



How Boetie surprised everyone

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Theme: *Sometimes what we regard as our "weaknesses" can be our biggest strengths*

Appropriate age group: *Any age group*



Boetie (which means 'Little Brother' in Afrikaans, one of South Africa's languages) was a monkey, the bravest and most daring monkey in his troop. He loved hanging and climbing and swinging and leaping. He could hang from a branch by two fingers. He could climb to the top of the tallest banana tree. He could swing from tree to tree without falling. He could ride on a giraffe, standing on his head. He could leap across the river where grumpy old Grandpa Crocodile lived. He was good at throwing things. As a matter of fact, he could hit an elephant between the eyes with a seed pod from ten trees away. Boetie was quick as a flash. He could snatch a bug from under a porcupine's nose. He could steal a hair from a jackal's tail or a feather from an owl's nest. He could tie squirrels' tails together in the blink of an eye. He could tickle a snake's nose to make it sneeze.

So you see, Boetie had special and unusual talents. He could even growl like a lion to make buck stampede through the veld. It was a pity that the other monkeys (especially his Mother and Father) did not appreciate his talents! In fact, they said he had no talents and was no use to his family or his troop. When his Dad asked him to look after his little sister he teased her and pulled her tail. When his Mom sent him to fetch bananas for the family he came back with six bananas in his mouth. All day long his parents moaned and groaned and shouted at him: "Stop rocking the branch! Your sister is going to fall off! Who poked holes in the ant heap? Clean up your branch! Take those berries out of your nose! Who put that scorpion on Dad's head?"

Boetie was just having fun and he could never understand why everybody was always shouting at him. His sister didn't want to play with him. The neighbours complained about him. Everybody seemed to be against him. That made him feel sad and angry. So what did he do to make himself feel better? He put ants in his sister's hair and he dropped banana skins on the cross old cobra. This, as you can imagine, caused even more trouble for Boetie.

As time went by Boetie felt more alone and more angry. He was so angry he used to go deep into the forest to throw stones and break branches. Sometimes he shouted at the trees: "Just stop shouting at me, all of you! I'm sick of it and I'm getting really angry. Don't you understand I just want a friend to play with?" But the forest didn't answer him.

One night Boetie couldn't sleep. His toes were twitching and his ears were itching and his tummy was making funny noises because he was hungry. He was a bit scared of the dark but the moon was shining so he went looking for something to eat – a banana or a big juicy insect, something to nibble on. He swung to the next banana tree and the next and the next but there were no bananas left, not one. So he jumped down to the ground and spotted a rock shining in the moonlight. He turned the rock over like his Mom and Dad had taught him – and there was a lovely fat juicy bug, fast asleep. He closed his eyes, swallowed the bug in one go, and burped loudly twice. When he opened his eyes he got



the fright of his life – a huge leopard was stalking towards the trees where the other monkeys were sleeping.

Boetie's body went weak with fear. His legs wobbled, his tail curled into a knot and his tummy felt very, very funny. He tried to scream but no sound came out. Then he remembered the time the spotted hyena almost bit off his tail and the time the elephant almost trampled him. He'd survived those dangers so he knew he could survive this one too.

He knew he had to save his family and the other monkeys so he began to follow the leopard, moving very, very quietly. He didn't step on a single twig. All the time he was thinking very, very hard. He was too small to fight the leopard so what could he do to save everyone?

All of a sudden Boetie thought of a plan. He knew that leopards are only afraid of lions and fire, nothing else. He knew how to roar like a lion and he also knew how to make fire.

(How did Boetie know how to make fire? Well, once he saw a rock fall and crash into another rock, making sparks fly, and the sparks made a fire in the dry leaves. From that day on Boetie practised making sparks fly to scare the ostriches and make them run like crazy. Soon he was quite good at making fire. He never told his Mom and Dad because he knew they'd say, "Don't play with fire!")

The leopard was moving slowly but surely towards the tree where Boetie's family were sleeping and he knew leopards can climb trees. His family didn't know that a hungry leopard was stalking them so he had to act fast to save them.

Boetie ducked behind a big tree, found two small shiny rocks and rubbed them together. Nothing happened! He tried again, this time a bit harder. Still nothing. He was scared to make a noise and alert the leopard but this time he rubbed really hard. There was a shower of sparks, some landed on a dry branch, and flames started flickering.

Boetie picked up the branch and followed the leopard. He practised his special lion growl under his breath. The leopard was only two trees away from his family tree when he put his plan into action.

Slowly, with the branch hidden behind his back, he crept towards the leopard. He took a deep

breath, and growling his best lion growl, jumped at the leopard, holding the burning branch like a spear. "Grrrowwl!" The leopard's eyes shone in the dark, as big as plates, and he raised his paw and hit Boetie a single blow. Then he turned tail and disappeared into the forest, yelping in fear. Boetie was left dazed. He stumbled in the dark and bumped his head on a tree.

The yelping of the leopard woke the whole troop. They were amazed when Boetie crashed out of the trees and into a patch of moonlight. They asked each other, "Can it really be Boetie who saved us from the leopard?" While all the other monkeys were chattering in excitement, Boetie's Mom and Dad climbed out their tree and went to their brave son. His tail was a bit burnt and his fur was full of leaves but otherwise he was fine. They hugged him and said, "Son, we are so proud of you!" Then they helped him into the family tree and his sister gave him a big hug.

Boetie, as you can imagine, was the hero of the troop. They were really proud of him. At last his talents were appreciated – well, some of his talents. Nobody ever got used to the way he ate scorpions when they were still alive and wiggling!



- ? Possible discussion points:
- *What things have you done to help others?*
 - *What things are you proud of about yourself?*