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Acknowledgments

To my loving bride and daughters: You are the reason I tell these stories. Thank you for your willing ears, support, and encouragement to share them with the world.

Thank you to my parents, who provided me with a world to enjoy plant, animal, and human nature, and to be blessed with an oral tradition of storytelling that intertwined both real and imagined. Special thanks to my siblings, and community who helped shape my vision along the way.

Special thanks to my illustrator, Misha Jovanovic, who has so skillfully channeled the spirit of my words into beautiful art.

Preface

Table Fables was conceived with several goals in mind. First, it was an opportunity for me to share my love for storytelling. Secondly, it allowed me to impart life lessons and morals to my young daughters. Thirdly, it was a way for me to share some of my experiences with my daughters around the kitchen table at dinner that would hold their attention and inspire their imagination.

Each story would typically begin by asking each of my daughters to pick an animal. No matter how dissimilar the animals were in terms of their real world habitat or surroundings, my task was to weave a story that could bring these characters to life in some adventure, mystery, with hopefully a moral lesson. Virtues such as love, honor, friendship, beauty, self-awareness, hope and wisdom are displayed as well as vices such as selfishness, deceitfulness, fear, hatred and self-doubt.

The full series of *Table Fables* have main characters that are animals, ranging from domesticated farm animals native to my North Carolina home, to those in the wilds of Africa, Australia and Antarctica. A couple of stories are human-based, yet all have a common fable theme. Each story, hopefully, includes enough adventure and surprises to entertain any reader.

The first of the *Table Fable* series, "Bukosi - King of the Ants" started one day when I spontaneously picked up my daughters' little guitar and plastic bongo and pounded on them. This got their attention. I followed it with a loud call, and then made the sound of wind blowing, and announced "Here is the story of 'Seymore, King of The Ants.'" My daughters immediately drew near. At that moment, I did not know what I had gotten myself into or where the story was going, but as the saying goes, "I went with the flow." They were intrigued, and the ritual was often repeated at the dinner table.

Later, I decided to put the story of Seymore to paper. I changed the characters' names to African names, with meanings tied to their nature exemplified in the story.

I have also used Adinkra symbols to represent key moral lessons with each of the Table Fables, that can be seen on the cover page as well as the beginning and end of each story. The Adinkra symbols are based on West African wisdom that express various themes that relate to the history, beliefs, nature, philosophy, and moral values originally created by the Ashanti Akan of Ghana and the Gyaman of Cote d'Ivoire in West Africa. They mostly have rich proverbial meaning or marks of wisdom, since proverbs play an important role in the Asanti culture and their rich tradition of storytelling.

Bukosi, the smallest of the ants, is convinced that he will become King of the Ants. One day, he sets out on a journey to prove his worth to accomplish something no other ant has ever done. To meet the challenges of his adventure, he has to rely on faith, wisdom, generosity, courage, friendship, and a persistent belief in himself to dare to achieve his dream.

The Table Fables are intended for children of all ages and those who are still children at heart. I hope you enjoy them.

Visit us at www.thetablefables.com to learn more.

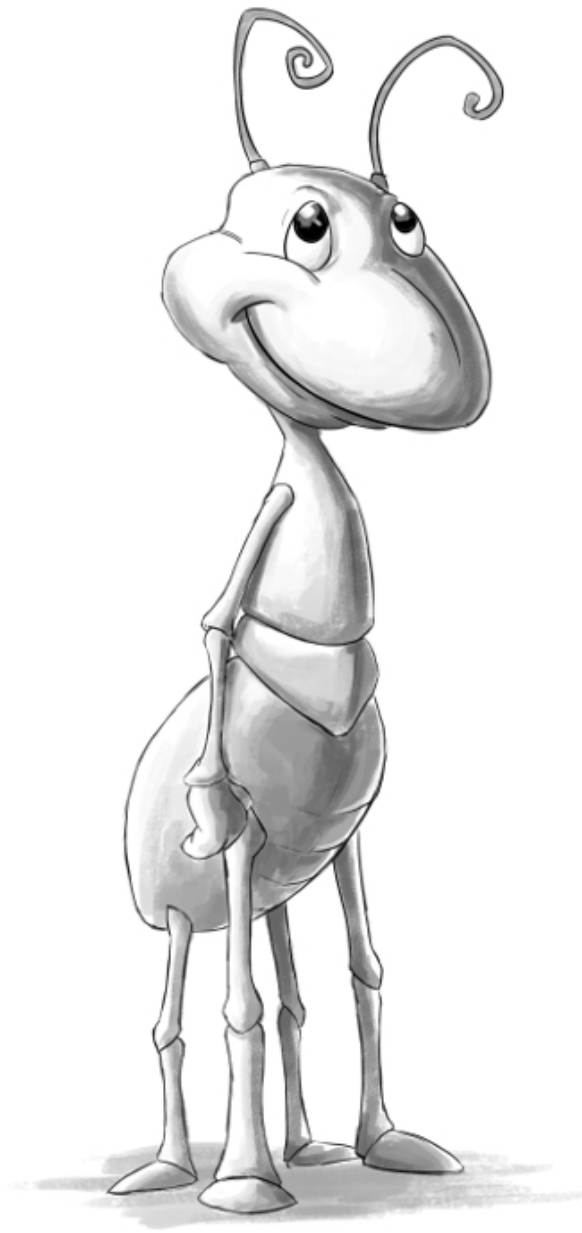
In the summer of 2017, we're releasing a printed hardcover collection of eight stories entitled "Table Fables" that will include this ebook story. Look for it on our site as well as numerous online bookstores.

