

THE PECULIAR TREE

CHILDREN'S STORIES FROM BOTSWANA



The Peculiar Tree:

Children's Stories from Botswana

THE PECULIAR TREE
Children's Stories from Botswana

Published in July 2024

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or any information storage or retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from the author.

© Copyright rests with the individual authors 2024

Editor: Zukiswa Wanner
Translator: Dr. Naledi Kgolo-Lotshwao
Illustrations by Onica Lekuntwane

Typesetting & Cover Design by Stoep Collective
Set in Adobe Garamond Pro 13pt

THE PECULiAR TREE

CHILDREN'S STORIES FROM BOTSWANA

Contents

Biggie and Pecky 9

Olga Wankie Tladi

The Peculiar Tree 12

Abigail Mwikisa

Daisy and the Fish Eagle 15

Goitseone Raphael

Tswee and the Porcupine 21

Wendy Joy Boucher

Boobaa Shines Her Light 27

Ms. Phontelle

Mama's Magic Afro 31

Omphile Sharon Monnana

Stars Draw Near 36

Dr. Lesedi Gaeemelwe

The Walls of Song & Fire 42

Neo B. Ntepa Kitso

Jojo and the River 47

Laone Chombo

My Goat Maghubukhwane 54

Caiphus Mmino Mangenela

Biggie and Pecky

OLGA WANKIE TLADI

One upon a time, in a far away forest of Kasane, there lived a kingdom of animals of the jungle, together with their king, the Great Lion. Amongst the animals, lived the clever and quiet Pecky, the woodpecker. Pecky, who was a very tiny bird, was always in her little corner by herself. She was a bird of little words as she was shy. When she spoke with her little squeaky voice, all the other animals of the kingdom would roar with laughter. This really made Pecky so unhappy, unwanted and all alone. She lost confidence in



herself with each passing day. Pecky felt like no one understood what she was going through enough to support her.

Among the animals of the jungle was also Biggie, the Elephant. Biggie with his enormous body, long trunk, large flappy ears and majestic walk, feared no-one in the jungle. Biggie always loudly asserted his presence. He believed he was the fairest of them all in the jungle. Whenever he trumpeted, others listened to him.

By the river as all the animals had taken their drink, Pecky's life was about to change. It was a quiet afternoon but the rustling of the tree branches and the sweet melody of birds soaring high in blue skies could be heard in the distance.

While many animals had retired from the river after the afternoon drink, Biggie continued swimming lazily in the cool river water. On nearby trees Pecky was, as usual, singing and pecking all alone. Scruffy the crocodile was also moving from the riverbank towards his favorite spot in the river. But he saw that Biggie had already taken his spot. A loud argument started when Biggie refused to move. A fight broke out between the two with each pouncing at the other at every opportunity they could get. As they tussled, Scruffy grabbed Biggie's tail with his long teeth and the elephant cried out in pain sending a thunder of noise across the forest. Scruffy let go of his grip on Biggie's tail.

Biggie groaned in pain pleading with anyone who could hear, "Help! Help me, somebody heeccccclpppp! This crocodile wants to kill me."

No one came to his rescue. Pecky, the woodpecker flew past the scene bursting in song. Biggie pleaded with him.

"Pleeease!"

With all the confidence in the world Pecky replied with his sweet, squeaky voice, "How can I possibly help the mighty Elephant?"

But Pecky perked up realizing that perhaps there was something she could get out of this, after all. She asked Biggie, "If I help you, what will you do for me in return?"

The elephant replied, "Anything you ask I will do."

Then Pecky replied with a sad voice, "I want you to protect me from all the other animals of the forest who are always laughing at me."

Since he was in pain, Biggie agreed to this without even blinking. Pecky delightedly flew down the river and started to help Biggie by pecking on the eyes of Scruffy until they oozed. Groaning in pain, Scruffy let go of his grip on the tail of Biggie.

In the days that followed Scruffy became sick as he could not find food on his own because he could not see anymore.

Biggie was relieved that he could now swim in the river whenever he wanted without worrying about Scruffy. He was proud of Pecky and could not thank her enough for saving his life.

"Thank you, my hero!" he kept on saying.

Pecky on the other hand, felt free and excited to have someone to call on for help. She told Biggie how little she always felt whenever the animals laughed at her. Biggie promised to

never allow anyone to make her feel like that again. Pecky and Biggie's friendship started from that day on. They lived happily and peacefully with each other in the forest of Kasane and are inseparable to date. Where there is an elephant, Pecky the woodpecker, can be seen in the back of Biggie the elephant pecking on the ticks on the back.



The Peculiar Tree

ABIGAIL MWIKISA



There was a woodland, where many trees of different shapes and sizes as far as the eye could see, grew.

Winter had just ended so the woodland was buzzing with excitement. Spring had sprung. Every tree's leaves were sprouting, buds were swelling and the trees and all the insects that lived in this wonderful wilderness, were buzzing with joy in anticipation of their favorite time: spring. The time when flowers begin to bloom.

The trees loved the beauty of the flowers and wore them with pride. More importantly they loved that flowers meant fruits and vegetables would sprout soon. The trees loved being able to feed the animals of the woodland.

It wasn't long before flowers began to bloom. Different colors, different shapes, different shades on all trees. Except one.

Although this tree was one of the biggest in the land, she had no flowers, very little leaves and had no buds at all. She was not like the others in any way. As a matter of fact, the few leaves she had were ugly, dull and, frumpy looking. As she was so big and tall, she could not hide this, and before long, all the other trees began to notice how different she was.

"What's wrong with you? I've never seen a tree with no flowers like you. Are you sick? Everyone has budded so beautifully but you, you look ugly," the mophane tree exclaimed.

"Don't talk to her. Your flowers might become like hers and fall off," said the river birch nearby as she chuckled with mophane tree and teased the strange tree.

"**B**zzz zzzz, I just saw that there are no other trees of your type here. Maybe you aren't supposed to be in this forest," said a bee as it buzzed past her on its way to enjoy nectar from a shrub nearby.

"What a shame none of the animals are even looking her way," the raisin bush gloated.

The savannah creatures and the trees laughed at the big grey tree as they frolicked together enjoying nectar and revelling in the new beauty that came with the season. The tree became a laughing stock.

The big tree became sad. Her few leaves began to droop. She felt like she wasn't good enough because she did not look like the others. She did not have nectar and no one wanted to be around her. She started to believe she really was not meant to be part of the woodland. She believed everyone was right and that somehow she got there by mistake. She accepted her lonely fate.

One day at dawn, the wilderness was awoken to a beautiful scent. A smell more beautiful than any nectar or flower they had ever smelt. As the creatures and trees became more alert, they couldn't help but stare at the big, grey tree.

Something had changed.

“What?” the big grey tree exclaimed, worried that once again, she would be the laughing stock of the land.

A bird perched on one of her branches “You. You look...”

Before she could finish, the big grey tree looked at her reflection in the lake and to her surprise, her flowers had bloomed and bore huge buds some of which had turned into magnificent large fruit. Suddenly loud thuds could be heard approaching. It was a large herd of elephants. The biggest animals in the wilderness had travelled from far called by the scent of the grey tree’s bloom “Finally Mowana fruits. Our favorite!” The elephants exclaimed with joy.

Baobab, for that that was this tree’s name, turned to the other trees and reminded them sadly, “You all ignored and laughed at me. You were mean to me.”

She continued, “I was ignored by insects and belittled for not feeding anyone only to feed the respected giants of the woodland,” she ended with a grin.

The elephants dropped some fruit as they ate and the other animals that couldn’t reach the fruit at the top of the tree or break the hard shells of the Mowana fruit began to gather them from the ground and feasted with great delight. It seemed the fruit of the Mowana tree was a delicacy, and they were waiting for help from the elephants to access them.

The matriarch of the herd sat beside the big grey tree and said to her “Oh darling, you bear our favorite fruit. You’re so special you take time to bloom. Everyone blooms differently. You just have to learn to be patient with yourself and believe in yourself.”



The trees that shunned the Baobab apologised to her. The creatures that walked past did the same as they enjoyed her fruit. Peace and harmony was restored in the woodland and the big grey tree finally realized she was exactly where she needed to be.



Daisy and the Fish Eagle

GOITSEONE RAPHAEL

Somewhere in Moremi Game Reserve, there was a beautiful large pond. It was surrounded by massive rocks, and tall reeds that swayed back and forth in the gentle breeze. There were water lilies and other aquatic plants. This pond was home to many fish. The fish considered this pond to be a very safe place as it was hidden by the long reeds. It protected them from being eaten by predators such as the fish eagles and it was safe from the boats of the fishermen.

One sunny day before sunset, the pond fish threw a party. They swam peacefully in the shallow water near the rocks. They played with each other and they were happy. The younger fish would bask for a little while on the rocks before diving back into the water for more oxygen. They played and partied happily because they knew it was the safest time for them to play with no fear. They believed that the flying predators would have gone to rest.

As the fish partied and played the music loudly, a fish eagle that had been looking for a late afternoon snack heard a massive noise coming from a patch of long reeds. The fish eagle flew over the reeds to see what all the noise was about. To his great surprise, there was a large pond with a lot of fish frolicking in the water.

What a lucky evening!

He had barely caught any fish during the day, and now here was a pond full of food. Carefully landing on the rock, he crouched behind the reeds to have a peep before making his move to catch a fish. He was fascinated by the carefree fish. Instead of immediately snatching one fish, he decided to watch as the fish partied.

As he watched, he got a little careless and moved forward. One of the fish saw him and yelled a warning to the other fish. In an instant, all that was left on the surface of the pond were ripples and bubbles as the fish dived deep to safety.

However, one fish remained on shore as it did not hear the warning signal because it was taking a nap while others partied. The fish eagle saw the lone fish and went to poke it and scare it a bit before eating it.

This fish turned around angrily, thinking it was the other fish teasing her. 'Quit it guys, I am trying to meditate,' she shouted. The fish eagle prodded again. The fish almost fainted when she came face to face with the fish eagle. She looked around to find that she was all alone.

'Did you eat everyone else?' she asked in a trembling voice.

'No! They ran away when they saw me,' the fish eagle replied.

'How come I am the only one left behind?' she asked.

