

STRIPES

by Heather Larkin

Elaborate, colorful lengths of fabric (*kanga*) form the backdrop for the OPENING CREDITS. The geometric and floral motifs dance in place.

One *kanga* features a large outline of Africa.

Title: STRIPES appears. A printed zebra breaks loose from the design and starts wandering around. It chews on the floral designs.

Another *kanga* design features two 9 year old boys, joined by prints of sheep, goats and cattle.

The cartoony zebra continues to run amok until it finally gets bored and wanders off.

SCENE 1 - EXT. HOMESTEAD - DAWN

Colorful STARLINGS SING and WEAVERS CHATTER as the sun rises, producing a RISING CACOPHONY. Squat mud huts sit quietly in the background. From a thatched roof, a GO-AWAY BIRD makes its characteristic CALL.

INT. MUD HUT

A boy, PATRICK, sleeps soundly. The grating CALL of the go-away bird jolts him awake.

EXT. MUD HUT

Patrick emerges from the hut's entrance. [Patrick wants to win the attention of his older peers and parents by taking his responsibilities super seriously. But inside he's still just a kid who wants to have fun.]

His MOTHER, carrying a jerrycan on her shoulder, hurries by. Patrick, wanting to be helpful, gravitates toward her.

She slows, points toward the sheep/goat pen, then walks off.

Patrick nods eagerly and pads off.

Patrick approaches 25 SHEEP and GOATS, kept in a tight circle by a fence of thorny acacia branches. He picks up his herding stick: a long, thin branch leaning against the pen.

He makes a gap in the fence, and lets the livestock slowly saunter out.

Tired, Patrick drags himself behind his small flock. He lets out a gaping yawn. A cold wind makes him shiver. He sticks his hands in his armpits and tries to make himself as compact as possible.

Patrick spots in the distance: his FATHER walking tall, regal-like, among a herd of enormous cattle. Patrick waves to him with both hands.

Patrick's father waves back, briefly. He turns back to his cattle and gets them moving by tapping his herding stick on the ground and waving it over his head.

Patrick turns back to his own paltry flock. Inspired by his father, he straightens up and waves his herding stick in a similar fashion.

Patrick leads his flock farther and farther from the homestead.

SCENE 2 - EXT. DIRT PATH THROUGH DENSE STAND OF ACACIA TREES - EARLY MORNING

The sheep and goats keep a slow and steady pace along the dirt path. Patrick diligently redirects animals who stray off the path.

Another boy, JOHN, runs toward Patrick. Some of the sheep startle and their tight formation breaks up. [John is only a little bit younger (and smaller) than Patrick, but he's completely uninterested in adult things. He's looking for friendship with other children and animals, but can be overly rough in his approach.]

A single LAMB gallops after John, tied to a string. The lamb tries to stop, but John jerks it forward.

Not wanting to be with younger company, Patrick greets the newcomer with a guarded smile.

John runs up to Patrick and hugs him uber-tightly around the shoulders.

John gestures to himself and the flock. Can I join you? he seems to say.

Patrick hesitates, then nods.

Joyous, John skips toward the back of the flock. He shoves his lamb between two of Patrick's sheep.

Not entirely sure about the newcomer, Patrick keeps one eye on John for a moment before turning his full attention back to the flock.

John's gaze wanders over his surroundings. His eyes fall on something in Patrick's flock. An unusual black and white STRIPED LAMB ambles among larger and more monotonously colored animals.

Patrick hears a distressed BLEATING sound from behind him. He is shocked to see John running up to him with the striped lamb held awkwardly in his arms.

John, utterly fascinated, points out the stripes on the struggling lamb's back.

Horrified, Patrick grabs the lamb out of John's hands.

Patrick holds the lamb gently until it calms down. With great care, he sets it down and strokes its head.

John watches, surprised. The lamb runs off and rejoins the flock.

Patrick flashes John a dirty look, then turns back toward the flock. He waves his herding stick with gravitas.

Suddenly cheerful again, John finds a branch on the ground and follows

after Patrick, mimicking his gestures.

SCENE 3 - EXT. TARMAC ROAD - LATE MORNING

A raised tarmac road cuts through an expansive, arid landscape. The sheep and goats slowly ascend onto the road, clustering along its ragged edge. Patrick joins them, looking up and down the road. A rusted sedan passes by.

