

The Honeyguide's revenge

Zulu folktale

English



This is the story of Togar, the Honeyguide, and a greedy young man named Gartee.

One day while Gartee was out hunting he heard the call of Togar. Gartee's mouth began to water at the thought of honey. He stopped and listened carefully, searching until he saw the bird in the branches above his head.

"Chitik-chitik-chitik," the little bird rattled, as he flew to the next tree, and the next.

"Chitik, chitik, chitik," he called, stopping from time to time to be sure that Gartee followed.



After half an hour, they reached a huge wild fig tree.

Togar hopped about madly among the branches. He then settled on one branch and cocked his head at Gartee as if to say, "Here it is! Come now! What is taking you so long?"

Gartee couldn't see any bees from under the tree, but he trusted Togar.





So Gartee put down his hunting spear under the tree, gathered some dry twigs and made a small fire.

When the fire was burning well, he put a long dry stick into the heart of the fire. This wood was especially known to make lots of smoke while it burned.

He began climbing, holding the cool end of the smoking stick in his teeth.

Soon he could hear the loud buzzing of the busy bees. They were coming in and out of a hollow in the tree trunk – their hive. When Gartee reached the hive he pushed the smoking end of the stick into the hollow. The bees came rushing out, angry and mean. They flew away because they didn't like the smoke – but not before they had given Gartee some painful stings!





When the bees were out, Gartee pushed his hands into the nest. He took out handfuls of the heavy comb, dripping with rich honey and full of fat, white grubs. He put the comb carefully in the pouch he carried on his shoulder, and started to climb down the tree.

Togar eagerly watched everything that Gartee was doing. He was waiting for him to leave a fat piece of honeycomb as a thank-you offering to the Honeyguide. Togar flittered from branch to branch, closer and closer to the ground. Finally Gartee reached the bottom of the tree. Togar perched on a rock near the boy and waited for his reward.



But, Gartee put out the fire, picked up his spear and started walking home, ignoring the bird.

Togar called out angrily, "VIC-torr! VIC-torr!"

Gartee stopped, stared at the little bird and laughed aloud. "You want some honey, do you, my friend? Ha! But I did all the work, and got all the stings. Why should I share any of this lovely honey with you?" Then he walked off.

Togar was furious! This was no way to treat him! But he would get his revenge.



One day several weeks later Gartee again heard the honey call of the Honeyguide, Togar. He remembered the delicious honey, and eagerly followed the bird once again.

After leading Gartee along the edge of the forest, Togar stopped to rest in a great umbrella thorn. "Ahh," thought Gartee.

"The hive must be in this tree." He quickly made his small fire and began to climb, the smoking branch in his teeth. Togar sat and watched.



Gartee climbed, wondering why he didn't hear the usual buzzing. "Perhaps the hive is deep in the tree," he thought to himself.

He pulled himself up another branch. But instead of the hive, he was staring into the face of a leopard!

Leopard was very angry at having her sleep so rudely interrupted. She narrowed her eyes, opened her mouth to reveal her very large and very sharp teeth.



Before Leopard could take a swipe at Gartee, he rushed down the tree.

In his hurry he missed a branch, and landed with a heavy thud on the ground twisting his ankle. He hobbled off as fast as he could.

Luckily for him, Leopard was still too sleepy to chase him.

Togar, the Honeyguide, had his revenge.

And Gartee learned his lesson.

And so, when the children of Gartee hear the story of Togar they have respect for the little bird. Whenever they harvest honey, they make sure to leave the biggest part of the comb for Honeyguide!



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