The fish eagle shrugged. 'I don't know, maybe you didn't hear the warning.'

'Are you going to eat me?' she asked, as tears started pouring down her cheeks.

'Well, I was going to,' the fish eagle hesitated, seeing the tears, 'but today is your lucky day. You can go and join your family.'

'Really?' the fish asked, suspecting a trick.

The fish eagle nodded. 'Yes, you can. Go before I change my mind.'

The fish dived back in the water for more oxygen and then came back out.

'Why are you back?'

'I wanted to thank you,' she replied.

‘You are welcome.’

‘What’s your name?’ the fish asked.

‘I am Tony,’ the eagle answered.

‘I am Daisy. Can we be friends?’

Surprised, the eagle agreed.

‘Good. As my friend, you cannot eat me or my friends and family. You also cannot tell anyone about our pond. Promise?’

The fish eagle smiled. ‘I promise.’

Tony and Daisy then promised to keep their friendship a secret. Daisy knew if she told her family and friends, they would worry as the fish eagle was their natural enemy. On the other hand, Tony knew he could not tell the other eagles about the pond because it would put Daisy and the other fish in danger.

They made up a song that they would sing to each other every time Tony came to the pond. They also decided on the perfect time Tony could visit Daisy without others noticing.

Every day in the afternoon, Tony would sneak away to go see his best friend, Daisy. When he reached the Pond, he would hide behind the reeds and start singing:

Woo-woo-woo-woo-woo
Daisy, Daisy, you are my friend.
Daisy, Daisy, yes you are my best friend.
Come out and I’ll not eat you
Woo-woo-woo-Daisy, come out now

Then Daisy would come out singing:

Uh-uh-uh-uh-uh-uh
Tony, Tony, you are my friend
Tony, Tony, yes, you are my best friend
I trust you and I know you will never hurt me
Uh-uh-uh, I am coming out now.

They were always happy to see each other. Tony would tell Daisy about the beauty on earth and things he saw from high up in the sky. In turn, Daisy would tell Tony about underwater life and how fun it was to be a fish. They loved to talk about anything and everything in the few hours they spent together every day.

‘What’s your favorite food?’ Daisy asked Tony.

‘Mm, I love fish, but I also eat ducks, terrapins, baby crocodiles, small waterfowl and flamingos.’

‘How can I be your favorite dish?’ Daisy asked teasingly, as she dived back in the water for more oxygen and then came up again.

Tony laughed. 'Like I promised, I will never hurt you. We have been friends now for over a month. You should trust me.'

'I do trust you,' Daisy said with a genuine smile.

Some days, if they were not able to see each other, they would write each other letters. Daisy would use the water lilies to write her letters, while Tony wrote his on Mophane tree leaves. They had a special hiding place under one of the rocks.

As the days went by, Tony and Daisy grew closer and closer. They wanted to be a part of each other's lives. Daisy wished she could soar in the sky like Tony and see the interesting places he told her about, while Tony wanted to explore Daisy's underwater world. They also wanted their friendship to be open, to be able to visit each other freely. However, it seemed impossible to overcome their differences. One could not live in water and the other could not live out of water. And so, their friendship continued to be a secret.

One of Daisy's friends, Mary, had noticed that she often disappeared without explanation. So one day when she saw her sneaking off, she secretly followed her to the surface. She heard Daisy singing and she could not believe her eyes when Tony appeared among the reeds. She listened in on their conversation while remaining hidden. When she had heard enough, she silently dived back to report on what she had seen and heard. When Daisy arrived back home, the entire community had gathered, waiting for her. They demanded an explanation for her absurd behaviour. They wanted to understand why she risked the lives of other fish.

"Tony is not like the other fish eagles. He is friendly, kind, and very sweet," Daisy defended her friend with tears brimming in her eyes.

"You are a fool. He is going to come with all his friends to hunt us down," Daisy's father replied.

"He can't hurt us. We have been friends for months and he promised to protect us."

"Don't be ridiculous. He is an eagle and we are his food. He is waiting for you to trust him and then he will eat us all," her mother added.

"No, he will not. He is my best friend and I trust him with my life," Daisy sat down and cried.

The fish were outraged. They laughed at her stupidity and her parents grounded her. Everyone in the pond was warned not to swim up to the surface because it was dangerous.

For days, Daisy wept as she thought of Tony singing up on the surface and waiting in vain for her response. One day she was able to sneak out a letter to let him know that she had been grounded but that she would find a way for them to meet again.

Tony was very sad when he read the letter, but as promised, he came to the pond every day to check if Daisy had managed to sneak a letter out and he would leave letters for her.

One day there was a huge storm, and it violently shook the tree that Tony and his family slept in. Another tree fell on Tony's nest and he hurt his wing. He could not fly, and he had to stay in bed for days in order to heal. Tony was worried that he could no longer see Daisy. He wished that he could tell his family about Daisy, but he was afraid to put her life at risk.

One day, Tony's brother came to check on him, but found him resting. Then he saw

the letters from Daisy. When he read them, he could not stop laughing. Tony woke up, but before he could stop him, he had called others to read the letters with him and they laughed uncontrollably.

“How can you be friends with a fish? A fish! What kind of fish eagle are you? How can you play with such delicious food?”

“Why don’t you tell us where this pond is? We want to meet your fish friend,” they laughed hysterically.

“You can’t live in water, and she can’t live on land. You could at least have become friends with a frog as it can live on both land and water.”

The teasing went on and on. Some thought he might be waiting for Daisy and the other fish to fatten up so he could eat them.

As the days went by, Daisy became more and more depressed. Not only had Tony stopped coming to the pond, but he was not even leaving her any letters. She blamed her parents for separating her from her friend. Finally, she told them she wanted to leave the pond to go and look for Tony, because she knew something was wrong. Her family tried to warn her of the dangers, but she would not listen to them. She did not care what happened to her because she could not live without her best friend.

One day, Daisy snuck out of the pond. She hopped out of the water and leapt through the reeds. She leapt a short distance before she began gasping for air, but she stubbornly decided to keep going. A couple more leaps, and she realised she had made a big mistake. Looking back, she saw that the pond was now too far away for her to reach. She was too weak.

Back in the pond, Daisy’s parents saw that she was missing. They immediately suspected that she had gone to look for Tony as she had said she would. They and their friends swam quickly to the surface. As they looked through the reeds, they cried out as they saw her at a distance, flopping about on the ground. They knew she was dying. What could they do? They looked around for something to use to pull her back.

Suddenly, a large shadow passed over their heads. Daisy’s mother screamed in terror as a large fish eagle swooped down at great speed and grabbed her daughter in its talons. Her worst nightmare was coming true! But the fish eagle flew low over the pond and dropped Daisy into the water. It was Tony!

He landed on the rock, while Daisy’s parents and friends swam quickly to her to make sure she was all right. It took some time for her to catch her breath, but finally they saw that she would be okay. Daisy rushed over to Tony, and they hugged joyously. She then introduced him to the pond fish. Daisy’s parents could not stop thanking Tony for saving their daughter. They were embarrassed that they had judged him as a bad eagle before getting to know him. From then on, Tony could visit the pond at any time. He was even invited to the parties. He never told the other fish eagles about the pond.

As time went by the fish were able to invent a small fish bowl that enabled Daisy to be carried by Tony while he flew around so that she could view the beauty of the world from high up in the sky, and they invented a diving suit for Tony so that he could experience the

underwater world. Tony and Daisy are still best friends today. If you look at the reeds by a river near you, you may even see them sharing stories and laughing together.



Tswee and the Porcupine

WENDY JOY BOUCHER

Tswee was a seven-year-old boy who lived with his grandfather at a cattle post near the village of Phuduhudu. His mother worked in the city at a big shop that sold the most delicious ice creams and sweets. When she came home to visit him, she would always bring him a selection of brightly colored toffees.

Tswee's day started with him following his grandfather down to the river to get water. He carried a small bucket while his grandfather would bring along two big plastic containers. Once at the river, he had to be careful not to stir up the mud and scoop clean water into his bucket. His grandfather would roll up his trousers and wade into the river, keeping a sharp eye out for the sly crocodile or a hippopotamus that could run faster than a donkey cart.

There, grandfather dipped the plastic containers under the water, filling them up to the brim. Once the containers and Tswee's bucket was filled with water, the two would trudge up the riverbank with their heavy loads and struggle back to their home.

Once water duty was done, Tswee's job was to sweep the yard as clean, as clean as could be. Not a stick out of place. Tswee took pride in his work and always made sure that the yard was tidy. After sweeping, he would gather firewood to add to the pile of wood that they kept in a corner of the house. Only after all the duties were finished to his grandfather's liking, was he then allowed to play with his wire truck. This wire truck was a special toy that his grandfather had made for him, and he loved it dearly.

Once a week, he had to go with his grandfather to help him round up the cattle. This was an important task and he enjoyed helping with such a grownup job.

And this is how his adventure began.

One morning once their duties had been completed, they left the yard. "Come on, Tswee," his grandfather called "don't fall behind or you will get lost." Tswee did not want to get lost, and he ran quickly to keep up with his grandfather.

They had not gone far down the beaten track when he saw a tortoise. It was a Kalahari Tent tortoise, with the most beautiful star designs on its shell and sharp pointed edges. He sat down on the narrow path and watched the tortoise amble and stumble and enter the grassy plain. Tswee followed it. So interested in watching its journey was he that before long, he had wandered far from the path and his grandfather. The tortoise eventually stopped its walk and pulled its head into its glorious shell to take a nap.

Tswee looked up and realised that he couldn't see his grandfather.

"Ntatemogolo? Ntatemogolo!" he shouted into the wind, but his little voice was carried away over the Kalahari plains, like a leaf blowing in the breeze. Tswee started to run, his bare feet stumbling over clumps of grass and at times falling into a hole made by an elephant. "Ntatemogolo! Ntatemogolo, where are you?" Tswee shouted but there was no answer. Poor Tswee realised that he had wandered far from his grandfather. He thought and thought, that maybe he had better try and find the path again, and then he would find his grandfather. So Tswee tried to walk back the way he thought he had come but it was no use, he could not see his grandfather.

