

Of snakes and mice – iinyoka neempuku

as told by Vernie February

In the dusty old veld, where the sun shone mercilessly sometimes, there lived mother mouse with her two children. And, in that same old veld, some 1000 yards further on, in a hole, there lived mother snake with her two little snakes.

And, during the day, when mother mouse was busy, the veld mice played around, explored the veld, first timidly, then boldly. Until at last, they wandered off so far from their hole that they came upon a pool of clear crystal water, some five-hundred yards away. And when the sun shone it conjured up myriads of little diamonds on the water.

And, the snakes also explored their world, first timidly, then boldly, until they too came upon the pool of crystal clear water. The mice saw the snakes first. They turned and were about to run away. The snakes spoke to them. They stopped and listened:

'And you, what are you?
Such funny bodies.
Such funny heads
Such funny tails
Such funny noises
Peep, peep, peep
What are you?'

And the little mice answered: 'We are veld mice.'

Then, the mice asked the snakes:

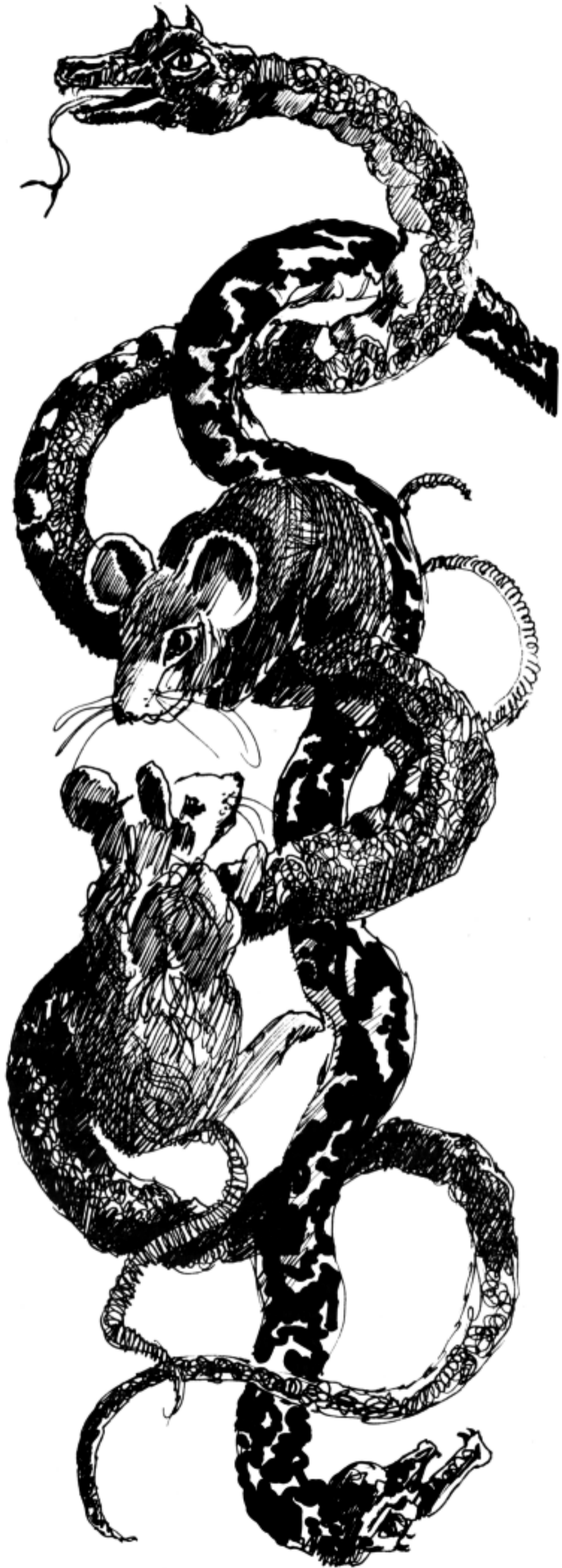
'And you, what are you?
Such funny bodies
Just one long tail
No head
No body
No feet
Just one long tail
With everything on it
What are you?'

And the snakes answered: 'We are called snakes.'

And the mice answered: 'We like you.'

The veld mice and the snakes played together for the first time in the African veld. And they were happy. And the sun of Africa, as if it wanted to lend extra lustre to this wonderful moment, the sun shone so beautifully, that myriads and myriads of little diamonds were conjured up in the water. And the snakes danced with the mice and the mice with the snakes. They pirouetted, swooshed their tails, squeaked and hissed with glee, while myriads of diamonds glittered on the water.

When night fell so dramatically in one swoop, enveloping everything, the mice scuttled off in a hurry, *peep, peeping* their way to their hole. And the snakes slithered their way through the veld.



Mother mouse asked her little ones:
 'Where have you been? What have you done?'

The veld mice replied:
 'We met these funny creatures
 No body
 Just one long tail
 No feet
 Just one long tail
 And, they called themselves snakes.'

Then mother mouse shouted with fear:
 'Snakes!
 You played with them
 Don't you know we're enemies
 They eat us up
 We're enemies.'

The veld mice trembled with fear for they did not know.
 When the snakes came home their mother asked them:
 'Where have you been? What did you do?'

The snakes answered their mother:
 'We met these funny creatures
 With funny bodies
 And funny eyes
 And funny tails
 And funny sounds
 They called themselves Veld Mice.'

Then mother snake shouted:
 'Did you eat them up?'

The little snakes said:
 'No, why should we eat them up?'

Then mother snake answered:
 'Don't you know we live on mice.
 We feed on them.'

The next day at the pool, the mice were there, the snakes were there. But whenever the snakes came closer, the veld mice ran away. At long last the snakes asked their friends:
 'Why do you run away?
 Are you afraid of us?
 Yesterday, we had such fun
 Yesterday, we were such friends.'

The veld mice – at a safe distance now, shouted back to the snakes:
 'Yesterday, we did not know
 that snakes were our enemies
 Yesterday, our mother had not yet informed us.
 We are *limpuku*
 and you are *linyoka*.
 Yesterday we did not know
 that SNAKES are our ENEMIES.'

So saying the veld mice ran off into the African veld, *peep, peep, peeping* their way to their mother and to safety ...

