policy called imperialism. Under imperialism Africans had little control over their land. Europeans set up their own laws and ruled most of the continent. In the 1900s many Africans began fighting to regain their independence. One of the leaders of this fight was Jomo Kenyatta (1897-1978), a Kikuyu who was born near Nairobi, Kenya. In 1938 Kenyatta wrote *Facing Mount Kenya*, a study of the Kikuyu people and culture. In this book, Kenyatta wrote the following tale, a story about the history of imperialism and how European nations had treated Africa. But in this story, called *The Man Who Shared His Hut*, no European nations are named. Instead, all the characters except one are animals. As you read this story, try to figure out who and what the different characters represent. How does Kenyatta describe the relationship between Africans and Europeans?

Once upon a time an elephant made a friendship with a man. One day a heavy thunderstorm broke out, the elephant went to his friend, who had a little hut at the edge of the forest, and said to him: "My dear good man, will you please let me put my trunk inside your hut to keep it out of this torrential rain?"

torrential: pouring

The man, seeing what situation his friend was in, replied: "My dear good elephant, my hut is very small, but there is room for your trunk and myself. Please put your trunk in gently."

The elephant thanked his friend, saying: "You have done me a good deed and one day I shall return your kindness."

But what followed? As soon as the elephant put his trunk inside the hut, slowly he pushed his head inside, and finally flung the man out in the rain, and then lay down comfortably inside his friend's hut, saying: "My dear good friend, your skin is harder than mine, and as there is not enough room for both of us, you can afford to remain in the rain while I am protecting my delicate skin from the hailstorm."

The man, seeing what his friend had done to him, started to grumble, the animals in the nearby forest heard the noise and came to see what was the matter. All stood around listening to the heated argument between the man and his friend the elephant.

In this **turmoil** the lion came along roaring, and said in a loud voice: "Don't you all know that I am the King of the Jungle! How dare anyone disturb the peace of my kingdom?"

On hearing this the elephant, who was one of the high ministers in the jungle kingdom, replied in a soothing voice, and said: "My Lord, there is no disturbance of the peace in your kingdom. I have only been having a little discussion with my friend here as to the possession of this little hut which your **lordship** sees me occupying."

The lion, who wanted to have "peace and tranquility" in his kingdom, replied in a noble voice, saying: "I command my ministers to appoint a **Commission of Inquiry** to go thoroughly into this matter and report accordingly." He then turned to the man and said: "You have done well by establishing friendship with my people, especially with the elephant who is one of my honorable ministers of state. Do not grumble any more, your hut is not lost to you. Wait until the sitting of my **Imperial Commission**, and then you will be given plenty of opportunity to state your case. I am sure that you will be pleased with the findings of the Commission."

The man was very pleased by these sweet words from the King of the Jungle, and innocently waited for his opportunity, in the belief that, naturally, the hut would be returned to him.

The elephant, obeying the command of his master, got busy with other ministers to appoint the Commission of Inquiry. The following elders of the jungle were appointed to sit on the Commission: (1) Mr. Rhinoceros; (2) Mr. Buffalo; (3) Mr. Alligator; (4) The Rt. Hon. Mr. Fox to act as chairman; and (5) Mr. Leopard to act as Secretary to the Commission.

On seeing the **personnel**, the man protested and asked if it was not necessary to include in this Commission a member from his side. But he was told that it was impossible, since no one from his side was well enough educated to understand the **intricacy** of jungle law. Further, that there was nothing to fear, for the members of the Commission were all men of **repute** for their **impartiality** in justice, and as they were gentlemen chosen by God to look after the interests of races less adequately **endowed** with teeth and claws, he might rest assured that

turmoil: confusion

lordship: title of respect

Commission of Inquiry: panel of investigation

Imperial Commission: government panel

Rt. Hon.: Right Honorable, title of respect

personnel: people appointed

intricacy: complicated matters

repute: honor
impartiality: fairness

endowed: furnished

they would investigate the matter with the greatest care and report impartially.