He started to cry big sobs, shouting for his grandfather until his throat was sore and dry. He found a bush with little brown, wrinkled berries and he picked a few to suck. They were sweet and they reminded him of the toffees that his mother would bring him each time she came home.

The sun had grown high in the sky, beating down on Tswee with hot rays. He decided to sit under a Motopi tree while wondering what he would do. He longed to sip on some of his grandfather's milky tea because his throat was so sore, from shouting. Tswee cried, and big tears ran down his dusty cheeks. He cried and cried for his Mama and grandfather, but they did not come. Eventually, Tswee crawled into a ball and fell asleep. As Tswee slept, the sun started to sink into the sky and a cool breeze started to blow the grains of sand around the

Kalahari.

Tswee woke up frightened. Where was he? Where was his grandfather? He wanted to go home. He was cold and he was scared. The little boy pulled his t-shirt tight around his skinny body and started to look around. He soon found a wide elephant path, he followed it and then realised it was taking him to the river. He could smell the water, and he started to run, eager to wet his throat and sip the cool liquid.

As he got closer to the riverbank, he slowed his steps, remembering his grandfather's words to always be careful near the water – it was the home of the creepy crocodile and the hungry hippo. He walked closer to the bank, knelt, and cupped the water in his hands. It felt cool and he brought his hands to his lips, he sipped and sipped. It felt so good to have some cool liquid running down his throat into his belly. He drank and drank and then went up the bank, where he found a jackal berry tree.

He climbed into the wide branches and looked over the brown riverbank where many zebras were coming down to the river to drink. He watched the pretty striped mammals running here and there, making their high neighing sounds. Entwined in between them galloped bushy-tailed wildebeests and occasionally he saw a shy kudu twitching its ears. In the distance, he saw the tall giraffes and monstrous elephants flapping their map-like ears to keep themselves cool.

Tswee curled himself around the branches of the big tree and imagined his Mama's arms around him. Soon his breathing stilled, and he was fast asleep, dreaming of racing his wire car around his grandfather's yard.

Tswee woke in the night, the bright moon shining high above him. In the moonlight, he could see the shapes of animals still coming down to drink at the river. But everything was still and quiet. Occasionally he heard the laugh of the hyena in the distance. He wanted to climb down the tree but he was too scared to. He knew that the hyena was a curious creature and if it saw him, he would be in danger. But, he also didn't want to spend the whole night up the tree, it was beginning to become quite uncomfortable.

He decided to slither down. When he was on the ground, he crouched trying to think about which way to go. He looked at the water. The flowing river was going in a certain direction and he knew if he followed the river, he would find people along it. But it was night, and the villagers would all be in their homes.

His grandfather would be looking for him, of this, he was sure. Grandfather would never leave him alone in the bush for a whole night. But what Tswee did not know was that the afternoon wind had wiped away all his tracks, and the group of people searching for him was not looking near the river, but in the direction of the big sandy desert.

Tswee decided to follow the river, not too close to the bank in case a hungry crocodile was lying about. He walked, picking his way carefully in the moonlight when suddenly he saw something snuffling and grumbling along the ground ahead of him. He froze and tried to make himself disappear against the trunk of a tree that was close to him. The shape came closer and closer, and just as it reached Tswee, it picked up his scent and became still. Tswee and the shape looked at each other, trying to decide who was the most dangerous.

Then Tswée realised what the shape was. It was a prickly porcupine looking for some juicy roots to dig up. Tswée sat down against the trunk and the porcupine crept up to him, not too sure what he was but as the porcupine had never seen a human before, he had no fear of him. He sniffed Tswée and wrinkled his snout. This didn't seem like something he could eat or would even try. Tswée did not move, he allowed the porcupine to smell him. He sensed that the prickly creature would not hurt him, and he gently put out his hand and felt the smooth quills lying on his back. He felt the quills shiver under his touch, but the porcupine did not put them up in defense and Tswée felt comforted by the presence of the animal.

The porcupine shuffled next to Tswée, realising that this small person needed to be comforted and protected. The little boy breathed in the musky smell of the animal and knew that this creature would help him get out of the trouble he was in. The porcupine snuffled around and then started to move back in the direction it had come from, Tswée followed, not wanting to be left alone. The porcupine walked along slowly, stopping ever so often to dig for a root or have a nibble on a branch. It got very excited when it came upon a wild melon and bit into it. Tswée watched the little animal chew away at the skin and then sucked the moisture from the juicy soft parts inside of it. He decided to also try some of the fruit and made a sour face when the taste turned out to be quite sharp.

The prickly creature would turn around often and stare at Tswée as if to make sure that the little boy was still following him. Tswée kept up with him, not wanting to be alone. Suddenly the porcupine became as still as a statue, Tswée stopped behind him. There on the path in front of them was a fierce-looking hyena. The porcupine's quills shot up in the air, shaking ferociously as the hyena confronted them. Tswée realized that the hyena was intimidated by the height of the porcupine quills, and he tried to make himself as tall as possible, waving his skinny arms in the air, shouting in a loud voice 'Go Away! Go Away!' When Tswée did this the hyena got a big fright and jumped off the path, rushing into the bushes. The porcupine slowly lowered his quills and they both continued their way.

The sky started to get light; dawn was coming. Tswée was feeling tired, wanting to sleep after the long walk and the scary hyena experience. The porcupine plodded around a bush and there on the side of an anthill, was his burrow. The animal went in backward and seem to encourage Tswée to follow. Tswée crept in on his hands and knees, it smelt a bit funny but wasn't unpleasant and soon he reached a bigger area under the ground. There the porcupine curled up and went to sleep. Tswée settled as close as he could and closed his eyes. Soon the little boy was fast asleep, dreaming that he was home helping his grandfather with the chores.

Tswée awoke, rubbing his eyes and as he sat up, he bumped his head on the burrow's roof. Next to him, the porcupine snored grumbling a little in its sleep. Tswée lay down again, but did not close his eyes, he got used to the dim light and was aware of where he was. The porcupine's home was littered with old pieces of wild melon, tufts of grass, and knobby roots. He smiled thinking that the prickly animal was just like him, collecting things and keeping them in his home. After some hours, the porcupine stirred and sniffed at Tswée, and encouraged him to climb out of the burrow. When Tswée came out of the hole and stretched

his body he realised that the day had gone, and the evening had begun. He was concerned, he had been away from home for over a day. His grandfather must be worried not knowing what had happened to him.

The big round moon was peeping over the horizon, ready to start its journey into the sky.

The porcupine nudged Tswee, nearly pushing him over, and made him turn onto an elephant path, wandering away from the river. Tswee felt scared, he didn't want to leave the river, he knew that the river would lead him to people. But the porcupine was insistent and kept pushing him with its nose until Tswee had walked along the path for some metres. The porcupine led the way, picking the twists and turns of the narrow track with the knowledge of knowing where to go. Tswee followed, a little unsure, but decided that the little prickly creature, whom he had grown fond of in the short time, would do him no harm. It seemed like they had walked for hours, the moon shining down upon them from the starry sky. Occasionally they would hear the laugh of the hyena and an owl sweeping overhead. Eventually, the porcupine stopped and allowed Tswee to rest. Tswee sat against the trunk of a tree, tired and wanting his grandfather, a tear ran down his cheek and this was followed by more and more tears until he was sobbing loudly. The porcupine shuffled up to him and pushed his nose into Tswee's shoulder, as if to say, 'it's all right little one, I will protect you.' Tswee stroked the porcupine's quills which quivered under his hand. His sobs quietened and he felt better, for letting his sadness out. The night had grown cold, and he pulled his t-shirt closer to his body, wishing that he had a blanket to keep him warm.

He was thirsty and the hunger pains were making his tummy ache.

The porcupine disappeared off the path for a few moments, coming back a few moments later holding a wild melon, in its mouth. Tswee took the melon biting into its sour flesh but enjoying the liquid as it filled his stomach. Once their meal was finished, they started the journey again. Tswee and the porcupine walked and walked, further and further from the river, deeper and deeper into the grasslands.

As the sun started to rise, Tswee and the porcupine came upon a fence surrounding a maize field. Tswee's heart quickened. He knew this maize field. It was the field at the back of his grandfather's house. He started to run, shouting out for his grandfather, and then remembered the little prickly friend that had brought him home. He ran back and put his arms around the animal, whispering into his ear, thanking him for bringing him home safe. The porcupine sank his head into the little boy's shoulder. Then Tswee jumped up and ran quickly towards the yard. "Ntatemogolo! Ntatemogolo!" he shouted.

Reaching the gate, he saw a big fire burning in the yard with several chairs around it and people lying on their blankets waiting for the sun to be up before they started to search again for the lost child.

"Ntatemogolo! Ntatemogolo! I am home!" The old man came out of the hut and all the people sat up astonished to see this little figure running into the yard straight into the arms of his grandfather. His grandfather held him tight for the longest time and then gave him a big mug of sweet milky tea. Tswee enjoyed every sip and accepted a dish of creamy porridge.

It was delicious. Once Tswee's hunger had been filled, the people gathered around him asking questions and wanting to know how he found his way home. Tswee sat on his grandfather's lap near the fire and told the villagers his story of how he met the porcupine and his journey home. The people were amazed to hear his tale and were so happy that he was safe.

Once all the people had left, Tswee's grandfather told him to always stay close to him in the bush so that he would not get lost again. Tswee promised to do that. This big adventure had scared him. Then he saw a familiar figure walking into the yard, it was his Mama. He ran to her, and she picked him up, holding him tight. When she heard that he was missing, she got onto the big bus and came home immediately. What a relief to see him unharmed.

In her handbag, she had a big packet of toffees for Tswee and something sweet for his nntatemogolo too. Mother stayed a couple of days with them before going back to the city but promised Tswee that after his next birthday, he would go to visit her.

From that day, after his adventure, Tswee and his grandfather would put an extra bowl of porridge out each evening near the maize field fence. It was a thank you for the porcupine for taking loving care of the little boy.

Every day when Tswee collected the empty porridge bowl to be filled with porridge again, he saw the little foot tracks of the porcupine and occasionally he would find a wild melon with teeth marks on it, as a gift from the porcupine to him. It made him smile and he was so thankful for the world he lived in, the experiences it offered him and for all the adventures waiting for him to take.