The coast clear, Patrick rushes the sheep and goats across the road. They walk as quickly as their short legs can manage. Ever vigilant, Patrick continually checks up and down the road.

A slumped, bored-looking John comes on the road following the last of the sheep. He waves his branch, but with much less enthusiasm than before.

He notices something interesting: A large DESERT TORTOISE pulls itself alongside the edge of the road.

The last of the livestock cross the road and descend onto the other side. Patrick is about to follow when he notices John calling him. John runs over to Patrick and grabs his arm. He jumps and points excitedly at the tortoise.

Patrick shakes his head, gesturing toward the livestock.

John grabs Patrick's arm and, in a few strides, drags him back across the road. Patrick pulls his arm away, peeved.

Not noticing, John crouches next to the tortoise. The tortoise hunkers down. John runs his hands over the tortoise's shell and knocks on it like a door.

Patrick, unable to resist, leans in and takes a look. Intricate and beautiful patterns adorn the tortoise's shell.

Fascinated, he smiles. John notices.

Not wanting to give anything away, Patrick quickly puts on a more neutral expression.

But he's still interested. Not looking at John, he bends over and slowly reaches out to touch the tortoise's shell.

HONK HONK!

Patrick jumps. A massive truck barrels down the road.

A BLEATING sound. Patrick notices his striped lamb wandering back into the middle of the road, in front of the truck.

Patrick wants to run and save it, but hesitates. The truck is only a few seconds from the lamb. John shakes his head: Don't do it.

The lamb, tired, sits down. HONK HOOONK!

Patrick dashes across the road.

He scoops up the lamb just before the truck screams past. White dust and

black exhaust fill the air.

Patrick, standing scrunched in a protective position, unfurls himself and coughs. Furious, he glares after the disappearing truck. He yells and shakes his fist.

John runs to Patrick's side, impressed. Patrick gives him a fleeting, distrustful glance. Patrick looks down at the lamb, glad that its safe. Still holding it close, he climbs down from the road after the rest of his flock.

Still looking at Patrick in awe, John follows after.

SCENE 4 - EXT. GLADE NEAR KOPJE (ROCK-MOUND) - MIDDAY

Patrick strolls toward a small kopje (rock-mound), letting his flock disperse. Lambs play. Sheep nip happily at the grass. Goats get on their hind legs to reach the leaves on top of bushes.

John drags his lamb over to a dead bush. He knots the lamb's lead to the stump and runs after Patrick.

Patrick scales the kopje. He carefully checks the area immediately around the kopje. He can see all the sheep and goats. No other signs of life. Looks safe.

John climbs up and looks far into the distance. Far, far away, a giraffe neck pokes out of a dense patch of acacia.

He points it out to Patrick with urgency, as if it might suddenly disappear.

Patrick ignores him, and settles under a tree for a snooze. Disappointed, John continues to look.

EXT. ACACIA TREES, BELOW THE KOPJE

A cartoony GREVY'S ZEBRA walks lethargically among the acacia trees. As it passes a tree, one of its rump stripes gets "caught" on an acacia thorn. As the zebra walks, the stripe slowly pulls off more and more stripes in one long "string" until

SNAP!

the stripe breaks and the two pieces dangle below its belly. The zebra starts. It looks at the damaged stripes, appalled.

The zebra tries to smooch and wriggle its rump against the ground, trying to press the stripes back on.

But when it stands up, the stripes looks like an even more embarrassing mess.

An idea. The zebra looks up into the trees and whistles for some YELLOW WEAVER BIRDS, sitting in their woven nests. Three birds land on the zebra's back. The zebra gestures to its pitiful stripes. The weaver birds CHIRP with understanding. In a flurry of activity, they work on the stripes.

But instead of fixing the stripes, the weaver birds have made a nest out of the stripes.

The zebra can't believe the horror. It snorts at the birds with disapproval.

The birds try again, restoring the zebra with normal stripes. The grateful zebra dances, showing off its stripes like a girl showing off a dress.

The zebra suddenly sees something very interesting: Some distance away, Patrick's striped lamb gambols around a bush. It playfully runs and bucks.

The zebra stares wide-eyed, completely transfixed by the lamb and its stripes.

With a greedy look, the zebra takes a step toward the lamb.

