

# *How Isuro the Rabbit Tricked Gudu*

Andrew Lang's Fairy Books

African

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*Intermediate*  
*12 min read*

Far away in a hot country, where the forests are very thick and dark, and the rivers very swift and strong, there once lived a strange pair of friends. Now one of the friends was a big white rabbit named Isuro, and the other was a tall baboon called Gudu, and so fond were they of each other that they were seldom seen apart.

One day, when the sun was hotter even than usual, the rabbit awoke from his midday sleep, and saw Gudu the baboon standing beside him.

'Get up,' said Gudu; 'I am going courting, and you must come with me. So put some food in a bag, and sling it round your neck, for we may not be able to find anything to eat for a long while.'

Then the rabbit rubbed his eyes, and gathered a store of fresh green things from under the bushes, and told Gudu that he was ready for the journey.

They went on quite happily for some distance, and at last they came to a river with rocks scattered here and there across the stream.

'We can never jump those wide spaces if we are burdened with food,' said Gudu, 'we must throw it into the river, unless we wish to fall in ourselves.' And stooping down, unseen by Isuro, who was in front of him, Gudu picked up a big stone, and threw it into the water with a loud splash.

'It is your turn now,' he cried to Isuro. And with a heavy sigh, the rabbit unfastened his bag of food, which fell

into the river.

The road on the other side led down an avenue of trees, and before they had gone very far Gudu opened the bag that lay hidden in the thick hair about his neck, and began to eat some delicious-looking fruit.

'Where did you get that from?' asked Isuro enviously.

'Oh, I found after all that I could get across the rocks quite easily, so it seemed a pity not to keep my bag,' answered Gudu.

'Well, as you tricked me into throwing away mine, you ought to let me share with you,' said Isuro. But Gudu pretended not to hear him, and strode along the path.

By-and-bye they entered a wood, and right in front of them was a tree so laden with fruit that its branches swept the ground. And some of the fruit was still green, and some yellow. The rabbit hopped forward with joy, for he was very hungry; but Gudu said to him: 'Pluck the green fruit, you will find it much the best. I will leave it all for you, as you have had no dinner, and take the yellow for myself.' So the rabbit took one of the green oranges and began to bite it, but its skin was so hard that he could hardly get his teeth through the rind.

'It does not taste at all nice,' he cried, screwing up his face; 'I would rather have one of the yellow ones.'

'No! no! I really could not allow that,' answered Gudu. 'They would only make you ill. Be content with the green fruit.' And as they were all he could get, Isuro was forced to put up with them.

After this had happened two or three times, Isuro at last had his eyes opened, and made up his mind that, whatever Gudu told him, he would do exactly the opposite. However, by this time they had reached the village where dwelt Gudu's future wife, and as they entered Gudu pointed to a clump of bushes, and said to Isuro: 'Whenever I am eating, and you hear me call out that my food has burnt me, run as fast as you can and gather some of those leaves that they may heal my mouth.'

The rabbit would have liked to ask him why he ate food that he knew would burn him, only he was afraid, and just nodded in reply; but when they had gone on a little further, he said to Gudu:

'I have dropped my needle; wait here a moment while I go and fetch it.'

'Be quick then,' answered Gudu, climbing into a tree. And the rabbit hastened back to the bushes, and gathered a quantity of the leaves, which he hid among his fur, 'For,' thought he, 'if I get them now I shall save myself the trouble of a walk by-and-by.'

When he had plucked as many as he wanted he returned to Gudu, and they went on together.

The sun was almost setting by the time they reached their journey's end and being very tired they gladly sat down by a well. Then Gudu's betrothed, who had been watching for him, brought out a pitcher of water—which she poured over them to wash off the dust of the road—and two portions of food. But once again the rabbit's hopes were dashed to the ground, for Gudu said hastily:

'The custom of the village forbids you to eat till I have finished.' And Isuro did not know that Gudu was lying, and that he only wanted more food. So he sat hungrily looking on, waiting till his friend had had enough.

In a little while Gudu screamed loudly: 'I am burnt! I am burnt!' though he was not burnt at all. Now, though Isuro had the leaves about him, he did not dare to produce them at the last moment lest the baboon should guess why he had stayed behind. So he just went round a corner for a short time, and then came hopping back in a great hurry. But, quick though he was, Gudu had been quicker still, and nothing remained but some drops of water.

'How unlucky you are,' said Gudu, snatching the leaves; 'no sooner had you gone than ever so many people arrived, and washed their hands, as you see, and ate your portion.' But, though Isuro knew better than to believe him, he said nothing, and went to bed hungrier than he had ever been in his life.