Boobaa Shines Her Light

MS. PHONTELLE

It was *Shine Your Light* concert day and all the animals were gathering by the Chief's Court. Just a few animals from Werda had signed up and BooBaa the Lamb was one of them. Because of the concert excitement, the Kgalagadi winter breeze didn't bother them at all. Boobaa was very excited and couldn't wait to be on stage. The host of the talent show, Farmer Molemi took a last glance at the sundown view and walked towards the morula tree to send the contestants backstage for last minute performance practice. Lobu the Chameleon, Cheche the Gecko, Woody the Beaver and Peakay the Peacock all eagerly ran to the back.

Lobu brought a multi coloured ramp for his dress rehearsal, he changed colour as he danced up and down. When he moved to the red portion of the ramp, he turned red and then changed when he stepped on a different colour.

"Wow!" the other contestants expressed in admiration laced with a twinge of envy.

"Quite now!" Peakay shrieked jealously. He was arrogant because he had won many times before. "My turn," he ordered. He swiftly moved to the centre of the backstage and spread his multi-eyed feathers into a semi-circle; it was quite magnificent and the animals were delighted, and cheered him.

Immediately Boobaa ran out in tears, banged the courtyard wall and cried, "They will say my talent is boring, no one will say wow after I am done."

Farmer Molemi was around the corner and he heard the cry. He came closer and knelt down before BooBaa and quietly said, "No talent is boring Boo – trust me."

"Yes, but others..."

"Forget about others and their talents, okay? Enjoy yours. Your talent is your present." Molemi calmly said.

"Ok, I will try," BooBaa replied with a forced smile.

BooBaa watched the farmer quiver in the cold, in his short-sleeved shirt, and that gave her a light bulb moment. Moments after dusk set in, the street lights flickered.

Farmer Molemi then stood up, beamed and whispered, "Its show time." He walked onto the stage as the curtains opened. Stage lights beamed on him.

"Welcome, welcome everyone to theeeeeeee ...drum rolls... *Shine Your Light* concert!!!"

"Yeaahhhhhhhh!" the crowds screamed.

"Let the show begin," Farmer Molemi spoke loudly.

He called the animals one by one to perform. First was Cheche who started strolling up the wall and dancing on the ceiling – the crowds went wild.

Then Woody brought a willow bark of the tree and started chewing the wood very fast until it was all finished and everyone clapped. Next came Peakay followed by Lobu. The crowds seemed unable to hold their excitement inside with each new act. On and on the animals performed.

"Legofi, legofi!" Farmer Molefi exclaimed urging the crowds to applaud. Many animals performed well and finally it was Boobaa's turn. Her palms were sweaty, her heart raced and

as she waited to go on stage she tried to get confidence by chanting, “My talent is my present, my talent is my present, my talent is my present.”

“And the last performance of the *Shine Your Light* concert is.... BooBaa,” bellowed Farmer Molemi. His hands were now frozen so he clapped and quickly rubbed his hands together to create warmth. Indeed, the Kgalagadi weather was the hottest in summer and the coldest in winter.

The crowd’s applause was less enthusiastic than before and that made Boobaa more uneasy. BooBaa sheepishly stumbled onto the stage, on her roller skates with a rucksack and giggled at herself in embarrassment. The crowd remained quiet. She gave the crowd her back as she opened her rucksack and reached for her razor and cut down the fluff on her neck and then dropped the blade.

She silently held onto the mantra “My talent is my present, my talent is my present,” and that eased her nerves. She swirled to the left and right as she began to gracefully skate center stage and started using her knitting needles on the cut wool, round and round she twirled. The wool on her body started unrolling with every stitch. She twirled around a dozen times as she knitted and then turned to the crowd in a smirk as she glided to Farmer Molemi. She took a bow and placed one glove she just weaved into his icy hands. Farmer Molemi’s smile warmed up the entire stage and his eyes teary in appreciation.

“Wooooooooooooow!” The crowd responded in amazement, and now Boobaa started coiling like an ice-skater, as she circled gracefully while knitting. She turned again and again and later faced Farmer Molemi and handed him the other glove she just knitted and then in a mousy voice whispered, “My talent keeps you warm.” and she bowed down again. Farmer Molemi beamed and nodded in thanks and he immediately slipped them onto his fingers.

The crowd gave a standing ovation and roared and chanted “BooBaa, BooBaa, BooBaa, BooBaa!!”

Farmer Molemi was not feeling cold anymore, thanks to his new present. He asked the crowd who the winner was, and still they chanted, “BooBaa, BooBaa, BooBaa, BooBaa!!”

BooBaa joined the other contestants at the back and didn’t care if she won. She was happy her talent did some good and she was happy with her performance. After a short while Farmer Molemi called all the animals to the stage to finish the show. They all lined up next to each other facing the audience.

And the winner is BooBaa!!” shouted Farmer Molemi. He ran to her and they hugged. Even the other animals that signed up clapped for her and were amazed. She celebrated the win by loudly singing, “My talent is my present, my talent is my present and my talent is my present.”

The animals all came to hug Boobaa except Peaky who was still in shock that he didn’t win. But Boobaa hugged him anyway to share her love and off course he couldn’t resist but blush

and hugged her back.

Farmer Molemi waved to the crowd and said “Ladies and gentlemen, that is how the animals shone their light tonight. Goodnight!”

Boobaa was very proud and very pleased with herself for allowing Farmer Molemi ‘s words to inspire her to enjoy her talent.





Mama's Magic Afro

OMPHILE SHARON MONNANA

CRACK!

Mama's favourite cup broke into six pieces. They were all different sizes. My legs ran as fast they could to the front door, I was checking to see if Mama had heard the sound.

No.

She was singing along to a song on YouTube while hanging laundry. Rushing back to the kitchen I picked up the pieces and carefully wrapped them in a newspaper and threw them into the dustbin.

It was an accident, I was trying to pack away the dishes so Mama would have less work to do and she would be happy. Now her favourite cup was broken and she would be angry.

Her words came rushing to me like a new memory. She had said, "Aasa, during the course of your life do not tell any lies. God wants us to tell the truth, and I hope you understand that the truth will always set you free. In any case, I will know if you ever tell me a lie."

"How will you know?" I had asked.

Mama just smiled and told me that being honest was the best thing I could do for myself and others. She had added, "If you can tell lies then you can steal too. I do not want that for you. You are such a good girl."

I knew that I didn't want to be like Moagi, a boy in my class. He had stolen my pencil case and lied to the teacher. So I just smiled at Mama. Telling lies scared me.

What would I do? Mama would come inside soon; and when she came into the house, she would put the kettle on to make a cup of coffee. But she would not be able to find her cup.

I couldn't swallow my saliva as I tried to gather courage to go outside. My feet were heavy but I forced myself out of the door and went outside.

We lived in the middle of Palapye in a small cottage. And we did not have a lot of space in the house but my dad would say that we did not need a lot of space as long as we had each other and a whole lot of love.

Palapye is a cross between a village and a town, not really a town and not really a village. It is somewhere in between due to all the malls and some important Government offices. But the people are simple, live modestly, and it is a place where there is no rush. Mama was always happy that we did not have the traffic that Gaborone has because it takes us ten minutes or less to get anywhere we want to within Palapye. I never lived in the city so I did not know any better. All I knew is that I loved living in Palapye.

The sun was shining brightly and it was so hot outside. The trees were starting to get colour now, and everything was greener. The strawberries were flowering and that made Mama and me very happy.

"Oh hey Aasa. I did not see you baby. Do you want to help me?" Her voice was so cheerful and it made me feel guiltier.

All I could do was stare at her, trying to work my mouth to answer but my tongue felt dry. I wanted to tell her but it was hard.

"Aasa? Are you okay?"

"Yes Mama." I worked my hands and feet and started to help her. It was then that I made

my decision.

I looked at her as the sun shone on her. Mama was beautiful. Today her big afro was in a bun. She did not like hair to get in her face when she was working. Spotting her in a crowd was never hard, and she had said spotting me was easy too. I too had hair like hers and she told me that I was the prettiest girl in the world every day. I loved our hair.

As soon as we walked back inside the house, Mama put the laundry away and switched the kettle on.

"Are you having coffee?" The voice was mine but it did not sound like mine. It was loud and squeaky like that of a mouse.

"Yes, it's always a good time to have..." She paused.

"Coffee!" I finished, it was half-hearted. Our own inside joke.

The cabinet opened, the cups rattled.

I wanted the earth to open up to swallow me. But the ground remained closed. No matter what I tried, I could not become invisible.

"Aasa, have you seen my cup?"

It was time. I looked around so I did not have to look at her.

"Nnyaa mma." My saliva was a lot as I swallowed. Then I looked at my feet.

There was more rattling in the kitchen.

"Are you sure? Tell me the truth baby."

"I said no. Why do you keep asking me?" Then I stormed off outside.

Do liars have a right to be angry? I had lied but I was not happy. I was sad and upset. But mostly I was ashamed. Throwing rocks did not help today.

Mama walked outside, I looked at her hands and my hands covered my mouth. Anger and shame turned to shock.

How did she find it? My neck felt sweaty and I rubbed my hands together.

"Aasa Marakanelo! Do you have anything to say to me?"

Tears would not work this time. I was a big girl. Should I beg for forgiveness? Yes, that would be better. After all I was in the wrong.

Still looking down I said, "Mama I am sorry..."

"What did we teach you about confidence?"

"That I must look people in the eyes and stand up for the truth."

"Then what are you doing now?"

I looked up at her. Mama's face was sad and her hair looked droopy, it was strange.

"Mama what's wrong with your hair?"

"Aasa, you did not answer my question. I want the truth from you."

"I was packing away the dishes and then I accidentally broke your cup when you were hanging the clothes. I wanted to tell you when I came outside but I did not want you to be sad. It's your favourite cup so I was scared."

"Scared of what?"

"That you would be disappointed and angry with me."

“But it was an accident baby, I could have been annoyed about it, but now I am angry that you lied. Mostly I am sad that you did not tell me the truth.”

“I am sorry Mama. I am really sorry. I will empty my piggy bank and buy you a new cup.”

