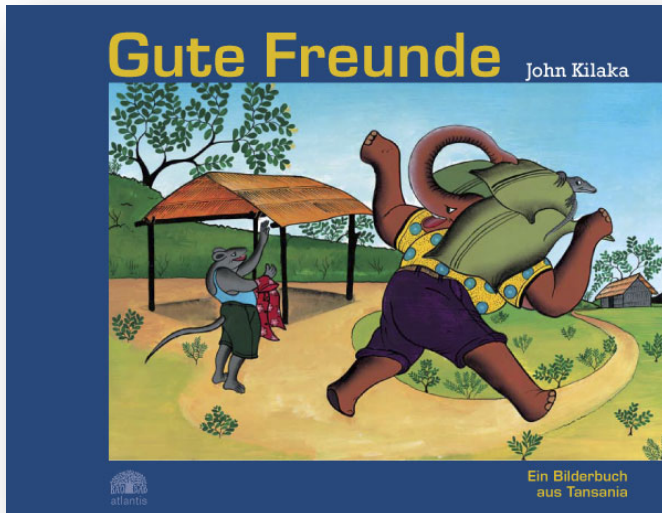




JOHN KILAKA: TRUE FRIENDS

A PICTURE BOOK FROM TANZANIA



Text and Illustration: John Kilaka

Original language: Kisuaheli,
original edition published in German

Date of publication: 2004

Picture Book, 32 pages
Ages 4 and up

© 2004 Baobab Books, Basel
ISBN 978-3-905804-41-6

→ **Rights sold:** English (US/Canada and India), Japanese, Korean, Italian, Portuguese (Brazil), Rwanda

→ **Awards:** Bologna Ragazzi Award New Horizons 2005

SYNOPSIS

Ratz the Rat never says no – small wonder then that he is so popular. His best friend is Elephant, who prefers doing nothing while Ratz the Rat is busy collecting food. Elephant offers his friend part of his house as a larder. Ratz the Rat accepts – good friends are always trustworthy. But when the big drought comes and the food supply runs out, the friendship is put to a tough test ...

THE AUTHOR

John Kilaka was born in the southwest of Tanzania in 1966. As a child he loved to draw on the blackboard at school; which angered the teacher for two reasons – he was distracting his classmates and using up the school's precious supply of chalk.

At the age of twenty he moved to Dar es Salaam where he studied the art of Tingatinga painting with Peter Martin. Today John Kilaka is now one of the most important representants of Tingatinga art. He has published three picture books with the Swiss Publisher Baobab Books, all of them have been translated into many languages. John has not only been collecting stories from Tanzania but travelled throughout Africa and Europe and participated in many story telling programs.



Contact: Baobab Books, Sonja Matheson, s.matheson@baobabbooks.ch, +41 61 333 27 25



JOHN KILAKA: TRUE FRIENDS

SAMPLE TRANSLATION

1

Rat was the only one who knew how to make fire. Early morning, all the animals would crowd around and watch while Rat rubbed a special stick against a log until there was a spark. When the fire was burning, he would give some to each of his friends so that they could cook their food. Rat liked all the animals, but Elephant was his best friend.

2

Elephant and Rat were next-door neighbours, but they couldn't have been more different. Rat never stopped working. He gathered and stored grain, even when the harvest was good. But Elephant liked to sit outside his house and relax. Why work so hard when there was plenty of food for everyone?

Then one season the rains did not come. The crops in the fields began to wilt. Elephant saw the cloudless sky and the brown earth, and he began to worry. "I have a big stomach, and I need lots of food to fill it. That means I'll be the first to go hungry. I'd better pay my friend Rat a visit."

3

"The fields are dry this season," he said. "Yes," said Rat. "But I'm not worried. I have enough to last through the bad times."

"You do have a good supply," agreed Elephant. "But your little house is open on all sides. Aren't you worried about thieves? Why not keep your food at my place? My house has a door and sturdy walls."

Rat thought about it. "You are my best friend," he said. "I trust you. Take the food and look after it for me. I will come and get it from you when I need it."

"Don't worry about a thing," called Elephant, as he heaved the sacks of grain onto his shoulders and hurried home.

4

Weeks later, when the land was dry and parched and there was not a speck of grain to be found, Rat went next door to Elephant's house. "I've come to fetch the grain you have been keeping for me," he said. But he was in for a terrible shock.

"You have a tiny stomach and you don't need much. But I am big and I need lots of food," Elephant said cruelly. "Now go away and leave me alone!"

Rat could not believe his ears. "What kind of friend would do such a thing?" he cried. And he decided to run away from the village.

5

The next day, the other animals came to Rat's house as usual to fetch the fire they needed to cook their breakfast. But Rat was nowhere to be found. "Do you know where Rat is?" they asked Elephant. But he just shrugged and shook his head.

"Why would he disappear like that?" said Zebra. "Could someone have driven him away? If so, they had better watch out. Rat has a secret power – the power of fire. He could come back and burn down his enemy's house."

Elephant was horrified. "You must all stay here and help me protect my house!" he cried. "I stole Rat's food, and now I'm scared." But the animals backed away. "You're on your own now!" they said angrily.

6

So Elephant went to see Lion, he is big and strong, he thought. He's not afraid of anyone. He'll help me. But Lion shook his head and waved Elephant away. "How can you be afraid of a tiny animal like Rat?" Elephant asked. "It's true that I am king of the animals," said Lion, "but I am afraid of fire. What if Rat decides to burn down my house when he finds out I have protected a thief? No, you are the one who created this mess. You will have to look after yourself."



7

Back at home, Elephant sat outside his house and worried. Would Rat come and set his house on fire?

Elephant decided to climb a tree to keep watch. He waited, and watched, and waited some more. By midnight, he could no longer keep his eyes open, and he fell fast asleep. He dreamed that Rat and his friends were chasing him with torches. Elephant could feel the heat of the flames right behind him, but he could not escape.

Elephant jerked awake. He had fallen to the ground with a heavy crash. When he tried to stand up, he felt a terrible pain in his leg.

8

When dawn came, Elephant limped to the hospital, where the doctors gave him a very thorough examination. They patched up his cuts and bruises, gave him a tetanus shot and wrapped a big bandage around his broken leg.

Elephant returned home, but he was all alone. His sturdy house no longer felt safe. He couldn't sleep, and his leg hurt. Worst of all, he had lost his best friend.

9

"this is no good," he said to himself. "I have to find Rat and tell him how sorry I am, even if he is very angry with me." So Elephant set out to search for his friend. He looked in every cave and behind every hill. He followed every tiny set of footprints. "Rat!" he called out again and again. But there was no answer.

10

In the meantime, Rat's empty stomach had got the better of him. "I'm going to starve to death out here anyway, and I'm all alone," he said. And he set off for home.

The other animals were thrilled to see him. "It's Rat!" they shouted. "Now we will have fire again!" And they all ran to greet him. "But where is Elephant?" Rat asked. The others explained that Elephant had left the village, and no one was guarding his house. So Rat simply went in and took back his sacks of grain.

11

Weeks later, a tired and hungry Elephant limped into the village. He had been wandering over the countryside all this time, searching for his friend. "Rat came home long ago, and he has taken back his sacks of grain," Frog told Elephant.

12

Elephant gathered up his courage and went to find his friend. "I'm very sorry for what I did," he said. "I was wrong. I hope you can forgive me."

Rat looked Elephant straight in the eye. "True friends don't think only of themselves, even when times are hard," he told him.

Elephant nodded. "I know that now," he said. So Rat forgave him. And all the animals joined them in celebrating, happy that things had been set right in their world once again.