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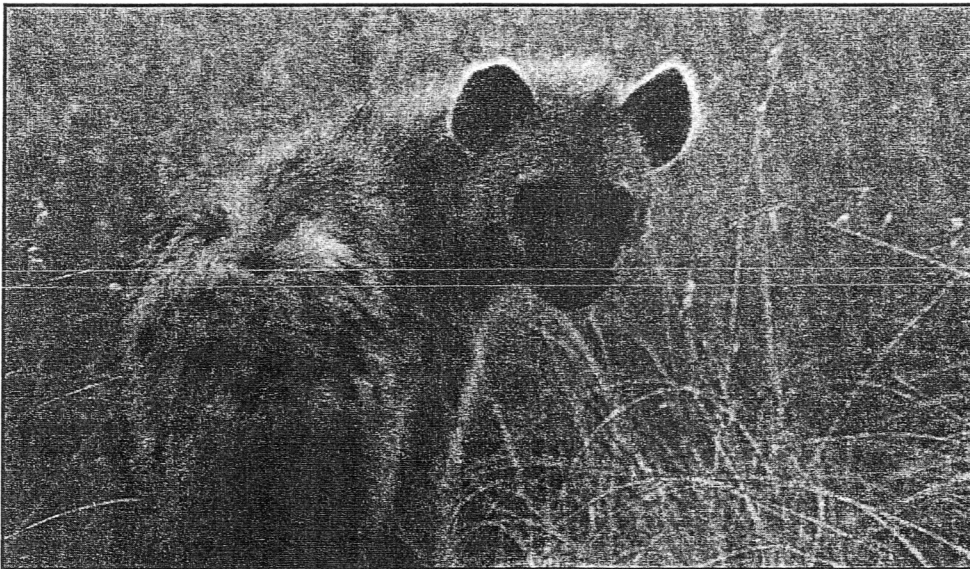
## *Hyena and the Moon*

Retold by Heather McNeil

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Hyena is a thief, and he has always been so. Hyena is also crippled, hind legs shorter than front legs.<sup>(43)</sup> But he has not always been so.

Long ago Hyena's legs were all the same. He did not hump and slink across the savannah as he does today. He would trot and prance, run and dance, proud of his speed and courage, proud of his cleverness.



Ph.43. Hyenas appear "crippled," with hind legs shorter than front.

But there was one hyena who was not so clever. His name was Fisi, and he was handsome, with fur the color of honey. He was fast, and he ran with the hot winds that tossed the red oat grass.

Fisi was also a lazy hyena. He never hunted, but let Chui the Leopard and Simba the Lion do the work of stalking and pouncing and killing. Then Fisi would sneak in close and run away, with the meat clenched tightly in his mouth. Fisi would laugh at his cleverness.

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But Fisi was not so clever. There came a time of drought. No rains fell for many months. The water holes were deserted because there was no water, and when there is no water, the animals die.

All the animals were hungry, including Fisi. He no longer danced and pranced, but prowled and howled his way through the grass that scratched like dry fingers. He and the other hyenas continued to steal from Simba and Chui, running off into the night and laughing. But their laughter was dry, too, and died quickly.

One night Fisi's belly was grumbling and rumbling louder than ever. He tried to ignore it by bragging about his cleverness.

"Oh, Fisi, you are not so clever," said another hyena. "You are not even clever enough to fill your own belly. Every day you grow thinner, like all of us. The only one who grows round and full is the moon."

Fisi looked up at Mwezi, the moon. She was indeed round and full, and it made Fisi's mouth water to see the moon's bright richness.

"If only we could grow as she grows," Fisi thought. "If she were in our bellies, then we would be strong like the moon. If only...."

Suddenly Fisi began to laugh. "Eh! I am so clever!" He called together all the other hyenas. "I know how we can fill our stomachs. We will climb up to the moon! I will break off pieces to feed to you, and we will eat until our bellies are round and full like beautiful Mwezi."

"Fisi, you are a fool. How can we climb up to the moon? And even if we could, Mwezi would see us coming, and she would hide. Mwezi sees everything."

"Then we will cover ourselves with the branches of acacia trees," Fisi said. "We will make a tower of hyenas, standing on each other's shoulders. The tower will reach all the way to the moon, and then I will be able to break off pieces of Mwezi to feed to everyone."

The other hyenas laughed. But all night Fisi talked about the moon's power and beauty, and the more he talked, the more the others listened. They looked at the moon standing so proud in the sky, and they knew they wanted her strength.

So the next day all the hyenas gathered acacia branches. They covered themselves, but no matter how careful they were, the thorns

pricked and poked and jabbed and stabbed.<sup>(44)</sup> It was even worse for them when they began to build the tower of hyenas, climbing on each other's shoulders, higher and higher toward the moon.

"Ouch! Be careful! You are standing on my nose!"

"Get your paw out of my ear!"

"I can't see! Your tail is covering my eyes!"

Fisi watched from the ground. "*Nyamaza!* Be quiet! Mwezi will hear you!"

Finally all the hyenas were piled on top of each other, and Fisi began his long climb to the top.

"*Haraka haraka!* Hurry, hurry, Fisi!"