“I forgive you baby. And, you do not need to empty your bank. It is okay if it’s an accident Aasa, I have accidents too. All we have to do is clean them up. Let’s do it together.”

“Okay Mama.”

We wrapped the glass with other pieces of newspaper, put it in a plastic bag and tied it. Then I threw it into the dustbin.

“Aasa, please promise me that you won’t tell a lie again.”

“I promise Mama. Will I be punished?”

“Yes. Do you understand why?”

“Ee mma. It’s because I told a lie. And a telling a lie is a bad thing to do.”

“Yes, you are right. That means no screen time today.”

I began to cry because Saturday was the day I had a lot of screen time. It was the day I watched my cartoons. Mama came to me and hugged me tight.

“You can watch them another time. Now run off and play.”

“Can you swing with me?”

“Of course baby. Let’s go.”

Later in the house, I was really curious.

“Mama how did you know I told a lie?”

Mama winked at me and said, “It is a secret.” Then put her finger on her lips.

I started giving her a back massage and kissed her cheeks.

“Ahh Mama, please tell me.”

She smiled, “my afro told me.”

“Mma?”

“My hair told me that you were lying.”

With this, I roared with laughter. “Mama are you okay? You know hair cannot talk.”

“Of course hair cannot talk silly.” She laughed loudly. “I did not say my hair talked.”

“Oh. Then how did it tell you?”

“My Afro is magic. It will always tell me when you are lying.”

I touched her hair, and then touched mine. “But our hair is the same, mine does not see lies.”

“My afro does not see lies baby. It senses lies. Remember when you said my Afro was drooping?”

“Yes. But I still do not understand.”

“My Afro becomes droopy when you lie. You told me your first lie since you understood good and bad. So that is why my hair was droopy. It sensed your lie.”

I gawked at her but all I could say was, “Cool! So you will know if I lie?”

“Yes, I will know all the time. So no more lies from now on, okay?”

I thought about it. “Okay Mama. I already promised.”

“Yes you did. Now come here.”

Mama gave me a big hug. She gives the best hugs. I hugged Mama back and she lifted me up.

Then I whispered in her ear, “will I also be able to tell if people are lying too one day?”

“Maybe, Aasa. Just maybe.”



Stars Draw Near

DR. LESEDI GAEEMELWE

Pono is a cheerful little girl who loves taking evening walks with her grandfather at the farm. Most nights they enjoy a magical view of the stars in the sky. Some twinkle, others shine steadily bright and once in a while they get to see some shooting all so amazingly. Grandfather tells Pono that the stars are huge but only appear tiny because we see them from afar. Pono is eager to learn more about the stars and even come closer to them.

Grandfather believes Pono can come closer to the stars. He tells her that it will not be easy. Pono is anxious to know how she will ever go near the stars. Grandfather however, has a plan. He promises to take Pono to visit the planetarium in exchange for her carrying out only three farming tasks. Pono is so excited about getting to explore stars at the planetarium that she is eager to get all her farm tasks done.

The first task is to help prepare milk for their kitchen's daily use. Pono is not very keen on this task because she has to wake up very early to go and milk the cows. It is all dirty and slippery as she tries to milk one of the cows. She finally gets one cup full but the calf accidentally trips on it and she has to milk the cow again. When she gets to the kitchen, she cannot use the milk as is but must boil it first before it can be used for breakfast. She boils the milk but almost all of the milk spills over while boiling. Pono is discouraged but manages to go back to the kraal to milk another cow and comes back to the kitchen. This time she is careful and removes the milk from the fire just before it spills over while boiling. At last, Pono has achieved her first cup of milk, ready for breakfast.

Throughout the day, Pono reflects on how much work goes into making her regular glass of milk. She now appreciates the efforts of her elder siblings who prepare almost every meal for her.

In their late evening walk, Grandfather asks Pono if she feels nearer to her milk now that she helped to prepare it. Pono proudly nods with a sense of fulfilment. Grandfather laughs and says, "the stars now draw near."

Grandfather will now give Pono her next task. She must now prepare the tomato puree that she likes to season her food with. Pono is quite concerned because there are no tomatoes yet in the field. Grandfather gives her a packet of tomato seeds and leaves her to it. Pono is shocked because she will have to plant the tomato plants and wait for them to make fruit. She is now ready to give up. Grandfather encourages her to start as early as possible if she desires to get that puree any sooner.

Pono now cultivates the field and spends a week digging and fertilizing the soil. She waters it and receives a lot of help from grandfather who has been growing all types of crops for many years. Pono is tempted to give up many times just wondering if she can really wait that long to eventually harvest tomatoes. She is also worried about accidents that might cause her to start afresh. She remembers the calf that had spilt her milk when she was still doing her first task. She is sure she would die if she had to start planting again if there was a sudden outbreak of bugs devouring her tomatoes just before harvest. She starts to panic and wants grandfather to ensure no pests will disrupt her tomato growing mission.

Pono's imagination is taking her through the motions. As they plant the tomato seeds, she starts to think about a mysterious bird that will suddenly show up in the night and start digging out the seeds to feed on them. Grandfather cannot stop laughing listening to Pono's wild thoughts.

"You need to cool down Pono," Grandfather says as he cracks into louder laughter.

It has been a week now since the tomato seeds were planted and Grandfather calls out to Pono to come and see the tomato plants sprouting. This feels great for Pono. It gives her hope and she believes one day soon she will make her tomato puree. Pono is faithful to watering her tomato plants and soon they begin to flower. She realizes her patience has grown and is no longer intimidated by the time left for her to finish this task.

Two months later, the flowers begin to show tiny tomatoes. This is extremely exciting for Pono and grandfather is proud of her progress so far. Pono now perceives herself as a motivational speaker. She thinks out loud and tells grandfather about how she would love to motivate prisoners awaiting their prison release. Grandfather is entertained by Pono's daydreaming and as usual, laughter is his predictable response.

It has been almost three months now and the tomatoes are certainly ready for harvest. They are bright red and shiny. Grandfather and Pono will be harvesting the tomatoes early in the morning. Pono goes to bed excited to finally commence making her tomato puree after harvest.

At night Pono dreams about the harvest and in the dream, she gets up early to harvest her tomatoes but to her utmost shock, she sees several boys running off the ranch carrying sacks on their backs. She screams out for help but her voice is muted. She hurries to the tomato field to find all the tomatoes gone. She manoeuvres through the plants hoping the thieves left just one tomato to make a little puree but all tomatoes are gone. Pono is still trying to call out to grandfather or anyone but it is as though her mouth has been muffled. She rushes to get her cellphone to call the police but the phone buttons will not press up any number. She then sets to hit the road to go to the police station. On her way there she can see the stars as they usually are when she is gazing with grandfather but it is daylight. The stars are talking to each other and it seems they are talking about her. One star tells the other about how she is eager to make tomato puree yet it is not about the puree.

Suddenly, a tomato shows up in between the stars and argues that Pono is purely interested in the puree but the stars laugh at the tomato pointing it out that the tomato is

just a stepping stone to the stars. The tomato storms off heartbroken and bumps into Pono while at it. Pono tries to explain herself but her voice still will not project. All she can see is a heart broken tomato that has just learnt that its loving caretaker was just doing it to gain something else. The tomato stands still in front of Pono and smoothly sings a sad song;

*What is love, what is love,
Oh, I thought my Pono loves
What is love, what is love,
She watered me for her own love
She nutured me for her own star
A star is all she thinks about
And when she's done, I will be just a memory
Like that cup of milk
All I will be is a mere lesson
Oh, what is love, what is love*

Pono is filled with guilt and compassion, but more than that she feels defeated. She is angry at the stars but the stars seem not to care. They behave like invincible bosses up in the sky, boastful and rude. Pono questions her desire for the stars. She ponders on what the stars have done for her. Her milk has fed her and nourished her body. Her tomato puree has seasoned her food so deliciously. That too is as good as the feeling she gets when taking her lovely walks with grandfather while stargazing. She feels she has wasted a lot of time not appreciating every other important aspect of her life as much as she did the stars.

Abruptly she arrives at the police station and states her case. The police set out to search for the tomato thieves and luckily, they find them. Pono is so relieved, but not for long. As the police try to take back all the tomatoes from the thieves, the tomatoes refuse to be taken back. The tomatoes would rather stay with the thieves because the thieves love the tomatoes purely for them being tomatoes, not as a task to gain the stars. The tomatoes start to dance and sing as thus;

Leave us alone
We found our lovers
Let us go
They are our new found masters
To them we are the stars
We're their red gods of mars
So, leave us alone
Go help your Pono get her obnoxious stars

Pono wakes up and rushes to grandfather crying. After hearing about this dream grandfather is baffled and clueless as what he will say to comfort Pono and bring some sort of resolution.

All he can do is hug her and tell her that everything will be fine but he feels like he is just lying to her.

Nevertheless, the tomatoes are ready for harvest and harvesting is what will happen today. So Pono and grandfather go on to happily harvest the tomatoes. They divide them into those for sale and those for domestic use. Pono finally gets a tomato to make her tomato puree.

As Pono downloads various tomato puree recipes from the internet, she remembers the songs from her dream sung by the tomatoes. She knows she is missing something on her road to the stars. She must find out what she is missing.

Grandfather on the other hand is also nervous about Pono's state after her dream. He thinks deeply about it because he knows Pono will be searching for answers very soon. Later in the evening during their regular stargazing walk, grandfather decides to recite a poem for Pono in the hope that it will help her to better decode her dream and give her peace of mind. He hums as he begins to recite;

*My journey is real
My labour is still
For when my aim
is not yet gained
the process between
I call my sweet
My aspirations aren't all of me
My efforts too are dear to me
Today I have my darling Pono
Before her also cherished
Wedding her grandmother
And birthing her father
Which one is my prize
Surely all are

Because all are a collective
Of a treasure so true
It cannot be decoded*

In tears of appreciation, Pono hugs and kisses grandfather and is able to understand the lesson from her dream. She is able to grasp that as much as the end of a thing is greater it does not mean the beginning or path to it is inferior but very much determinant of the very end. Now Pono's goal to reach the stars is without blame. Her intentions are now more solid. Her convictions are valid.