The Commission sat to take the evidence. The Rt. Hon. Mr. Elephant was first called. He came along with a superior air, brushing his tusks with a **sapling** which Mrs. Elephant had provided, and in an **authoritative** voice said: "Gentlemen of the Jungle, there is no need for me to waste your valuable time in relating a story which I am sure you all know. I have always regarded it as my duty to protect the interests of my friends, and this appears to have caused the misunderstanding between myself and my friend here. He invited me to save his hut from being blown away by a hurricane. As the hurricane had gained access owing to the unoccupied space in the hut, I considered it necessary, in my friend's own interests, to turn the undeveloped space to a more economic use by sitting in it myself; a duty which any of you would undoubtedly have performed with equal readiness in similar circumstances."

sapling: young tree
authoritative: official

After hearing the Rt. Hon. Mr. Elephant's **conclusive** evidence, the Commission called Mr. Hyena and other elders of the jungle, who all supported what Mr. Elephant had said. They then called the man, who began to give his own account of the dispute. But the Commission cut him short, saying: "My good man, please confine yourself to **relevant** issues. We have already heard the circumstances from various **unbiased** sources; all we wish you to tell us is whether the undeveloped space in your hut was occupied by anyone else before Mr. Elephant **assumed** his position?"

conclusive: convincing

relevant: timely,
important
unbiased: fair, open-
minded
assumed: took

The man began to say: "No, but—" But at this point the Commission declared that they had heard sufficient evidence from both sides and retired to consider their decision.

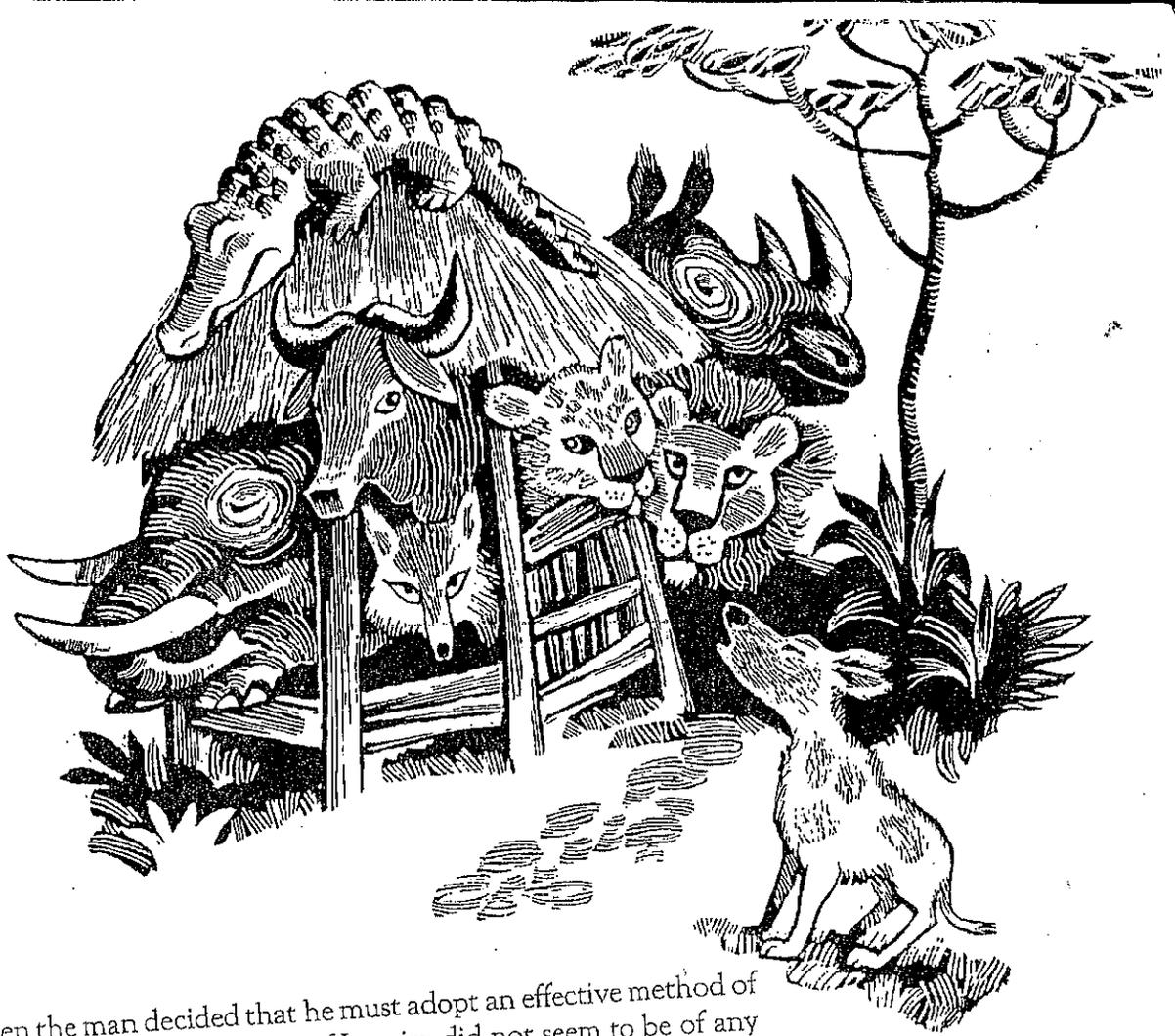
After enjoying a delicious meal at the expense of the Rt. Hon. Mr. Elephant, they reached their verdict, called the man, and declared as follows: "In our opinion this dispute has arisen through a **regrettable** misunderstanding due to the backwardness of your ideas. We consider that Mr. Elephant has fulfilled his sacred duty of protecting your interests. As it is clearly for your good that the space should be put to its most economic use, and as you yourself have not yet reached the stage of **expansion** which would enable you to fill it, we consider it necessary to arrange a compromise to suit both parties. Mr. Elephant shall continue his occupation of your hut, but we give you permission to look for a site where you can build another hut more suited to your needs, and we will see that you are well protected.

