

2 How The Leopard Got Its Spots

Warm Up Session

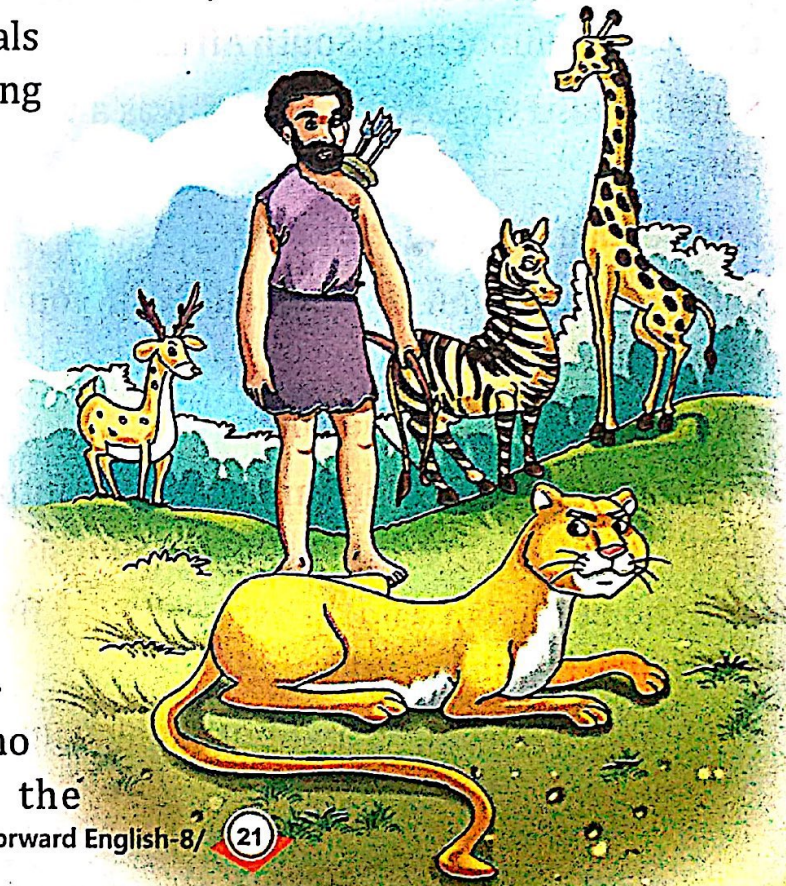


In earlier times, animals were not the same as we see them today. They changed to save themselves from their enemies and got merged with their surroundings. Read this interesting story to know one such incident.

Reading Time



In the days when everybody started fair, the Leopard lived in a place called the High Veldt. The Giraffe and the Zebra and the Eland and the Koodoo lived there; and they were exclusively sandy-yellow-brownish all over; but the Leopard, he was exclusively the sandiest-yellowish-brownest of them all, a greyish-yellowish catty-shaped kind of beast, and he matched the Veldt so closely that the rest of the animals could not see where he lay waiting for them; for he would lie down by an exclusively yellowish-greyish-brownish stone or clump of grass, and when the Giraffe or the Zebra or the Eland or the Bush-Buck or the Bonte-Buck came by, he would surprise them by jumping. He would indeed! And, also, there was an Ethiopian with bows and arrows (an exclusively greyish-brownish-yellowish man he was then), who lived on the High Veldt with the



Leopard; and the two used to hunt together; the Ethiopian with his bow and arrows, and the Leopard exclusively with his teeth and claws till the giraffe and the Eland and the Koodoo and the Quagga and all the rest of them didn't know which way to jump.

They didn't indeed!

After a long time, they learned to avoid anything that looked like a Leopard or an Ethiopian; and bit by bit the Giraffe began it, because his legs were the longest; they went away from the High Veldt. They scuttled for days and days till they came to a great forest, exclusively full of trees and bushes and stripy, speckly, patchy-blatchy shadows, and there they hid, and after another long time, what with standing half in the shade and half out of it, and what with the slippery-slidy shadows of the trees falling on them, the Giraffe grew blotchy, and the Zebra grew stripy and so, though you could hear them and smell them, you could very seldom see them, and then only when you knew precisely where to look. They had a beautiful time in the exclusively speckly-spickly shadows of the forest, while the Leopard and the Ethiopian ran about over the exclusively greyish-yellowish-reddish High Veldt outside, wondering where all their breakfasts and their dinners and their teas had gone. At last they were so hungry that they ate rats and beetles and rock-rabbits, the Leopard and the Ethiopian, and then they met Baviaan, the dog-headed, barking Baboon, who is the wisest animal in all South Africa.