A deep BAAAAA. An adult sheep wanders in front of the striped lamb. Surprised, the zebra ducks behind a tree.

The zebra flips its ears back and looks around with shifty eyes. It sneaks off, determined to get closer to the lamb.

EXT. ATOP THE KOPJE

Patrick sleeps soundly until he's sha-sha-shaken awake by John.

John yells and points down toward the acacia. Annoyed, Patrick reluctantly follows and takes a look.

Just below the kopje, a zebra briefly comes into view as it sneaks between two trees. Patrick starts, alarmed and intrigued. A zebra, so close!?

He scrambles down the kopje, John following close behind. Not far from the flock, the boys hide behind a rock.

They catch another exciting glimpse of the zebra. Super alert, they keep watching, in silence.

BAAAAA-AAA! The striped lamb has wandered next to Patrick and bleats at him like a whining child. Be quiet! BAAA-AAAAA! He grabs the lamb and holds on to it.

They look around for another glimpse of the zebra. No signs of movement. Nothing.

A shadow falls over the boys. They turn around and see the zebra standing right there, looking down at them. From the ground, the zebra looks huge and powerful. Patrick stares, frozen in awe, afraid to move. John wears a huge grin.

Suddenly, the zebra uses its teeth to grab the lamb out of Patrick's arms and bolts away with it.

Patrick and John stand in shock for a beat. Patrick, realizing what has just happened, runs after the zebra, but then suddenly stops.

He looks back the rest of his flock, still grazing happily. He looks back

and forth, torn.

Patrick grabs John's shoulders, looks him square in the eyes and gestures for him to "stay here."

John, startled by the direct contact, nods emphatically. Patrick runs off after the zebra.

John, suddenly understanding that he's being left behind (and not liking it), turns toward the sheep and gestures for them to "stay here." He runs after Patrick.

SCENE 5 - EXT. GRASSY PLAIN

The zebra puts the lamb down gently. Looks it over, admiring it like a doting parent. The lamb seems nervous, not sure what to do.

The zebra licks the lamb's neck, pulling its neck fur up into a mohawk (like the zebra's). The lamb seems surprised, but enjoys the affection.

EXT. ACACIA PATCH

Patrick runs and runs. He stops and looks around, but there is no sign of the zebra. He looks around desperately for clues.

Suddenly John runs up behind Patrick, surprising him. Patrick's expression says: 'What are you doing here??'

Patrick gestures for John to go back, pushing him.

THUMP! The giant foot of a giraffe descends nearby. The rest of the giraffe slowly passes over them. Scared, Patrick jumps back.

The giraffe picks up pace and starts to gallop away. John, ecstatic, laughs and follows the giraffe.

Patrick yells after John to stop, but he's not listening. Patrick hesitates, then runs after John.

Other giraffes step in around them. Patrick darts back and forth to avoid their legs. The boys and the giraffe come out into a wide open grassy plain, with a smattering of acacia trees.

Patrick finally catches up to John and drags him under the low branches of an acacia tree. Safe!

John peeks out of the branches, amazed by the sight. There are large groups of animals nearby: OSTRICH, ORYX, IMPALA, DIK DIK. Patrick looks out as well. GIRAFFE, BABOONS, WARTHOGS, GUINEA FOWL. They are smack in the middle of a huge plain full of wildlife.

Patrick looks around, dazzled by bustle of animal life.

Suddenly, Patrick notices the zebra and the lamb walking toward him. Their trajectory will take them right by his tree. Seeing his chance, Patrick poises himself at the edge of the tree's cover.

Nearby, John reaches outside the branches to touch one of the thirty guinea

fowl foraging nearby.

Patrick waits, tensed, ready to grab the lamb when

BOOM!

Thirty guinea fowl take wing. Lots of SQUAWKING, feathers flying. The zebra and the lamb look up, vigilant, then trot off in a new direction.

Patrick whips around. John holds up a guinea fowl, flapping its wings like mad. Look what I got!

Patrick glares at him: What's wrong with you?!

EXT. NEARBY GRASS-LESS PATCH

A fly lands on the zebra's shoulder and the zebra twitches, then kicks, in annoyance.

The zebra checks on the lamb. The lamb tries to shake off flies too.