regrettable:
unfortunate

expansion: growth

The man, having no **alternative**, and fearing that his refusal might expose him to the teeth and claws of members of the Commission, did as they suggested. But no sooner had he built another hut than Mr. Rhinoceros charged in with his horn lowered and ordered the man to quit. A Royal Commission was again appointed to look into the matter, and the same finding was given. This procedure was repeated until Mr. Buffalo, Mr. Leopard, Mr. Hyena and the rest were all accommodated with new huts.

alternative: other
choice



Then the man decided that he must adopt an effective method of protection, since Commissions of Inquiry did not seem to be of any use to him. He sat down and said: "Ng'enda thi ndeagaga motegi," which literally means "there is nothing that treads on the earth that cannot be trapped," or in other words, you can fool people for a time, but not for ever.

Early one morning, when the huts already occupied by the jungle lords were all beginning to decay and fall to pieces, he went out and built a bigger and better hut a little distance away. No sooner had Mr. Rhinoceros seen it than he came rushing in, only to find that Mr. Elephant was already inside, sound asleep. Mr. Leopard next came in at the window, Mr. Lion, Mr. Fox, and Mr. Buffalo entered the doors, while Mr. Hyena howled for a place in the shade and Mr. Alligator basked on the roof.

Presently they all began disputing about their rights of penetration, and from disputing they came to fighting, and while they were all embroiled together the man set the hut on fire and burnt it to the ground, jungle lords and all.

Then he went home, saying: "Peace is costly, but it's worth the expense," and lived happily ever after.

Just like the man in the story, some people in Africa turned to violence to rid their land of European imperialists. Kenya regained its independence from Britain in 1963, and Jomo Kenyatta later served as its president.

Source: Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*. London: Martin Secker & Warburg Ltd., 1953.

The Man Who Shared His Hut

Imperialism – A policy established by the Europeans, whereby they took land from other nations and used it to its best potential economically. Many of the native people were treated harshly during this time. And many of these nations eventually rebelled against the European Imperial Powers.

Questions About the Story

1. Who did the man represent in the story?
2. Who did the animals represent in the story?
3. What did the hut represent in the story?
4. From whose perspective was the story told? Think about how the story ended before you answer this question.
5. Explain the steps that the elephant took in occupying the hut originally.

Step #1

Step #2

Step #3

Step #4

6. Why did the elephant feel that the man could be in the rain, but he could not?
7. Why was the man upset about the choice of members for the Commission of Inquiry?
8. Why did the Commission believe that the man could not have someone appointed on his behalf?
9. What were teeth and claws?
10. Was the commission trying to decide who built the hut? Who the hut belonged to originally?

11. The commission granted the elephant possession of the hut based on the fact that

12. What do you think that the unoccupied space in the hut represented?

13. By what endearing term did the elephant continue to call the man throughout the story?

What do you think that this means?

The Europeans felt that they should have the possession of the land in Africa for two reason.

1. They felt that they could use the land to its best potential.
2. The Europeans felt that they were asked by God to protect nations less intelligent than themselves.