As usual Pono starts being silly and says she wants to go back into her dream to talk to the tomatoes. She asks grandfather if she can go back into her dream to sort out the issue with the

tomatoes and grandfather laughs out loud.

The following afternoon Pono's tomato puree is ready for lunch time seasoning. And it is now time for Pono to carry out her last farming task. Anxious to hear about the task, Pono sits beside grandfather expecting another challenging task. Grandfather laughs and says, "your third and final task is to take a picture with me in the middle of the farm in our farm clothes."

"Is that all?" Pono asks, and grandfather nods with a warm smile.

They put on their beige farmwear and head to the middle of the farm for a humorous photoshoot.

The next weekend, Pono has an enchanting time at the planetarium learning about stars and decides during that experience to be an astronaut. Many years later she lives with the stars and does not despise all the other components of her journey to being an astronaut.



The Walls of Song and Fire

NEO B. NTHEPA KITSO

Every morning after Tshego's mother eats her porridge, she stands by the wall and bellows the usual greetings to their neighbour, Nkuku MmaBaile.

"Dumela, Mme! O tsogile jang, mma?"

The back and forth will carry on until they have gone past what the other is doing, and what ailments they have that day. Occasionally and eventually, someone will come closer to the fence to gossip about the poor luck of the neighbours.

Sometimes this will extend to them sharing a cup of tea while Tshego plays outside or she chases the cats around the old neighbour's sturdy mud house. It's a big rondavel with a thatched roof and no windows. The walls are low enough to allow the gum poles holding

together the roof and leave space between the wall and the thatch, which the cats use to jump in and out of the house often. The combined smell of the mud and the gum poles is so strong that Tshego often asks her mother about it, but now it has become one of her favourite scents, after the mosukujane tea that the old lady sneaks her when her mother isn't looking.

The house is decorated with thick designs doodled around the door on its mud walls in white chalk. The matching patterns are also put along lelwapana that shields the house. Inside the lelwapana walls there are decorative paintings of different kinds of figures; people and animals that compel everyone who walks into the yard to stop and study them. They are made of reddish-brown and black chalk.

Most Tuesdays and Thursdays, Tshego's mother leaves her with the old woman and goes to the shops in the afternoons to buy stock for her semausu. Nkuku MmaBaile will make some of her delicious logala or bogobe jwa lerotse with morogo wa dinawa to eat with Tshego. On some really special days, there'll be meat or chicken.

One Thursday when Tshego walked through the small lelwapana to get to the leiso where Nkuku MmaBaile was sitting washing her plates and cups, she noticed a part of the floor across the lelwapana seemed to be wet. She asked, "Nkuku, did you accidentally pour water in your yard?" With a low laugh, Nkuku MmaBaile shook her head and responded, "no ngwanaka. I'm renewing bodilo for the yard. It was wearing out." When she noticed that Tshego was a little confused by what she said, she pointed to the small mound of mud that sat towards the small wooden gate, "You see that mud? I mix it with boloko, and apply it on the floor like that to make my yard beautiful and clean, and to keep termites from eating away at my house." She attempted to stand up, grunting in frustration as her bones creaked until she steadied. Then murmuring, she adjusted her headscarf and waddled towards the mound. Tshego skipped along.

Nkuku MmaBaile sat where it was a bit damp in a pattern that went against the grains of what was now the older layer of bodilo. Pointing to the oddly shaped hoe and shovel that sat next to the mud mound, she instructed Tshego, "Bring me that kepu and garawe, ngwanaka. Then grab big lumps of that mud and lay it here," she patted the dry ground beside her thighs softly, "then go back with the garawe and grab as much boloko as you can from inside that white plastic."

Tshego excitedly hopped towards the mud, kicked at it, then one after the other, grabbed lumps as big as the bowls she often ate porridge in, to where the old lady was seated. Impressed with the amount of mud Tshego brought, Nkuku the asked her to bring other things. Tshego begrudgingly picked two loads of wet cowdung for the old lady. It smelt like fermented grass, and she had scrunched up her nose in a tiny scowl, since she couldn't block the smell with her hands.

When she was done and ready to sit down Nkuku MmaBaile she said, "Oh mothonyana, we forgot water. Please go and fetch water with that small black bucket", pointing in the direction of the small leiso. When she had gotten enough water, the old lady instructed her to sit down leaving enough space between them to sit two little girls. With her chapped and

weary hands, Nkuku MmaBaile took the first lump of mud and broke it down, occasionally grinding the small lumps into powder using both the sharp blade and round head of the small kepu. Tshego watched silently, fascinated.

When she was satisfied with the amount of ground mud she had made, Nkuku MmaBaile made a small well in the middle of it and then shovelled a sizeable amount of the pungent wet cow dung, then poured in some water and mixed it with her hands. "Come on, mix with me," she asked the little girl. When the mixture was almost as thick as her delicious logala, she stopped and then took a handful, going against the grain again she smeared the mud mixture in vertical patterns with her fingers, "you press down like this and drag your hand downwards, while at the same time allowing your fingers to make marks. You do this until the whole lelwapana is covered. You want to help me?" Tshego was so excited that, she took two tiny handfuls and went along with the old lady, creating a new coat.

They went at it for so long, that they did not even notice Tshego's mother approaching them. Smiling down at her daughter, she called to her, "it's getting late, ngwanaka. It is time to bath and get ready for bed." Noticing her sullen face, Nkuku MmaBaile reminded her, "yes ngwanaka, you remember I told you that in Setswana, ngwana wa mosetsana ga a tlhape bosigo. How about I also go bath, and sleep, then you can help me finish this tomorrow?" That was enough for her to stop sulking. A small smile tugged at her tiny mouth and instantly sank away the tears that were threatening to break out. After bidding each other well for the night, Tshego traipsed home behind her mother, playing with the mud that she was yet to wash off of her hands.

She was unusually quiet during her bath time, her mother could see she wasn't still upset, but she wasn't sure why her usually inquisitive Tshego had fallen silent. She cautiously asked, "Did you have a good time today?" Tshego nodded, then as if she was considering what to say, "Mama, why does Nkuku keep telling me that 'ngwana wa mosetsana ga a tlhape bosigo'? What is wrong with bathing at night? And does that mean that boys can bathe at night?"

Her mother chuckled, "is that what has been worrying you?" she searched her tiny eyes, and playfully pinched a small button-like nose.

"What will happen to me if I bathe at night, Mama?" Her mother considered her answer for a little bit, then responded, "The snake that lives in the water will eat you. It eats little girls who bath at night." Tshego gasped, her eyes widening. Her mother fed her pumpkin, relish, and beef stew when they were done. She fell asleep as soon after.

The following morning, Tshego rushed through her routine and almost didn't finish her bread and eggs, she was too excited and worried the old lady would carry on without her. As soon as her mother said it was ok, she bolted to their abandoned project. When she got there, she found the old lady still having her morning tea, so she asked her "Nkuku, can I

step on this part? It looks dry now”, pointing to the area she had found done the day before. Without waiting for an answer, she hopped onto the patch near the wall at the corner. She jumped and clapped her hands, humming mindlessly. As she moved, the painting on the wall also moved. Tshego was startled to a stop, looking closely at the paintings. Then she clapped her hands again to make sure she did not imagine what she just saw. The black stick figures on the painting without drums also moved, when she slowed down her clapping, the figures’ movement also slowed down. The old lady knowingly smiled at Tshego’s recent discovery.

“How did they do that, Nkuku?” The old lady instructed her to come towards her and sit down, when she had settled, she poured her now warm tea blend for her in the small, yellow enamel cup. “Loooong time ago, when I was a little girl, my mother taught me how to paint like that. She told me that those people were from her mother’s people, the Bakwena, who loved song and dance and who are also your grandmother, my younger sister’s people. She taught me a secret, that only the first-born girls in the family carried songs and danced, and they are the only ones to know about this. It is what makes the paintings come to life when you sing to them,” she told the little girl in between sips of their tea. Now Tshego was even more curious.

Grunting at the stiffness and stubbornness of her bones, Nkuku MmaBaile stood and waddled to the wall, Tshego quietly followed her. They stopped directly in front of the wall, facing each other; her in curiosity, the old lady with a knowing smile and patience. “Face the wall and jump,” she told the little girl, and so Tshego did, the black paintings on the wall jumped. She was fascinated and excited. MmaBaile watched in amusement, “she is going to be a lot to teach this one”, she muttered to herself laughing softly.

After moments of repeatedly jumping and laughing, the old lady halted Tshego by holding her shoulder, “ok ngwanaka, now jump and clap your hands at the same time.” Now Tshego was very excited, she jumped and clapped in between fits of laughter, and the paintings all started moving with her; the deep red ones started beating the drums while the stick figures just jumped.

Nkuku MmaBaile disappeared into her dark house and came back out with two objects; a small stool-like cylinder covered at the top with a cow’s skin tucked under her arm and a small square piece of wood that fit in her hand, with various straight wires stuck to it at the tip. Tshego stopped and looked at her in wonder. The old lady placed the cylinder object in her underarm down in front of her “this is a moropa, and this...” she held out the small wooden object out to her, “...is called setinkane.” Nkuku MmaBaile sat down and patted the ground for Tshego to do the same.

“What are they for, Nkuku?” With one hand, the old lady started beating at the moropa, each spot she beat at made different sounds, when she realised how fascinated Tshego was she put it down and started strumming on the protruding wires of the setinkane shooting sharp notes, “...the music!”, the little girl exclaimed. “Yes. These are what makes the music, and we

sing along to them.” So much time had passed on and Tshego was so mesmerised by what was happening in front of her.

“Ko-ko! Dumela Nkuku! Dumela mothonyana wame! It is getting late, come and bath so we can get ready for bed.” She said, and Tshego grumbled, as she started to complain. Nkuku MmaBaile gave her a pointed look, admonishing her, she straightened and got up. “Remember, what you learned today is our little secret, you must keep it to yourself. Tomorrow when you return, we will learn more, I will teach you all the songs.” Excitedly, Tshego skipped along home with her mother, already hoping it was tomorrow.