The zebra leads the lamb over to a spot of bare earth. The zebra gets on the ground and rolls back and forth, kicking up lots of dust. The lamb looks on with interest. The zebra sits upright, shakes off the excess dust and gestures for the lamb to do the same.

The lamb kneels, but can't turn itself all the way over. Its legs flail. It BAAs in complaint.

The zebra seems baffled by the sound. The zebra responds with a small whinny. They touch noses affectionately.

EXT. UNDER A TREE

Patrick and John hide under a tree. Patrick, not wanting to take any chances, keeps a firm grip onto John's arm.

Patrick drags John, as stealthily as possible, toward the cover of another tree. Now they are only a few meters from the lamb.

Patrick sees his chance and darts out to grab the lamb, pulling John along.

BARK! BARK! Two male impala dash across Patrick's path, making him stop short. John slams into Patrick.

CRACK! The impala lock horns. More males follow behind.

Panicked, Patrick turns around, grabs John and pulls him under a tree.

Phew! Patrick takes a breath. The impala disappear. Some distance away, the lamb gambols happily while the zebra grazes. Patrick watches like a lion, plotting his next move.

John notices something that makes him light up. He leaves Patrick's side unnoticed.

Ready, Patrick poises himself like a sprinter waiting for a starter's pistol.

Patrick hears a deep RUMBLING noise very close by.

Patrick glances outside the tree's cover. An elephant mare, ripping up grass with her trunk, stands only a few meters away.

Ahh! Patrick turns to warn John.

To his horror, Patrick sees John reaching out to touch the foot of an even closer, bull elephant. Double Ahh!

Patrick runs over and pulls John away just in time.

CRRRRRRAAAACK!

Another elephant, with its trunk wrapped around the tree's upper branches, starts to pull the whole tree down. The boys escape out into the open. The tree falls, cracked in two. Uninterested in the boys, the elephants pull on the acacia's branches and stuff them into their mouths.

Breathing heavily, and utterly desperate, Patrick scans around for the zebra and the lamb. There! The zebra sees Patrick scowling at him and starts. What are you doing here?

In an all or nothing move, Patrick runs for the lamb. All around animals freak out and scatter. Patrick comes inches from the lamb.

But the zebra gets between them, grabs the lamb and runs off like a bullet. Patrick continues to chase the zebra, but the zebra outruns him and disappears over a hill.

Patrick stops, huffing and puffing. He hangs his head in disappointment. John catches up, looking concerned.

They stand next to each other on a now completely empty plain.

SCENE 6 - EXT. GLADE NEAR KOPJE

Patrick and John walk back in gloomy silence. Suddenly, Patrick looks around in shock.

There, in the stand near the kopje where Patrick's sheep were grazing, all of the sheep and goats have disappeared. Only John's lamb, still tied to the dead bush, remains.

Patrick looks around frantically, checking around trees for signs of his flock. He runs up the kopje to take a look.

While Patrick runs around, John creeps timidly over to his lamb.

Patrick comes down from the kopje, looking pensive.

He suddenly picks up a rock and throws it at a tree. John watches, tense.

Patrick stamps right up to John and starts yelling. He gestures to the missing sheep, to the many directions they could be. He gestures his instructions to John to "stay here" and how he hadn't listened.

Hurt and upset, John yells back. They yell at each other.

Fed up, Patrick turns and walks away from John. He picks up a small boulder and lobs it at the ground.

Oh yeah? John looks around, finds a bigger boulder, and with greater effort, picks it up and lobs it at the ground.

But Patrick was not looking. Patrick sits alone, twirling his herding stick in his hands. Feeling defeated, he holds up his head with one hand.

John stares at Patrick's back. He's not sure what to do.

Lonely, he crouches down and reaches out to pet his lamb.

The lamb, scared of him, evades his hand. The lamb runs as far as the lead will allow.

Frustrated, John gets up to untie the lamb's lead.

As he's untying, the lamb pulls on the string. John fails to catch it and the lamb runs away. John stumbles after the lamb, but he stops, when he sees

Patrick walks up to the lamb, crouches down and offers his hand to smell. The lamb approaches. Patrick winces when he sees where the string has dug into the lamb's neck. He gently removes the string. He scratches the lamb's head affectionately. The lamb licks Patrick's fingers.

John watches, puzzled. Jealous.

Patrick gently picks up the lamb and walks over to John. He eases the lamb into John's arms. He adjusts John's arms to hold it properly.