Bukosi - King of the Ants



Some time ago, in an ant colony on the African savannah, there was an excited mother and father who expected the birth of their first child. One night, the mother ant lay in bed drifting off to sleep when she heard the sounds of the night winds that echoed the words “BUKOSI! BUKOSI!” She awoke the next day and declared to her husband that she liked the name "Bukosi" for the baby. The husband thought it was a powerful name, and he agreed with her choice.

The day came when the child was born. All of the close friends and relatives gathered to see the new baby. To their surprise, Bukosi was born a tiny tot. Some began to whisper and giggle that they had never seen a baby ant so small. They wondered how he would be able to do his part in the colony as a worker, like his mother and father. Bukosi's parents were very proud of their little one, and reassured everyone that he would grow into a fine ant one day. They raised him with all of the love and encouragement that any ant could receive. They would always tell him, “Don't let your size determine how big you dream.”



As Bukosi grew, he remained the smallest ant among his playmates. They all teased him, and to add to their amusement, Bukosi declared that one day he would be 'King of the Ants'. Each time he arrived at the playground, they would mock him. “Bukosi, your Royal Highness, how can we serve you?” They would pretend to bow in front of him, only to collapse to the ground in fits of rolling laughter. Bukosi would only say, “One day you'll see.”

As Bukosi grew into a young adult, it was time for him to take his rightful place in the colony. All the ants would tease and say, “Bukosi, you're too small to work like the rest of us. We may have to really take care of you like a king, because you'll starve trying to feed yourself.” With each tease, they would roll on the ground holding their stomachs from the pain of excessive laughter. Bukosi would only say, “One day I will be the king of the ants, and I'm going to show you all. In fact, to prove it to you, I will make the largest animal on the savannah bow down to me.” This was too much. It even brought a chuckle to his parents' faces. They would always say, “Now, Bukosi, it's okay to think big, but don't make yourself a target for laughter.”

The next day, Bukosi announced to his parents that he was going on a journey to prove to everyone that he would make his declaration come true. He packed his backpack with food (ant candy, ant sandwiches, ant tea, and ant cookies) from the pantry. (Ants love sweet things, you see.) His parents figured he would just go on a little journey maybe a few yards from the ant hill, and return by lunch with more of the imaginative stories he often told. Not taking his boast too seriously, they said, “Bukosi, we'll see you later.” Bukosi replied, “I'm not sure when I'll return.”

On his way out of the colony, Bukosi passed his playmates and other ants. They all smiled, and said to Bukosi, “Where are you going?” Bukosi replied, “I'm off to find the largest animal in the savannah, and he will bow down to me.” The ants all fell to their knees in laughter, and said, “That Bukosi is really good for a laugh.” They waved to him and said, “Good luck!”

Bukosi had never traveled far from the ant colony, and wondered where he should start. He decided to visit the old wise ant that lived alone on the edge of the colony. His parents had mentioned many times that the old ant had answers to many questions. As Bukosi approached the old ant's home, he could see him resting in the early morning sun holding a walking stick.



