

The Gentlemen of the Jungle
By Jomo Kenyatta (1891-1978)

Jomo Kenyatta became a leader in the movement for African independence. He grew up under British colonial rule. He would later become prime minister of newly independent Kenya.

Characters: *Narrator*
Man
Elephant
Mr. Lion
Mr. Rhinoceros
Mr. Hyena
Mr. Leopard

Narrator: Once upon a time, an elephant and a man became friends. One day a heavy thunderstorm broke out, and the elephant went to the man, who had a little hut at the edge of the forest. He said:

Elephant: My dear friend, it's raining very hard! Would you please let me put my trunk inside your hut to keep it out of this terrible storm?

Man: My friend, my hut is small, but I think there is plenty of room for me and your trunk. Just please be careful.

Elephant: Thank you my dear friend. You have done a nice deed for me, and one day I will repay your kindness. [*Elephant puts one leg in the "hut"*]

Narrator: But as soon as the elephant had his trunk in the hut, he began to push his head inside too. It was too big, and he finally pushed the man out of his hut and into the rain, as the elephant lay comfortably in the hut. The man was very angry. [*Elephant steps all the way in and pushes the man out of the hut*]

Man: Mr. Elephant! What is going on? Now I am out in the rain!

Elephant: But my friend, your skin is harder than mine, and there is not enough room for both of us, so you can afford to stay out there while I protect my delicate skin from the storm.

Narrator: The man began to protest and grumble, and all the other animals came out to see what all the noise was about. They all stood around listening to this heated debate between the elephant and the man. [*Elephant and Man continue to argue and push and shove, but the Man can't get back in*]

Mr. Lion: What is this?! Don't you know I am the King of the Jungle! How dare you disturb my kingdom?

Elephant: *[In a soothing, friendly voice]* My lord, there is no problem here. I'm only having a little discussion with my friend here about the possession of this little hut, which I am in right now.

Mr. Lion: I just want peace and tranquility in my kingdom. I command my ministers to appoint a Commission of Enquiry to deeply investigate this matter. I am sure the investigation will make you happy.

Man: Thank you, Mr. Lion. I am sure I will be pleased. The hut is mine, and I expect it to be returned to me, naturally.

Elephant: Well, then, let's get started with this Commission. I appoint the following elders to sit in on the Commission *[pointing to each person as he names them]*: Mr. Rhinoceros, Mr. Alligator, Mr. Leopard will be the chairman, and Mr. Hyena will be my Secretary.

Man: *[Loudly]* Wait a second! There are only animals on the Commission! Shouldn't there be one of MY people here to represent me?

[All animals begin to laugh]

Mr. Lion: Don't be ridiculous! Your people are not educated enough to understand the laws of the jungle.

Mr. Hyena: Besides, you have nothing to fear, because all these men on the Commission are well known for their fairness and honesty!

Mr. Rhinoceros: Besides, we have all been chosen by God to look after the good interests of those creatures that were born without teeth and claws like ours. We know what we are doing! Now, let's get this hearing started! I call Mr. Elephant to the stand! *[Elephant takes a seat in the chair]*

Elephant: Gentlemen of the Jungle, there is no need for me to waste your valuable time in telling you a story you already know. I know it has always been my duty to protect my friends, and obviously there has been a misunderstanding between myself and my friend here *[points to the Man]*. He INVITED me over, to save his hut from the terrible hurricane! As the hurricane began to gain access to all the unoccupied parts of the hut, I made the empty space economically useful by sitting in it myself, so the hurricane would not ruin his home.

Mr. Rhinoceros: That was very nice of you Mr. Elephant. Mr. Hyena, would you agree with his story?

Mr. Hyena: Yes, it's true. I saw him taking up the whole hut. It was very brave of him.

Mr. Leopard: I saw the same thing. Mr. Elephant was in the hut, risking his life in the storm for his friend. Now, Man, what do you have to say? *[All animals turn to face the Man]*

Man: That is not what happened! I did not invite him in, he asked if he could put only his trunk in the hut, and I said yes, and- *[Mr. Lion interrupts him]*

Mr. Rhinoceros: Please, sir, only talk about relevant issues. We already know what happened, there's no need to repeat the same story again!

Man: No, but listen-

Mr. Rhinoceros: I think we've heard enough evidence, thank you. Wouldn't you agree, Gentlemen of the Jungle?

[All animals nod in agreement and say "yes"]

Mr. Lion: In our opinion, this misunderstanding happened, Sir *[looking to the Man]*, because your ideas are so backward. Mr. Elephant has fulfilled his sacred duty to protect your interests. It is clear that the space in your hut should be put to its most economic use, and since you have not yet figured out how to do that, we think we should arrange a compromise.

Mr. Leopard: We figure that Mr. Elephant can continue to occupy your hut, but we give you permission to look for another hut that will better suit your needs, and we will see to it that you are well protected there as well.

Narrator: the man saw no way out of this, and he was afraid that if he did not comply, he would be exposed to the teeth and claws of the members of the Commission. So he traveled far and built another hut. As soon as it was built, Mr. Rhinoceros came charging in. *[Rhinoceros pushes his way into the hut]*

Mr. Rhinoceros: Sir, as protector of this territory, I now command you to build me a hut as well, since that hurricane is rumored to be spreading this way.

Man: What? This is my house! I won't build you one!

Mr. Rhinoceros: there's no use arguing, the Commission of Elders has already ruled that you are to build me a house too, so that I can better protect you on this land.

Man: How can this be? *[Lion, Hyena, and Leopard walk in]*

Mr. Hyena: And the Commission ruled that you have to build each of us a hut too. It's for your own good. We can better protect your interests this way. There is a big storm coming!

Narrator: So the Man had no choice. He built each member of the Commission a new hut. But he decided that since the Commission was of no use to him and did not protect him from anything, he should go and build a bigger and stronger hut farther away. *[Elephant walks into the house and lays down]*. As soon as Mr. Rhinoceros saw it, he came rushing in, *[Rhinoceros walks into the house]* only to find that Mr. Elephant was already inside sleeping on the bed. Mr. Leopard came to the window, Mr. Lion entered the door, Mr. Hyena looked for a place in the shade, and Mr. Alligator lay on the roof. Soon, they all began to argue over which of them had the right to the most space in the hut, or on the hut, or around the hut, and as they were arguing, the man set his hut on fire and burnt it to the ground, with the Gentlemen of the Jungle and all. Then he returned to his original home, saying:

Man: Peace is costly, but it is worth the expense.

Narrator: And he lived happily ever after.

Questions to Think About

1. Why was the man told that only jungle animals would be on the commission?
2. What is Mr. Elephant's explanation of his behavior?
3. Identify the central issue: What is Kenyatta saying with this fable-like story?
4. What does this story show about Africans' views of colonial powers?
5. What do the following represent?
 - a. Hut
 - b. Man
 - c. Jungle animals
 - d. Teeth and claws
 - e. The storm