



Micah and the Worst Drought in One Hundred Years. A story for children in the times of COVID-19.

Micah was a young elephant. He was fun and mischievous and had the kindest heart that the herd had ever seen. When Micah saw another creature in distress he would rush to their aid. His parents had to warn him many times not to rush to help lions and tigers when they got thorns in their giant paws!

Micah's family lived in the lush savannah lands. There had been good rain for all three summers of Micah's life and he had only ever known safety and security. But this story begins at the start of Micah's fourth year of life. It was a year that would go down in elephant history as a time of great fear and sorrow.

The rains had stopped. The grasses had died. Predators roamed the savannah hungrier than ever. The older elephants could not manage the long treks each day to search for water. They remained at the herd's usual spot, alone, hungry, and thirsty. They were scared for they knew they could not last long without water.

Micah's heart was aching for the old elephants. He knew that he could only carry about four litres in the pouch under his tongue and he knew that this was not enough to help. Adult elephants need 200 litres of water a day! He decided he would bring water to one of the elders who needed it most. But who?

Mr. and Mrs. Buntu had a daughter who brought them water every day; they didn't need him. Old Mr. Willa had struck up a deal with Micah's friend, Mia, to bring him water in exchange for nighttime stories. As Micah thought about the elders of his herd, he saw Mrs. Shasta shuffle past. Mrs. Shasta didn't look at him. She had her large grey head bent down low towards the ground; her ears hung sadly limp. Micah was surprised. He knew that Mrs. Shasta, although old with wrinkly, saggy skin, had been able to make it all the way to the water hole that day. She had had enough water, so why did she seem so sad? He resolved to ask his parents when they settled down for sleep.

Micah's parents did not answer him directly when he asked them about Mrs. Shasta. Instead, they told him a story, a story about monkeys and a human named Harlow. Harlow was a scientist. He studied monkeys as a way to find out about other primates, human ones. Micah had never seen a human and he wondered how this Harlow had managed to get into the jungle and sit with the monkeys to study them. "Shhh, Micah. You're getting off track." said his father as his mother continued the story.

Micah's mother changed the story a bit when she told it to Micah because the truth was that Harlow took baby monkeys away from their mothers. This truth was too awful to tell Micah at this point, so she said instead, that Harlow worked with baby monkeys who did not have mothers. This too upset our kind hearted Micah, who began to feel very grateful that he had his parents and was part of a loving family. How sad he was for the orphaned babies!

As he was imagining these sorry little monkeys, he realised his mother was still speaking. He listened in confusion as she explained that Harlow gave the baby monkeys pretend mothers! They were given a fake mother made of wire and wood, and another fake mother made of soft foam covered in fluffy towel material. The monkeys were put into two groups. In the first group, the wire "mother" had a milk bottle and the cloth one did not. In the second group, the cloth mother had the food while the wire mother had none. This seemed very mean to Micah. He was finding it hard to listen to his mother but she continued.





Harlow discovered something from these baby monkeys. He discovered that love is just as important as food and water! Harlow learned this because in both groups, the baby monkeys spent a lot more time with the soft, cuddly mother than the wire one, even when the wire one had the food. They would quickly get some milk from the wire one and then go back and spend the rest of their time cuddled up to the soft mummy monkey. How Micah hoped and hoped that these motherless babies felt warm and loved with the soft mummy monkey, even if she wasn't real.

"But, Mamma," said Micah as his mind returned to the reason he had started the whole conversation with his parents. "What does this all have to do with old Mrs. Shasta?" "All mammals, young and old, are the same in their need for love and company, Micah." said his dad. Micah was still confused. He went to sleep dreaming of fake monkeys and water holes that were overflowing.

The next morning, Micah got ready for the long walk to find water for the day. He ate some of the grass his father had left in a pile nearby, and as he ate, he watched the herd and thought about Harlow's monkeys. He saw Mr. and Mrs. Buntu wrap their trunks around their daughter's trunk as they wished her well for her long walk. They looked tired and thin, yet Micah could see that they were smiling. Mr. Willa trumpeted goodbye to Mia. He seemed happy too. And then, out of the corner of his eye, he spied Mrs. Shasta. She would be coming on the walk today. She would get to drink her fill of water, yet she looked frail and weak. Her trunk swung low and her eyelids were almost closed. There no hint of a smile on her face.

Micah was interrupted by the sound of wailing, a slow, deep sound coming from the adult elephants. They were standing next to Mr. Tantor who was lying flat on the earth. They were facing away from him, one by one reaching out to touch him gently with their hind legs. Mr. Willa was stroking him with his trunk. Micah knew what this meant. He knew that Mr. Tantor had died. He had seen this too many times in the past year as the drought ravaged the land. Mr. Tantor had not had enough water to live. It reminded him of Harlow's monkeys. They needed milk to live, milk and love.

And then Micah understood why his mother had told him about the monkeys when he had asked about Mrs. Shasta. Mrs. Shasta lived alone. She had no one to care for her. She needed love and company! Micah knew that although he only had a tiny water storage pouch, he had a huge amount of love to give. He knew he could not bring enough water to an elephant who was thirsty. He knew that Mrs. Shasta didn't need him to bring her water. He knew that the other elephants in the herd didn't need him to bring them love. But Mrs. Shasta needed him.

Micah knew what he had to do. He trotted up to Mrs. Shasta and asked if he could walk with her to the water hole. The old elephant's eyes brightened as she raised her trunk with an elegant curve. She perked up her ears and she gently nudged the top of Micah's head. "It's kindness like this that will help our herd survive. One day, when you are old and you tell the young ones about these years of drought, make sure you tell them that all living beings need love just as much as they need food and water. Thank you, Micah. Today I feel strong because I have all that I really need." And with that, the two elephants, one old and wizened, the other young and bursting with energy, turned to join the herd.