Tojo and The River

LAONE CHOMBO

In the depths of the African forest, there once stood an enchanted village in the swamps, known as Maun. The villagers of Maun prided themselves on having a special river which supported their daily activities. From that river, men caught fish within the depths of the dark waters while the women harvested water lilies in the shallow ends of the swamp. One morning after the villagers woke up however, they found out that their beloved river had dried up. Not a single drop of water was left and the fish were nowhere to be found. No river, no water. No river, no fish or water lilies. Which meant that the poor villagers would most certainly die of thirst and hunger.

One day the village's oldest woman called all the villagers under a baobab tree for a meeting. Her name was Mama K and she was well known to be the wisest of all the villagers. The people of the village circled around Mama K and they listened to her words attentively.

"My friends, thank you very much for coming," she mumbled with a toothless smile. "For all of us to survive, we will need a volunteer to travel to the mouth of the river and find out what the problem is and then solve it."

The villagers started to whisper fearfully amongst themselves, they did not like the idea of leaving the village because it wasn't safe out there. But they also knew that their lives would be in as much danger if the problem wasn't solved.

One man in the crowd finally spoke up "Mama K, it is too dangerous for any of us to go out there. Everybody knows that no man who leaves the village ever returns."

"I know of the danger my friends," said the wise old woman. "But it is better to risk one of us in order for the rest of the village to survive than to make the whole village perish of thirst and hunger. We all need the river."

The villagers nodded in agreement at Mama K's words, after all nobody wanted to die of thirst and hunger. Unfortunately, none of them seemed brave enough to step forward.

"Do we have any volunteer?" asked the wise old woman as she looked through the many scared faces.

At that point, a little boy elbowed his way through the crowd and he fiercely stood in front of Mama K.

"I will go," said the boy bravely.

The villagers burst with laughter. They all thought the boy was mad.

"What is your name, my boy?" asked the wise old lady with a wide grin.

"My name is Jojo," the boy responded confidently.

Suddenly, a giant man of muscular build stepped in front of Jojo "Go home little boy, this is a job for a grown man like myself." The man laughed as he shoved the boy away.

The villagers clapped their hands and whooped merrily. They were quite confident that the strong man would be able to solve the problem.

"What is your name my son?" asked Mama K.

"My name is Dijeje and I fear nothing," said the man. His voice was deep and loud like thunder. His chest was broad and he had thick dreadlocks reaching to his lower back.

"Well my son, thank you for volunteering," said Mama K "You will come across a few

deadly obstacles along the way but remember to trust no one.”

“Yes, yes, yes,” Dijeje spoke in a mocking tone. “As I said before, I fear nothing and I will solve this problem in a minute,” he rolled his eyes with annoyance.

The wise old lady smiled and took out three red beans from her pocket. She gave Dijeje one bean “Take this bean my son, it will grant you anything you want, but only use it in an emergency,” Then the old woman gave Dijeje a full small water pitcher. “There were only three water pitchers left in the entire village and now only two pitchers remain. “Drink the water sparingly otherwise you will die of thirst along the way, and remember to trust no one my son,” repeated the wise old woman.

The following morning, Dijeje set for the journey. He bravely walked through the thick forest. Along the way, he came across a crying hare, sitting beside a gigantic rock.

“Why are you crying, Mr. Hare?” asked Dijeje.

“My foot is stuck under this big rock and I can’t lift it alone, if only there was somebody strong enough to help me lift this rock off of my foot,” snivelled the hare.

“I am strong enough!” said Dijeje as he showed the hare his big muscles. “I will help you go free, but we will have to lift the rock together.”

So, Dijeje and the hare lifted up the rock and hare took out his foot in a jiffy. Unexpectedly, Mr Hare let go of the rock and it collapsed on Dijeje’s hands. The rock was way too heavy to lift alone and now Dijeje’s hands were stuck.

“Hare, help me!” cried Dijeje as he tried to pull himself free.

“Foolish man,” said the hare as he took Dijeje’s water pitcher and red bean. “Now I will go home to drink your water and cook your bean for my dinner.”

“Hare-hare, please don’t leave me here alone, I’m afraid of the dark,” cried Dijeje.

“Don’t worry my friend, the lions will eat you up before noon.” Hare laughed aloud as he left Dijeje crying helplessly.

As noon crept by, a pride of lions found Dijeje crying helplessly and they ate him up.

Back in the village, a week had passed by since Dijeje’s departure, and the villagers became thirstier and hungrier.

For the second time, Mma K called the whole village for a meeting under the baobab. “My friends, it looks like Dijeje’s quest was not successful and now a new volunteer is needed.” Said the wise elder.

Once more Jojo the little boy stepped forward to volunteer. The whole village laughed at him as before. Nobody in their rightful mind expected a little boy to succeed in a quest that a grown man like Dijeje had failed to conquer. To everyone’s relief, a scrawny teenage boy proudly made his way to the front of the crowd.

“Go home little boy, this is obviously a job for a smart boy like myself,” The teenager laughed as he shoved little Jojo aside.

“What is your name my son?” asked Mama K.

“My name is Laone. I am very smart and I volunteer myself for the quest,” said the boy. The villagers whopped and clapped for him.

“Well my son, thank you for volunteering,” said Mama K “You will come across a few deadly obstacles along the way but remember to trust absolutely no one.”

“As I have said before, I am very smart, Mama K and I will use my big brains to solve this little problem,” the boy gushed with confidence “I am the smartest in all of Maun if you may know.”

The wise old lady smiled and took out two red beans from her pocket. “Take this bean, my son, it will grant you anything you want, but only use it in an emergency.” Then the old woman gave Laone a full small water pitcher. There were only two water pitchers left in the entire village and now only one pitcher remained. “Drink the water sparingly otherwise you will die of thirst along the way and remember to trust absolutely no one, my son,” said the wise old woman.

The following morning when the village woke, Laone had already left the village and was on his way to the mouth of the river. As he went, he came across a distressed hare stuck between two boulders.

“Why are you crying, Mr Hare?” asked Laone.

“I’m stuck between these two large rocks and I can’t get out, if only there was somebody smart enough to help me out,” snivelled the hare.

“I am smart enough, I am very smart,” said Laone “And I will use my big brains to help you, don’t worry Mr. Hare.”

Laone studied the rocks and did some calculations on the ground. After he was done making one of his smart plans, he went behind the boulders and he started digging a hole below them. Soon, he found his way under the hare and he used all his strength to push it out. Before long, the hare was free, but now Laone was the one trapped between the rocks.

“Hare, help me!” cried Laone as he tried to pull himself free.

Foolish boy,” said the hare as he took Laone’s water pitcher and red bean. “Now I will go home to drink your water and cook your bean for my dinner.”

“Hare-hare, please don’t leave me here alone, I’m very claustrophobic,” cried Laone.

“Don’t worry my friend, the hole you dug will soon destabilise those boulders and they’ll crush you in no time.” Hare laughed aloud and he left the boy crying helplessly.

As the hare had told, the large rocks crushed the boy to death.

The following week, the villagers of Maun were all gathered around the wise old woman for the third time. They were murmuring wearily, their bones shaking from hunger and thirst.

“My friends,” said Mama K “We need a new volunteer or else we will all die.”

The villagers chatted amongst themselves fearfully. Nobody showed interest in volunteering except for little Jojo, but once more everybody laughed at him and that did not please the wise old woman this time around.

“This young boy shows true courage that none of you dared to show and yet here you are laughing at him,” Mama K rebuked the crowd. “Shame on you all,” she thundered with a wrinkled forehead to back her words, causing the crowd to bow their heads shamefully.

“Well, Jojo my son, it looks like you are the only one who is willing to save the village,”

said Mama K with a proud smile.

“Thank you for the opportunity Mama K. I promise I will not let you down,” said Jojo, with pure determination.

“Well my son, thank you for volunteering,” smiled Mama K “Let me tell you this my son, you will come across a few obstacles along the way but remember to trust absolutely no one.”

“I will remember your advice, Mama K,” Jojo responded humbly, “And I promise to do my best.”

The wise old lady smiled and took out one red bean from her pocket “Take this bean my son, it will grant you anything you want but only use it in an emergency,” Then the old woman gave Jojo a small water pitcher. There was only one pitcher left in the entire village and now none remained. “Drink the water sparingly otherwise you will die of thirst along the way and remember to trust no one. You are our last hope, my son,” said the wise old woman. “Oh, and one last thing, cook yourself some free meat on the way.”

“Cook myself some free meat?” Jojo was blank.

“You will know what I mean when the time is right my son,” Mama K responded with a wink.

The following morning, Jojo left the village early and was on his way to the mouth of the river. During his journey, he came across a crying hare sitting beside a gigantic rock.

“Why are you crying, Mr Hare?” asked Jojo.

“My arm is stuck under this big rock and I can’t lift it alone, if only there was somebody humble enough to help me lift this rock off of my arm,” cried the hare.

“I am humble enough!” said Jojo.

“Oh thank you very much,” smiled the hare.

“So Mr Hare, you are saying that you are stuck...so that means you can’t go anywhere or do anything,” asked the humble boy as he stroked his chin thoughtfully.

“Yes, I am really stuck and helpless. Please help me,” wept the hare.

“Alright, give me a minute,” said Jojo

Jojo went behind a bush and brought some wood with him and then he made a small fire just by the rock.

“I don’t understand how that fire will help me go free my friend,” queried the hare blankly.

“Oh no, the fire is not for helping you go free, silly hare, I am cooking myself some free meat.”

The hare smiled broadly, he loved food very much. “Will you share your food with me my friend, I am very hungry,” cried Mr Hare.

“I am sorry my friend but I cannot share my food with you, even if I wanted to,” said Jojo.

“But why can’t I have lunch with you, my friend?” asked the hare with a long face.

“Foolish hare, because you are the free meat. You tried to trick me and now the joke’s on you.” Jojo chuckled before roasting himself a juicy hare and washed it down with a pitcher of water.

After lunch, Jojo resumed his journey through the thick forest until he was below the

tallest hill in the forest. He walked up the incredibly steep hill and at the very top, he found himself eye to eye with a majestic white lioness with wings of an eagle. The creature sat on its haunches on top of a rock, licking its paws slowly.

Jojo tried to force a feeling of comfort upon the sight but it was a sight too horrid not to shiver, he wanted to run away but he was unable to move a muscle. He was too scared to even stop looking.

