

The Elephant's Tale, or How Ndlovu the Elephant Saved the Bees

On one of those long hot summer afternoons in the African bushveld, Ndlovu, the elephant was cooling himself in the shade of a spreading Msasa tree, tugging gently at the leaves of the upper-most branches and gorging himself on the mouth watering succulent foliage, when he heard a soft scratching in the earth close by, followed by the call of Ngede, the Honeyguide. By lifting himself slightly onto his huge padded feet, he could just make out the familiar, yet fearful sight of Honey Badger as he scratched and scraped away at the entrance to a burrow.

Ngede cocked his head to one side and said, "Why are you toiling away in the sun on a hot day like this, struggling to find something to eat in the dry, cracked earth, when I can show you a feast just waiting to be had?"

"Whatever to you mean?" snarled Honey Badger, eyeing Ngede with scorn,

"Not far from here, I have spied, tucked carefully away from sight in the bank of the river, a big bee hive dripping with juicy, sweet honey – just waiting for us!"

At the very mention of the word, "honey", Honey Badger stopped dead in his tracks, his mouth already beginning to water at the thought. "Where is it?" he demanded.

"O no, not so fast my friend, we need to go there *together*. I will show you where the hive is, you can tear it open and fill your belly with big fat grubs and as much honey as you can eat, but in return you must throw down a big chunk of honey comb for me. If you cheat me, I will never again show you where the hives are, but if you are trustworthy, we will make a good partnership."

Honey Badger felt nothing but loathing for the bird, for he was consumed by arrogance, but decided to hide his feelings "We have a deal then, shall we go there now?"

"No, no, we must attack early in the morning, before the sun comes up. The bees are still sleepy then and there is very little activity inside. It will be so easy for us!" Ngede chirped excitedly.

"All right, it's decided then, we meet here an hour before sun-up", Honey Badger replied, his eyes glittering with anticipation.

Ndlovu was shocked, his friends the bees were going to be attacked, their home rent apart, their stocks of honey stolen! Thousands would die! The bees were his friends, towards the end of the hot summer months, when waterholes were drying up and water was scarce, the bees would fly far across the plains and return with the secret of where some water could still be found. They would bring him honey on their soft furry legs to give him strength when he was weak from hunger. He could not let this happen!

He heaved his massive bulk through the thicket and lumbered off towards the riverbank as fast as his enormous size would allow. He arrived at the river just as the sun was beginning to set, and stepping quietly through the shallow, muddy water, made his way over to the other side. Lifting his trunk to the sky, he blew a soft melodious note into the air, completely unlike the trumpeting of an elephant.

He didn't have to wait long, shortly the Chief Guard bee flew towards him and settled on one huge, leathery ear, "What is the matter old friend?" he asked.

"There is no time to lose!" he cried, "Ngede and Honey Badger are going to attack your hive just before sun-up tomorrow morning, they will destroy your hive and steal your honey! Who knows how many will die! He exclaimed, his voice becoming shrill with dread.

"Our worst fears have come to pass," Chief Guard bee shrieked, "What are we to do? What will become of us?"

"Do not worry and do not be afraid. I have a plan. I have been thinking this out all the way over to your hive. This is what we will do. You must go back to the hive and alert everyone. The Chief Worker bees and their scouts must follow me; I have found a massive tree on the other side of the thorn veld that is hollow near the top. I will knock a small hole into the side of a branch that is hidden from view, and you must all work tirelessly through the night to move the grubs and the honey. When the job is done, the worker bees must wait in the shrubbery near the old hive until I give the signal. I will be close by the old hive, pretending to be napping on the muddy bank of the river, but I will be watching for Ngede and Honey Badger's arrival".

Ndlovu shook his great rump to dislodge several flies that had settled on his tail and continued, "Honey Badger will be unable to withstand the thrill of rushing straight into the hive for a vicious surprise attack, and Ngede will be waiting in anticipation on the branch above. He will be so excited that he will not be paying any attention to his surroundings. As soon as Honey Badger disappears into the hole, I will call softly to you as I have just done, then you must all be ready to move fast! I will snatch enough of the soft, pliable mud from the riverbank as I need, to close the hole up so firmly that Honey Badger will never escape, but, as I make the first move, you must all swarm around Ngede and sting him as many times as you can. He must flee for his life, far away into another land, and never return again, then you can live your lives in peace yet again."

And this is exactly what came to pass. Honey Badger was never seen again, and all the other animals of the bush veld wondered what had become of him, while Ngedede flew so high into the sky to escape the angry bees that he was snatched in mid-air by Ukhozi, the great Crowned Eagle, who was delighted to find such a delectable dinner so close to home. When the bush veld animals spoke of Honey Badger's disappearance, Ndlovu said nothing, he just smiled to himself.

The moral of the story is: We can all work together in harmony and peace, increase our wealth, grow and be uplifted and empowered, when we have the help and protection of a strong and stable base.