John, impressed by how calm the lamb is, looks up at Patrick, grateful for his kindness.

Patrick points behind John. Go home.

The smile leaves John's face.

Patrick runs off in the opposite direction.

John starts to follow, but then stops.

SCENE 7 - EXT. DRY PATCH WITH GULLIES

A flat, grass-less landscape with bare, dead-looking acacia. Huge eroded gullies scar the earth. The zebra and the lamb cross the gullies carefully.

The striped lamb almost falls into one, but the zebra catches it just in time.

The zebra suddenly notices Patrick standing nearby, staring at the zebra. He looks angry and determined.

The zebra considers running, but the gullies make that difficult. Instead, the zebra puts itself between the striped lamb and Patrick. Stands up tall.

It looks formidable.

Patrick picks up a rock.

He throws it at the zebra. The zebra dodges. It mocks a charge, snorting.

Patrick hurls another rock. And another. The zebra dances backwards.

The lamb, to avoid getting stepped on by the zebra, backs up and falls into a narrow gully.

Patrick stops in mid-throw, turning 180 from anger to fear.

The zebra panics and looks into the gully. The lamb struggles to keep itself from falling any further. The zebra starts digging at the gully's edge.

The soil crumbles and the lamb falls. The zebra watches aghast as the lamb falls, slowly, into what looks like the mouth of a great toothy beast.

Patrick dashes to the gully's edge and looks in. Spiky acacia branches and darkness choke the gully. No sign of the lamb.

Suddenly, the zebra winces. It starts bucking and kicking like mad, as if something has jumped on its back.

Patrick backs away just in time to avoid getting hit. Patrick tries to move around the zebra, but it keeps kicking and kicking.

John runs in, with his lamb following behind. He comes to the gully's edge and jumps in.

John slides to the bottom. He crouches down and sees the lamb just under and past some acacia branches. He reaches out to grab it, but it backs away from him.

The zebra continues to buck and kick furiously. Patrick tries to dodge out of the way, but an acacia branch catches his shirt and stops him.

John has pushed up the thorny branches with his back, and reaches for the lamb with a more gentle touch.

The zebra charges for Patrick.

BAAAA. A bleating sound echos. The zebra stops in its tracks, a distant look in its eyes. Its legs quiver.

Patrick rips himself away from the acacia and runs for the gully.

Patrick sees John standing inside the gully, cradling the striped lamb in his arms. Patrick smiles.

John slowly passes the lamb up to Patrick. Patrick hugs the lamb, overjoyed to have it back. The lamb licks his face.

Suddenly suspicious, Patrick looks around for the zebra. No sign of it. It's gone off somewhere.

John tries to get out of the gully, but the crumbling soil provides no footholds.

Seeing this, Patrick puts down the lamb, gets on his stomach and reaches his arms out to John. John grabs them and Patrick starts to pull him up.

The striped lamb sees something and, to Patrick's distress, gambols off.

No! Patrick almost drops John trying to reach for the lamb. It's hopeless. He watches the lamb disappear.

Patrick musters his energy again and finishes pulling John out of the gully. Dust covers John's clothes. He coughs. Patrick looks fleetingly at John, not sure how he feels.

John starts patting himself to get the dust off. Patrick helps him, patting his back. Finally, he gives John a big hug and smiles. John returns the smile.

John, surprised and confused, points into the distance. The zebra, followed by the striped lamb, can be seen walking away through the acacia.

Fired up again, Patrick gets his herding stick. In a spirit of camaraderie, he gestures John to come with him. John feels pumped too, glad to be wanted.

SCENE 8 - EXT. ACACIA STAND

The zebra stands motionless, ears back, looking away.

The striped lamb BLEATS longingly, but the zebra ignores it.

Patrick and John arrive. The zebra looks at them, barely interested. Patrick, filled with renewed anger and determination, picks up a rock. He bends down and smashes the rock on the end of his herding stick. A piece splinters off, giving the stick a sharp edge, like a spear. He raises it above his head.

The zebra doesn't move.

Patrick holds the spear higher. He mocks a charge, looking for the zebra to react.

Instead, the zebra buckles its knees and lies down in a relaxed fashion. Patrick, taken aback, and John, curious, stare at the zebra.