Before Bukosi could announce himself, the old ant said, “I know who you are. You're Bukosi, that ant that wants to be king.” Bukosi was surprised. He had never met the old ant before. He began to wonder what else the old ant knew. “My name is Bantu.” said the old ant. “Are those ant cookies and tea my old nose smells?” he whispered to Bukosi. “Yes, they are. Would you like some?” offered Bukosi. “I thought you'd never ask!” chuckled Bantu. Bukosi opened his backpack and presented a sampling of ant

cookies, tea, and a sandwich for the old ant. Bantu ate them gladly, and smiled between each bite.

After wiping his frail mouth and patting his sagging stomach, Bantu said, “So, you're on a quest to meet your destiny?” “Why yes!” said Bukosi, wondering how the old ant knew all this. “I'm off to find the largest animal in the savannah for him to bow down to me.” Bukosi proudly declared. “That's a high mountain to climb.” chuckled Bantu. Bukosi added, “But I'm not sure what he looks like and how to find him. Can you help?” Bantu rubbed his wrinkled cookie crumb-covered chin, and said, “You must go see the snake. He is wise and has seen much. He can help you. But know one thing, Bukosi. The snake is also dangerous, so remember to stand a safe distance from his mouth. He is wise but likes to talk in riddles and half-truths.” “How can I find him?” questioned Bukosi. “This time of day, he likes to rest under the wide branches of that big tree just beyond the grassy area.” Bantu pointed the way with his walking stick. “He also loves compliments, so don't forget to offer a few.” Bukosi thanked Bantu, and bid him farewell. Bantu nodded and returned to his morning meditation in the warm sun.

After what seemed like hours of walking, Bukosi approached a large tree with its broad branches of shade. Under it he saw what appeared to him as the largest animal he had ever seen. He wondered why the old ant did not tell him that the snake was the animal he sought. Bukosi figured his task would be easy, since the snake was already bowed to the dust.



As the vibration of his small footsteps neared the snake, it opened one eye and sent its probing tongue outward to sense who was coming. He closed the one eye. Then opened the other, then slowly closed it. Finally, the snake opened both eyes. He greeted Bukosi, “Well, master ant, what brings you to my shady retreat?” Bukosi, remembering the old ant's advice, shouted from a safe distance, “My name is Bukosi, and I'm in search of the largest animal on the savannah. I see that I have not only found the largest, but the most beautiful as well.” The snake, the largest python in the savannah, smiled. “Well, master ant, I see that you truly have an eye for beauty. My name is Coya. But I'm not the animal you seek. Why, may I ask, are you in search of the largest animal in the savannah, given you're among the smallest creatures?” Bukosi took a deep breath, and declared, “I want to find the largest animal to have him bow down to me, for one day I will be 'King of the Ants!'” Coya shivered with laughter from his head to the tip of his tail, a distance Bukosi could only imagine.

“You are brave little master. I think I like you, so I will help you. The one you should seek feeds at the top of the tallest acacia tree in the distance. When you see five legs, with four legs different from the fifth, there you will find what you seek.” Bukosi, a bit puzzled, wondered what kind of animal that could be. He began to wonder what he had gotten himself into. He offered thanks and a final compliment. “Farewell, O' wise and beautiful one.” Coya smiled and watched Bukosi head into the direction of the five

legged wonder. Coya closed one eye, then the other, and returned to his nap.

The walk to the acacia growth took Bukosi quite a while. He snacked on a couple of ant sandwiches. Along the way, he saw things his eyes could have never imagined. He went unnoticed by the larger animals, as he marveled at the striped horses, one-horned hippos, and walking giant birds with necks so long, he wondered how they could swallow.

As he approached the trees, he remembered the old snake's description of the animal he was to find. He also remembered Bantu's caution that the snake liked to talk in riddles. He began to wonder if there was such a thing as a five legged animal, when suddenly, he saw five legs swaying in the breeze. And indeed, four of the legs were different from the fifth. Bukosi looked up as far as he could, and could not see the head of this strange animal. He swallowed the last of the ant sandwich, and concluded that this must be the largest animal in the savannah. He wondered how he could get this animal to bow to him, since he could not look eye-to-eye with the beast.

Bukosi adjusted his back pack and began to climb, choosing the leg that was different from the other four. The climb was difficult. Bukosi stopped along the way to rest and surveyed the surrounding savannah. He had never been so high before, and wondered what he would find once he reached the top.

After a brief rest, he journeyed upward. At the top, he pulled himself onto a leaf. Before he could catch his breath, coming directly at him was a snake like creature. It was a tongue. He screamed with all of the sound his little body could create. "Hey! You almost got me!" "Oh! Pardon me, master ant. I did not see you. I'm sorry to frighten you. My name is Anody. What brings you so far from the ground below?"