Early next morning they started for another village, and passed on the way a large garden where people were very busy gathering monkey-nuts.

'You can have a good breakfast at last,' said Gudu, pointing to a heap of empty shells; never doubting but that Isuro would meekly take the portion shown him, and leave the real nuts for himself. But what was his surprise when Isuro answered:

'Thank you; I think I should prefer these.' And, turning to the kernels, never stopped as long as there was one left. And the worst of it was that, with so many people about, Gudu could not take the nuts from him.

It was night when they reached the village where dwelt the mother of Gudu's betrothed, who laid meat and millet porridge before them.

'I think you told me you were fond of porridge,' said Gudu; but Isuro answered: 'You are mistaking me for somebody else, as I always eat meat when I can get it.' And again Gudu was forced to be content with the porridge, which he hated.

While he was eating it, however a sudden thought darted into his mind, and he managed to knock over a great pot of water which was hanging in front of the fire, and put it quite out.

'Now,' said the cunning creature to himself, 'I shall be able in the dark to steal his meat!' But the rabbit had grown as cunning as he, and standing in a corner hid the meat behind him, so that the baboon could not find it.

'O Gudu!' he cried, laughing aloud, 'it is you who have taught me to be clever.' And calling to the people of the house, he bade them kindle the fire, for Gudu would sleep by it, but that he would pass the night with some friends in another hut.

It was still quite dark when Isuro heard his name called very softly, and, on opening his eyes, beheld Gudu standing by him. Laying his finger on his nose, in token of silence, he signed to Isuro to get up and follow him, and it was not until they were some distance from the hut that Gudu spoke.

'I am hungry and want something to eat better than that nasty porridge that I had for supper. So I am going to kill one of those goats, and as you are a good cook you must boil the flesh for me.' The rabbit nodded, and Gudu disappeared behind a rock, but soon returned dragging the dead goat with him. The two then set about skinning it, after which they stuffed the skin with dried leaves, so that no one would have guessed it was not alive, and set it up in the middle of a lump of bushes, which kept it firm on its feet. While he was doing this, Isuro collected sticks for a fire, and when it was kindled, Gudu hastened to another hut to steal a pot which he filled with water from the river, and, planting two branches in the ground, they hung the pot with the meat in it over the fire.

'It will not be fit to eat for two hours at least,' said Gudu, 'so we can both have a nap.' And he stretched himself out on the ground, and pretended to fall fast asleep, but, in reality, he was only waiting till it was safe to take all the meat for himself. 'Surely I hear him snore,' he thought; and he stole to the place where Isuro was lying on a pile of wood, but the rabbit's eyes were wide open.

'How tiresome,' muttered Gudu, as he went back to his place; and after waiting a little longer he got up, and peeped again, but still the rabbit's pink eyes stared widely. If Gudu had only known, Isuro was asleep all the time; but this he never guessed, and by-and- bye he grew so tired with watching that he went to sleep himself. Soon after, Isuro woke up, and he too felt hungry, so he crept softly to the pot and ate all the meat, while he tied the bones together and hung them in Gudu's fur. After that he went back to the wood-pile and slept again.

In the morning the mother of Gudu's betrothed came out to milk her goats, and on going to the bushes where the largest one seemed entangled, she found out the trick. She made such lament that the people of the village came running, and Gudu and Isuro jumped up also, and pretended to be as surprised and interested as the rest. But they must have looked guilty after all, for suddenly an old man pointed to them, and cried:

'Those are thieves.' And at the sound of his voice the big Gudu trembled all over.

'How dare you say such things? I defy you to prove it,' answered Isuro boldly. And he danced forward, and turned head over heels, and shook himself before them all.

'I spoke hastily; you are innocent,' said the old man; 'but now let the baboon do likewise.' And when Gudu began to jump the goat's bones rattled and the people cried: 'It is Gudu who is the goat-slayer!' But Gudu

answered:

‘Nay, I did not kill your goat; it was Isuro, and he ate the meat, and hung the bones round my neck. So it is he who should die!’ And the people looked at each other, for they knew not what to believe. At length one man said:

‘Let them both die, but they may choose their own deaths.’

Then Isuro answered:

‘If we must die, put us in the place where the wood is cut, and heap it up all round us, so that we cannot escape, and set fire to the wood; and if one is burned and the other is not, then he that is burned is the goat- slayer.’

And the people did as Isuro had said. But Isuro knew of a hole under the wood-pile, and when the fire was kindled he ran into the hole, but Gudu died there.

When the fire had burned itself out and only ashes were left where the wood had been, Isuro came out of his hole, and said to the people:

‘Lo! did I not speak well? He who killed your goat is among those ashes.’

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