Said Leopard to Baviaan (and it was a very hot day), "Where has all the game gone?"

And Baviaan winked. He knew.

Said the Ethiopian to Baviaan, "Can you tell me the present habitat of the aboriginal fauna?"

And Baviaan winked. He knew.

Then said Baviaan, "The game has gone into other spots; and my advice to you, Leopard, is to go into other spots as soon as you can."

And the Ethiopian said, "That is all very fine, but I wish to know whither the aboriginal Fauna has migrated."

Then said Baviaan, "The aboriginal fauna has joined the aboriginal Flora

because it was high time for a change; and my advice to you, Ethiopian, is to change as soon as you can."

That puzzled the Leopard and the Ethiopian, but they set off to look for the aboriginal Flora, and presently, after ever so many days, they saw a great, high, tall forest full of tree trunks all exclusively speckled and sprottled and spottled, dotted and splashed and slashed and hatched and cross-hatched with shadows. "What is this," said the Leopard, "that is so exclusively dark, and yet so full of little pieces of light?"

"I don't know," said the Ethiopian, "but it ought to be the aboriginal flora. I can smell Giraffe, and I can hear Giraffe, but I can't see Giraffe."

"That's curious," said Leopard. "I suppose it is because we have just come in out of the sunshine. I can smell Zebra, and I can hear Zebra, but I can't see Zebra."

The Leopard and the Ethiopian hunted all day; and though they could smell them and hear them, they never saw one of them.

"For goodness sake," said the Leopard at tea-time, "let us wait till it gets dark. This daylight hunting is a perfect scandal."

So they waited till dark, and then the Leopard heard something breathing sniffily in the starlight that fell all stripy through the branches, and he jumped at the noise, and it smelt like Zebra, and it felt like Zebra, and when he knocked it down it kicked like Zebra, but he couldn't see it.

Presently he heard a grunt and a crash and a scramble, and the Ethiopian called out, "I've caught a thing that I can't see. It smells like Giraffe, and it kicks like Giraffe, but it hasn't any form."

"Don't you trust it," said the Leopard. "Sit on its head till the morning same as me. They haven't any form any of 'em."

So they sat down on them hard till bright morning time, and then Leopard said, "What have you at your end of the table, Brother?"

The Ethiopian scratched his head and said, "It ought to be exclusively a rich fulvous orange-tawny from head to heel, and it ought to be Giraffe; but it is covered all over with chestnut blotches. What have you at your end of the table, Brother?"

And the Leopard scratched his head and said, "It ought to be exclusively a

delicate greyish-fawn, and it ought to be Zebra; but it is covered all over with black and purple stripes."

"Let us up," said the Zebra, "and we will show you."

They let the Zebra and the Giraffe get up; and Zebra moved away to some little thorn bushes where the sunlight fell all stripy, and Giraffe moved off to some tallish trees where the shadows fell all blotchy.

Leopard stared, and Ethiopian stared, but all they could see were stripy shadows and blotched shadows in the forest, but never a sign of Zebra and Giraffe.

"Hi! Hi!" said the Ethiopian. "That's a trick worth learning. Take a lesson by it, Leopard. You show up in this dark place like a bar of soap in a coal-scuttle."

"Ho! Ho!" said the Leopard. "Would it surprise you very much to know that you show up in this dark place like a mustard-plaster on a sack of coals?"