Bukosi was pleased at the beast's politeness. "My name is Bukosi. I'm in search of the largest animal in the savannah. The old snake said I would need to find you. So, you must be the largest animal." Anody chuckled and said, "That old snake. He is full of riddles, isn't he? I am a giraffe. I am indeed the tallest animal in the savannah, but the one you seek is even larger." At this point, Bukosi began feeling overwhelmed, especially as the hot breeze swung the leaf back and forth upon which he stood. "You, you

mean...there's another animal even larger?" "Yep!" smiled Anody. Don't fear, I can show you how to find him, and with no riddles. You're closer than you think!"

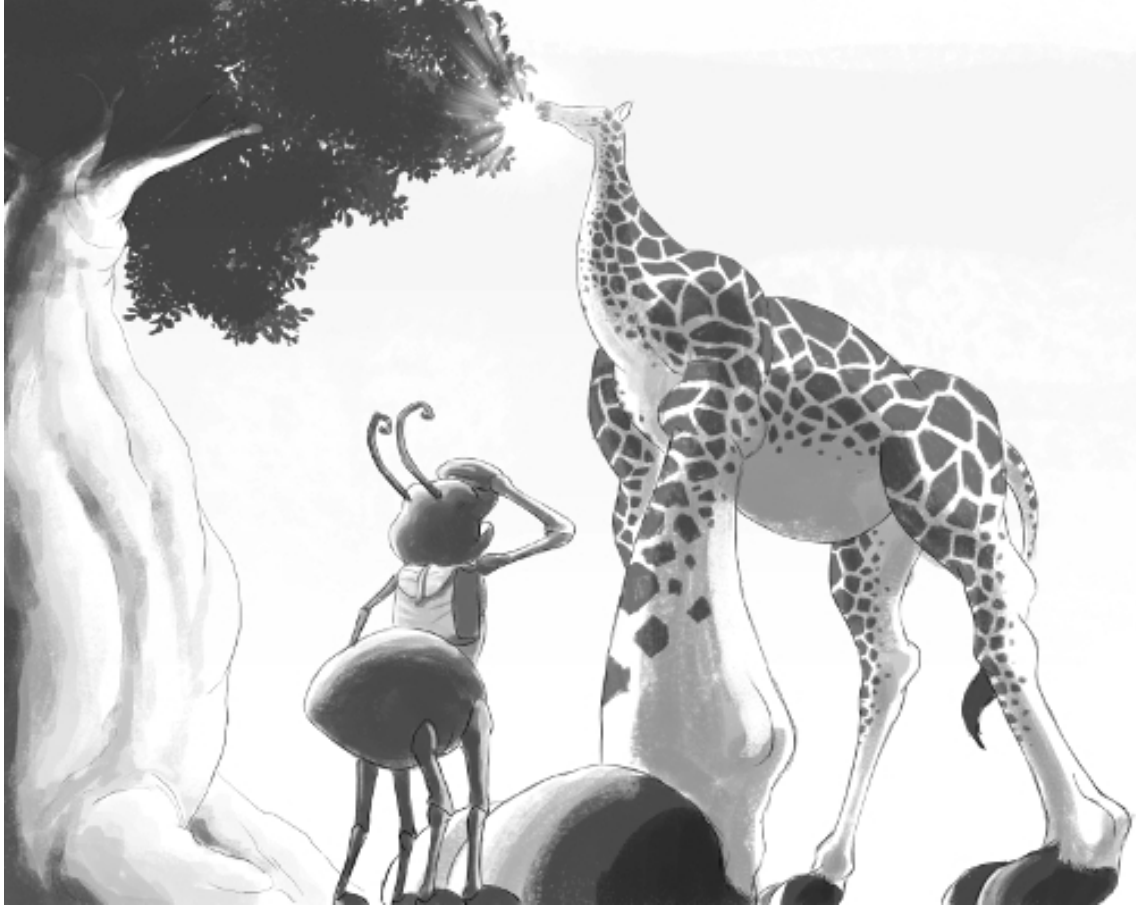
Bukosi thought to himself, "Finally!" "So where is this animal?" Anody pointed with the tip of his nose in the direction of the animal. "He's over there." Bukosi turned his head in the direction Anody was pointing, but he could not see anything. "I thought you said you would help me with no riddles! All I see is a large mountain." "That is no mountain. That is Damba, the 'King of the Elephants.'" Bukosi swallowed hard, and looked again. "The mountain moves!" Bukosi shouted excitedly. "It moves!" "Yep, that's Damba, the largest animal in the savannah." added Anody. Bukosi began to feel a bit dizzy, either because of the height, or from the overwhelming thought of how in the world he could make an animal this big bow down to him. He heard the laughter of his playmates in his ears, and knew that he could not return without trying.