Fascinated, John walks forward slowly and take a seat a few feet from the zebra. He looks the zebra over.

Patrick hesitates a moment. Then, taking ginger steps, moves toward the zebra.

The zebra remains still. Head down, ears back, eyes closed. It looks sad.

As Patrick gets closer, he notices the zebra in detail. Spots where the fur is worn and its black skin is revealed. John points out ticks scattered across its belly. Nicks in its ears. Patrick focuses on several large scars going across the zebra's neck and shoulders. He winces.

Filled with compassion, Patrick imagines a scene:

EXT. GRASSY PLAIN - DUSK

The zebra running with a FOAL running alongside.

A LIONESS catches up to the foal, but the zebra gets between them. The zebra kicks its back legs and the lioness runs off. Triumphant, the zebra looks for the foal.

To the zebra's horror, the foal runs across the path of a huge maned LION slowly opening its gaping, toothy mouth.

The zebra watches, petrified. Suddenly, a lioness jumps on her back, latching onto her neck and shoulders. In slow motion, the zebra bucks and kicks like mad until finally the lioness flies off.

EXT. ACACIA STAND

Patrick, moved by the vision, sits down beside the zebra. He reaches out slowly and gently strokes the zebra's neck. Her short hairs spring back up as his fingers pass by. He pets over the scars. Where the skin has healed, the stripes don't line up.

John happily joins in. He strokes a bit too quickly at first, but then slows down to match Patrick. Patrick sees John enjoying himself. They exchange joyful glances.

The zebra returns to the moment and opens her eyes. The zebra looks intently at the boys and their wide smiles.

Feeling relieved that his ordeals are over, Patrick stands up. He offers his hand to John.

John takes Patrick's hand and Patrick helps him up. The zebra watches with great interest.

The boys walk away. John's lamb follows John. The striped lamb, after a moment's hesitation, runs after Patrick.

The zebra leans over, watching them go.

SCENE 9 - EXT. GRASSY PLAIN

Strolling side by side, Patrick and John chat animatedly. With a worried look, John points behind them.

With its head low and eyes fixed on the boys, the zebra walks carefully behind them. Once spotted, she tries to hide behind an acacia.

Patrick and John, not sure what to do, turn back forward.

RRUUMBBBLLLEEE.

The boys jump. Several meters away, an elephant crosses their path. The boys stand shoulder to shoulder, afraid to move.

Movement from behind them. The zebra trots confidently in front of the boys. Looking at Patrick, she offers her tail to him like an outstretched hand.

Patrick hesitates, but then reaches out and grabs the end of the tail.

The zebra trots forward suddenly, jolting Patrick after her. Patrick reaches out for John to pull him along too. The lambs follow after in a line. The boys cower close behind the zebra, nervous.

The zebra leads them past a grazing elephant family. An elephant calf runs under its mothers belly. Patrick and John exchange glances, checking on each other. They relax and straighten up as they walk.

The zebra lifts its lips and sniffs the air. She makes a sharp left turn, pulling along the boys.

They come to a waterhole. A large group of ORYX and GIRAFFE lean over and drink at the water's edge. Small, chubbier PLAINS ZEBRAS stand in the water, drinking. Patrick, laughing, points out what he sees to John. They are at ease, sharing a moment of wonderment.

John gasps and points to the opposite bank.

Patrick sees a single sheep walking toward the water. Then another. Then he sees all the rest of his flock at the water's edge, drinking.

Patrick raises his arms and jumps with excitement.

SCENE 10 - EXT. TARMAC ROAD - SUNSET

Patrick and John work together to finish leading the sheep across the road. John carries the striped lamb in his arms. Having crossed safely, the boys turn to look back across the road.

The zebra stands, tail swishing, looking back at the boys. The boys wave goodbye, then climb down off the road, out of sight. The zebra turns and disappears into acacia trees.

EXT. DIRT PATH THROUGH ACACIA TREES

John sees a fork in the dirt path. Content, he waves goodbye to Patrick. Not wanting him to go, Patrick waves back. He pets the striped lamb sitting in John's arms, saying goodbye to it too.

With the striped lamb in his arms and the other in tow, John strolls down the path. Patrick heads down the other path with the rest of his flock.

On a ridge high above the road, the homestead and the grassy plains, a group of zebras wait as one of their own catches up.