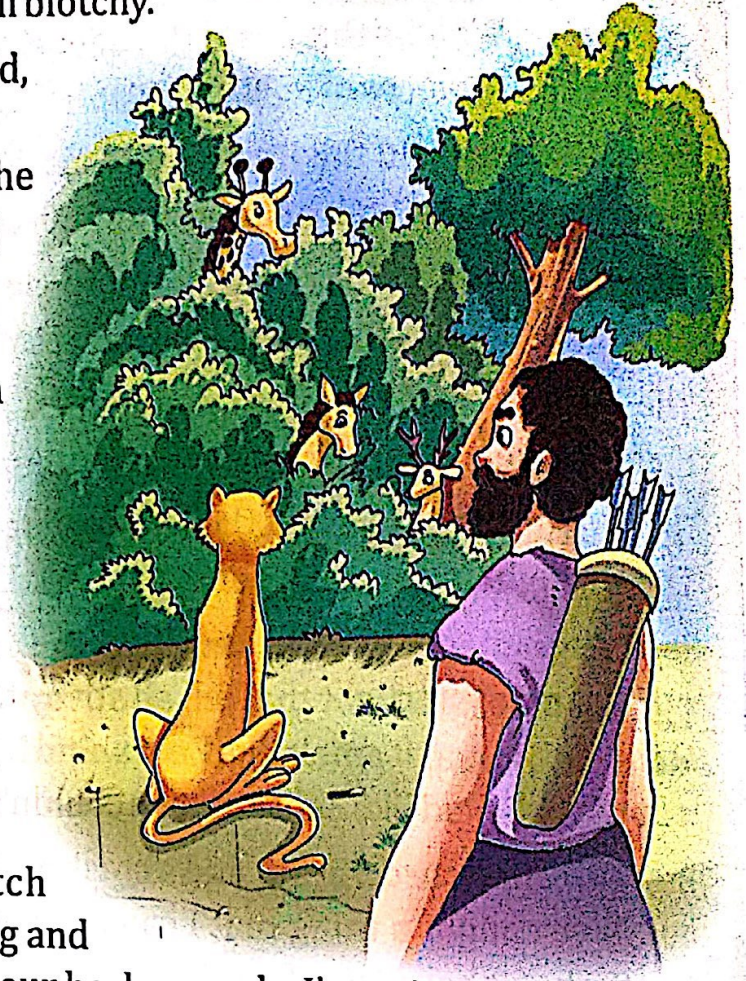
"Well, calling names won't catch dinner," said the Ethiopian. "The long and the little of it is that we don't match our backgrounds. I'm going to take Baviaan's advice. He told me I ought to change; and as I've nothing to change except my skin I'm going to change that."

So he changed his skin then and there, and the Leopard was more excited than ever; he had never seen a man change his skin before.

"But what about me?" he said, when the Ethiopian had worked his last little finger into his fine new black skin.

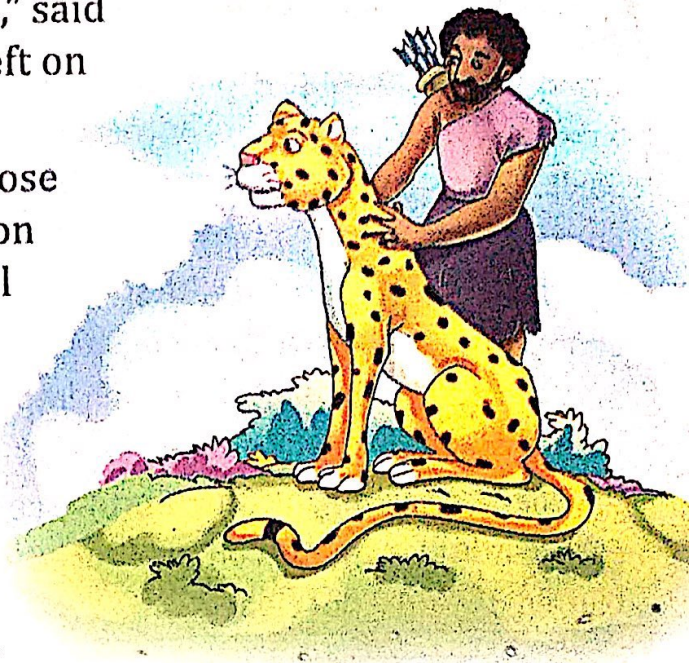
"You take Baviaan's advice too. He told you to go into spots."

"I'll take spots, then," said the Leopard; "but don't make 'em too big. I wouldn't look like giraffe not for ever so."



"I'll make 'em with the tips of my fingers," said the Ethiopian. "There's plenty of black left on my skin still. Stand over!"

Then the Ethiopian put his five fingers close together (there was plenty of black left on his new skin still) and pressed them all over the Leopard, and wherever the five fingers touched they left five little black marks, all close together. Sometimes the fingers slipped and the marks got a little blurred; but if you look closely at any Leopard now you will see that there are always five spots off five fat black fingertips.



"Now you are a beauty!" said the Ethiopian. "You can lie out on the bare ground and look like a heap of pebbles!"

So they went away and lived happily ever afterward.

—by Joseph Rudyard Kipling

Assignment



Story Comprehension

A. Answer the following questions on the basis of your reading of the text.

1. Who all lived in the forest?
2. What was bad for Giraffe and Zebra?
3. Where did the Giraffe and Zebra hide themselves?
4. What change came upon the Zebra and the Giraffe?
5. Why were the Leopard and the Ethiopian surprised?
6. Whose advice did they both follow and what did they do?

B. Explain with reference to the context.

1.though you could hear them and smell them, you could very seldom see them.

2. Ethiopian ran about over the exclusively greyish-yellowish-reddish High Veldt outside, wondering where all their breakfasts and their dinners and their teas had gone.