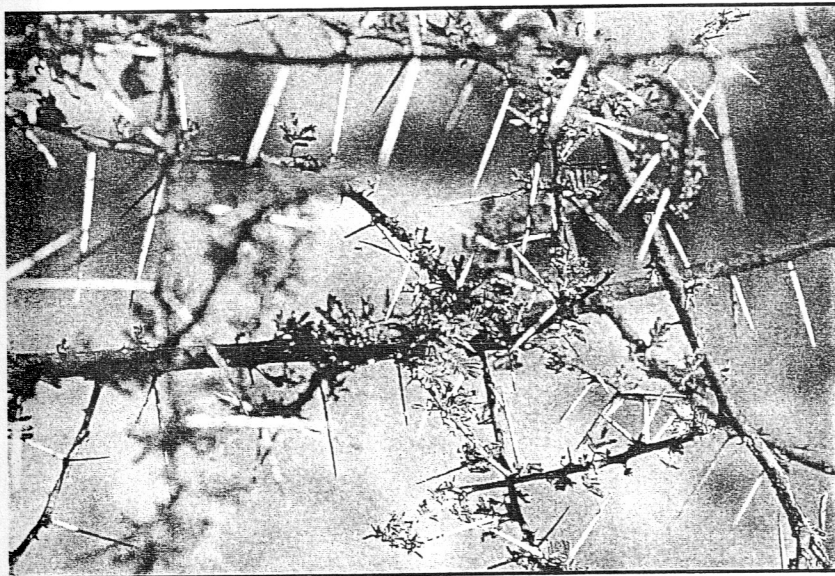
"We are hungry! Bring back plenty of the moon for us to eat."

"I can't see!"

This time it was not because of someone's tail that the hyena could not see, but because the moon suddenly disappeared behind a cloud. The savannah was bathed with darkness.

"I told you," Fisi said. "You scared Mwezi with all your loud foolishness. Now we will have to wait until she returns."

So they waited, trying to muffle their whimpers of pain and fear. And as they waited, the tower of hyenas began to weave back and forth, left to right, back and forth, left to right....



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Then three things happened at the same moment:

*Moja.* One. Mwezi slipped out from behind the cloud where she had been hiding and bathed the savannah with light.

*Mbili.* Two. Fisi reached the top of the tower and stretched out one eager paw to grab a piece of the moon.

*Tatu.* Three. The legs of the hyena at the bottom of the tower began to tremble, and quiver, and shake.... "*Saidia!* Help!" His legs collapsed, and the tower crashed to the ground, one hyena tumbling after another. Bumping, sliding, rolling, clawing, and bouncing, the hyenas fell on the trees and thorns, the hard, dry earth, and each other.

When it was all over, there was one brief moment of complete silence as the animals of the savannah saw what had happened under the light of the moon that night. Then the hyenas crawled off into the bushes. Many of them had broken legs. Their fur was torn, and they howled in pain as they humped their way into the shadows to lick their wounds.

So it is even today. Hyena is crippled, hind legs shorter than front legs, and he humps through the red oat grass. His fur is spotted with the scars of his foolishness.

But the children of Fisi still steal from Chui and Simba. They clench the meat tightly between their jaws and run away into the night, laughing at their cleverness.

## Original Translation

A long time ago there was this hyena which had a bad leg. It saw the moon. It called all the other hyenas, and they gathered together. He thought the moon looked like something good to eat. He wanted to jump and take it and eat it. They stood on each other's shoulders so the one on top could reach the moon and just pull it down. But the one which was on the bottom, it got very heavy. They all fell down and broke their legs. After they broke their legs, they all left, they left one another, limping. When they went out, they gave birth, and the young ones also had deformed legs.

## Tips on the Telling

### Tips

- The main thing to remember in telling this story is to take your time! Build the suspense just as Fisi builds the tower.
- Read about hyenas. Watch them in a zoo, if possible. (Better yet, visit Kenya!) Hyenas aren't really the scavengers they were once thought to be, but are actually strong hunters themselves, as well as thieves. They do "hump" and their howls can sound like eerie laughter in the African night.
- If necessary, prepare your listeners for this story with a few facts. For instance, you might want to describe the long thorns on acacia trees so the audience better appreciates the pain of the hyenas. Make sure everyone is familiar with hyenas. You might need to explain predators and scavengers. But make this introduction brief, or you'll lose your audience.
- Remember not to get overly concerned with memorizing my words. After reading the story several times, just tell it to yourself in your own words. Use the Swahili only if you feel comfortable with it; otherwise, leave it out. Then practice, practice, practice. Create a rhythm and pattern that is your own.

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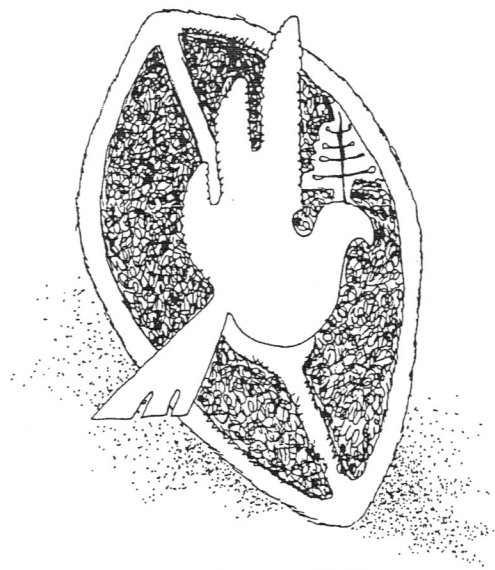
- I really had to expand this story; the original translation is hardly more than an outline. It helped to visualize this one as I wrote it, as it does whenever I tell it. Imagine the thin, slinking hyenas prowling about, looking for food. Imagine the savannah bathed in moonlight or silhouetted in darkness. Imagine a tower of hungry hyenas and the fear and trembling they are trying to suppress. My favorite image is one I have of the expressions on the other animals' faces when the hyenas come tumbling down to the ground. Visualization by the storyteller is extremely important in order for the audience to "believe and receive" the story. Imagine!

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