The Judge: A Tale From West Africa

From Touchpebbles

Two mice stole a large chunk of cheese. Both wanted to have what they thought was their fair share. But neither of them trusted the other to divide the cheese fairly. So they went to the lion, the king of all animals. “King, we want to divide this cheese, but we can’t do it fairly. We can’t agree on what is fair. Please help us.” The lion frowned at the mice because he was very busy but believed it was his duty to help. “I’ll send you to the monkey. He’s the judge and will help you, but it would be better if you could do it yourselves. Once you bring in a judge, many new problems might come up.” But the mice wanted the monkey, and so the king sent them to his law court.

The monkey was seated in a big chair behind a large table. The mice asked for his help in dividing the cheese. The monkey said, “Of course I’ll be the judge if you want me to.” He sent his helper for a scale and a knife. With the knife, he cut the cheese so that one piece was much bigger than the other. Then he ate some of the bigger piece. The mice asked him what he was doing. “I’m eating from this piece so that it will be equal to the smaller piece,” he said. He ate so much that when he put both pieces on the scale again, the one that used to be smaller was now bigger. So he began to eat from that piece. The mice now realized that the monkey planned to eat all the cheese. They said, “Give us what’s left, O Judge, and we will divide it fairly.” But the monkey said, “No. You will fight each other and then King Lion will be angry with me.” So the monkey went on eating until all of the cheese was gone. Then one mouse turned to the other and said, “Why didn’t we trust each other and cut the cheese ourselves?”