"So why did you want to find Damba?" asked Anody. "Well, you see I'm to one day become 'King of the Ants', and I promised to have the largest animal in the savannah bow down to me." rehearsed Bukosi. "Ahh, I see!" said Anody. That is quite a task you have ahead of you. I can help you. Damba is a powerful animal with tusks of ivory that are ten feet long. He mostly keeps to himself. Damba and I were playmates when we were young, but nowadays, he does not have much time for play. I do know a secret about Damba that might help you." "What is it, what is it?" asked Bukosi. Anody whispers, "Damba's ears are very sensitive and he's ticklish there. Also, the only one that Damba lets come near him is his son, Bamba. There's Bamba over there chasing his tail." To Bukosi, Bamba looked like a little mountain. "What have I gotten myself into?" Bukosi wondered.

"Now, the rest is up to you." declared Anody. "Oh, I can also help you get to the ground a lot faster than it took you to climb to the top of this tree. Just climb onto my nose and hold on." Bukosi jumped aboard, and within seconds, Anody spread his long legs and lowered his long neck toward the ground.



As Bukosi enjoyed the ride to the earth, he noticed that Anody had only four legs. He smiled to himself, and thought, “That old snake!” As Anody was bowed to the earth with his nose touching the sand below, Bukosi hopped to the ground.



He looked back at Anody, who saluted him with a farewell, “I bow to you, master Bukosi, 'King of the Ants,’” and with a swoop upward of his neck, Anody's face disappeared into the sky.

Bukosi braced himself for the final showdown, something he had prepared his whole life for. He walked in the direction of the mountainous beasts called elephants. As he approached the herd, he saw Bamba nearby sniffing the ground and air for something that had caught his attention. He walked in Bukosi's direction. Bukosi stopped, hoping the mountain would not crush him.

Bamba was getting closer and closer, and then stopped just short of Bukosi. “I smell something sweet and delicious. Would you know anything about that, master ant?” quizzed Bamba. “You must smell my remaining cookies and candies. Would you like some?” offered Bukosi. “Oh yes!” hummed Bamba. As Bukosi opened his backpack, Bamba stated, “Oh, where are my manners? My name is Bamba. What is yours?” Bukosi

responded, “My name is Bukosi, 'King of the Ants'.” As Bamba eagerly took the small sample of sweets onto his tongue, he declared “That's the sweetest thing I've ever tasted!



By the way, you should meet my daddy, he is a king too!” Bukosi graciously accepted the invitation. “But how can he see me. He is as big as a mountain!” stated Bukosi. “You're right!” said Bamba. “He is big. He

can see you if you're on my head.” Bamba offered the tip of his trunk to Bukosi. Bukosi climbed on and Bamba raised him to a safe spot between his ears. He then raced toward his father, Damba. Bukosi held onto a fiber of hair to keep from falling.

After a short trot, Bamba neared his daddy. Damba mostly kept a stern look on his face, but whenever Bamba was near, his face became a happy smile. “So how are you my son?” declared Damba. “Daddy, Daddy, I have a king for you to meet!” Bamba excitedly announced. “Where is he?” Damba looked about. “He's on my head, Daddy.” Bamba pointed with his trunk. “Where, where?” bellowed Damba. I can't see anything.” “He's on my head. He is the 'King of the Ants'. His name is Bukosi.”



Damba leaned in closely and peered at the spot where Bamba was pointing. “Oh, I see.” stated Damba. “Welcome Bukosi, 'King of the Ants'.” Bukosi answered with the top of his voice. Damba barely heard him. He leaned in closer until his large ears touched the top of Bamba's head. Bukosi then jumped onto his ears and climbed closer to speak. He said, “My name is Bukosi, and...” but before he could say another word, his ant footsteps began to make Damba's ears quiver. Suddenly there was a rumble coming from Damba that soon turned into a giggle, then a full laughter.

Bukosi remembered what Anody, the giraffe, had told him about Damba's ticklish ears. He saw that Damba was enjoying himself, and did his best ant

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