“Do not be afraid, child,” said the winged lioness. “Do you wish to pass along my path?”

Jojo nodded fearfully and gulped loudly.

“Very well then, if you want to move forward you will have to answer a riddle. If you get it right, I will let you pass but if you fail to answer correctly, I will devour you,” said the lioness. Her eyes were sharp and pale, her fangs big as swords.

“Alright ma’am, I will answer your riddle,” Jojo sweated.

“Good, Now listen,” the lioness replied with a nasty smile “When my tears pour down, they bring life and joy to all but they can also wash both away. What am I?”

Jojo stroked his chin because it helped him think fast and effectively.

“A cloud!” Jojo exclaimed with excitement. “The answer is a cloud because clouds bring rain and rain fills up our rivers and makes us happy, but too much rain will cause floods and destroy our crops and shelters.” He crossed his fingers, hoping his answer was correct.

The lioness shot him a piercing look. She began to lick her paw for a long time before responding. “Your answer is...correct and you may pass,” she announced.

The lioness gave Jojo one of its large feathers. “Take this feather, it will help you slide down the hill safely.”

“Thank you very much,” said Jojo.

Jojo threw himself on the gigantic feather and slid down the hill. After safely making it down, he saw the mouth of the river and it didn’t take him long to realise where all the water had gone. There was a giant’s baby sitting at the mouth of the river, her cheeks were full and round like giant melons.

Jojo didn’t know what to do next, but luckily, he heard a voice coming from a nearby mophane tree. He looked closely and saw a great brown owl with big glittering round eyes. “The giant’s baby has all the water in his mouth but he is slowly swallowing it. You need to be quick with your thinking my boy,” said the owl with a shaky voice.

Jojo took a deep breath and then an idea shot to his mind at once, he swallowed the red bean that Mama K had given him and then shut his eyes. “Oh red bean, grant me wings so I may fly like birds of the sky,” he wished. Jojo opened his eyes just to find himself floating in mid-air with the help of two enormous bird wings attached to his skinny back.

“I can fly!” squealed the boy as he flapped his wings around like a bird, the fascination of flying had him flapping about just for fun.

“Young man, act quickly before the giant baby swallows all the water,” cried the owl with annoyance.

“Oh, right. Sorry.” Jojo did not take the owl’s advice for granted, he grabbed the winged

lion's gigantic feather from the ground and he used it to tickle the baby giant with it. In no time, the giant baby giggled and his mouth fell open, letting all the water pour back into the river. Now all Jojo needed to do was lead the baby away and he did so by dropping the feather in mid-air just so it was blown away by the wind and then he watched with satisfaction as the giant baby chased the feather far-far away.

"Well done, my boy," squealed the owl.

Before he knew it, his wings had disappeared and he was back on the ground. He safely made his way back to the village and everyone celebrated his bravery. The river was full again and all the fish and water lilies were back. The people of Maun lived happily, all because of Jojo's bravery.



My Goat Maghubukhwane

CAIPHUS MMINO MANGENELA



Let me tell you a story. Oh, my name is Phazha. I am nine years old and live in a village called Tutume. I live with my Kuku who has two children, my Father her first born and Aunt Maggie. Aunt Maggie sadly passed away three years ago. We live with her son, Baledzi who is thirteen years old. He goes to school at Denjebuya just across the river while I go to Thini Primary School.

My father lives and works in Francistown. He is an accountant. All I know is that he deals with a lot of money. Sometimes, I visit him for the weekend, most of the time though, he comes to the village. My mother is far away in England studying to be a doctor. I have not seen her in two years. Baledzi says studying to be a doctor is hard and we will not see her for ten more years. My friend Uyapo says Baledzi is lying, and Mama is left with just two years to become a doctor. I can't wait to see her again. To smell her perfume and feel her soft hands.

One Saturday morning, Papa came from Francistown and asked me to accompany him to a neighbour's home. I struggled to keep up with him as he walked rather fast that day. Papa had increased the speed of his strides as we neared the neighbour's home. Papa often talked to himself which I found odd. It was as if he was talking to an imaginary friend or reasoning something within himself. He was doing it this morning, but I struggled to hear what he was saying. We walked into the neighbour's yard and Papa refused to sit on the stools we were offered after greeting the man. It seemed the man was waiting

for us in front of his unpainted two roomed house that looked out to the gate. Papa refused the wooden stools the man offered us to sit on. I could sense something was wrong..... very wrong.

"RaNtiti pay me all my money now please, I have been patient with you for far too long," Papa spoke in a loud voice for the man's wife and children who were sitting nearby to hear.

"I will pay you Tate ba Phazha, please give me some time," he said trying to steady his voice.

"No! I have given you enough time, I want my money now!" Papa was now shouting. The man shifted uncomfortably on the verandah where he was seated, his eyes looking at his hands on his lap in the cold May morning. His hands offered no solutions. His wife looked eastward at the rising sun searching for some sort of relief from it. The little child sucking at her breast started crying, as if the milk was no longer sweet. I looked down at the rubber sole

shoes keeping my feet warm. At that moment, I did not know what I was feeling, but it was not a pleasant feeling.

"I am going to pay myself with something of yours today, I promise you," Papa said as he started stomping around the yard looking for something valuable to take. I did not know if I should join him, so I just stood there, looking at my rubber soled shoes. He paused a bit at an old wheelbarrow, examined it for a few seconds but noticing the damaged wheel, moved on.

"Maybe we can pay you with one of our goats," his wife said after watching Papa march around like a soldier at a parade for some time.

Papa-Soldier marched towards their goat pen and there were two female goats and a kid. Even the goats could tell something was wrong because they started bleating uncontrollably as Papa-Soldier approached them.

"These sickly, starved goats are not enough to pay your debt, but I am tired of following you so I will take both goats.....including the kid."

Before anyone could speak, Papa opened the pen and instructed me to drive out the three goats towards our home. I moved fast, careful to stay low and away from Papa's anger, which was hovering in the air and poisoning everything in its path. I will never forget their son, about my age who started crying as I disappeared with the goats through the mophane bushes.

"Papa, why are they taking our goats? Papa, why are they taking our goats?" I heard him ask repeatedly. The father never answered. When we got home Papa followed me to our own goat pen. He opened the smaller enclosure where the kids are sheltered and said,

"Put him in there with the other kids." His voice was calmer. I got in as well, took the new baby goat and held him close to my chest. He felt warm against the cold morning. He had warm brown eyes and the whitest goat skin. It was as white as the morning porridge Kuku made and I was sure the way he felt was the way clouds feel, soft and fluffy. Papa must have seen the way I held on to the baby goat because he blurted out almost without thinking, "He will be yours Phazha, please take care of him."

I put my baby goat down, no baby goat was as handsome.

"I will Papa."

I looked at Papa. He was the best Father in the whole world. My Papa-Soldier! That night, I barely slept. I had a goat, my own baby goat to take care of. For the first time I wondered, was that goat skin enough to keep him warm till the morning? I woke up and followed Baledzi to the pen to milk the goats for the morning tea. I usually held the horns of the mother goats while he milked so they would not move about and kick the green bucket with the milk. That morning, I walked in front as I was eager to see my baby goat.

"Is there anything new you are noticing about the goats?" I asked Baledzi as he moved the first pole from the goat pen entrance.

"No," he replied still groggy with sleep. Baledzi was always grumpy in the morning. It struck me that he did not even notice the two new mother goats. That or he was not very chatty that morning.

"Look harder," I said with a naughty smile on my face.

“What is it? “Baledzi was getting impatient. “I have to go to school, you know!”

“Papa got me a baby goat,” I said with pride.

“Oh,” was all Baledzi could say, as if he did not believe me.

I quickly opened the smaller pen and held up my new baby goat. He was the only pure white baby goat, others had specks of black or brown, but mine was pure white.

“What’s his name? “Baledzi was slowly warming up both inside and outside as the sun came out in the east.

I had never heard about a goat having a name.

“I will think about it,” I said to Baledzi as he beckoned me to come hold the horns of a goat, he wanted to start milking. That whole day, I thought about a name I could give to my baby goat. I thought about it as I drank my standard two cups of Tanganda tea that morning.

“Where is your mind today, my dear grandchild?” Kuku asked me as I accidentally dipped my hand into the warm tea, trying to pick it without looking. I got burnt and put my fingers in my mouth to cool them.

“I’m thinking of a name for my new baby goat Kuku,” I said.

“That’s odd,” Kuku said, “I have never heard of a goat having a name. Anyway, hurry up and go to school, I am off to Tjilagwani to make traditional beer for a wedding.”

I thought about it as our teacher Miss Modise tried teaching the class a new song. I thought about it as I ate beans at breaktime. It had to be a good name. A special name. A memorable name. It was while walking Papa to the bus stop that Sunday evening that the name came to me. “Papa, I think I have a name for my baby goat.”

“A name? I have never heard of a goat having a name,” Papa said

“I know. My baby goat is special.”

“Okay, what will his name be?”

“Maghubukhwane” I said with a big smile

“Maghubukhwane?” Papa seemed confused.

“Yes Papa, Maghubukhwane. The best baby goat in the world.” I was proud of the name I had given my goat. It was a powerful name. A good name. A special name. A memorable name. Papa quietly walked to the bus stop and into the waiting Francistown bound bus.

Maghubukhwane was a happy baby goat. He would often jump when he was happy. I enjoyed putting the side of my face on his fluffy skin. I talked to Maghubukhwane and told him everything about what was happening at home and at school. He did not respond but his brown eyes always listened attentively. You should have seen us. Maghubukhwane and I under the big Mowana tree behind our home.

Maghubukhwane grew. Soon he was browsing with other goats and not just drinking his mother’s milk. I told everyone who would listen about my goat. Unlike most of my classmates, I owned a goat, a whole living goat! After a few years, he was the biggest goat in our pen and got a bell around his neck, announcing his grand arrival everywhere he went. I had the best goat in the village.

That December after closing school for the holidays, Papa told me that Mama would be

coming home for Christmas. She was finally done with medical school and would come home to be a doctor at the hospital in Tutume. She was going to be the best Doctor in Botswana. I had not seen Mama in over two years, and she would now find me a big boy in Standard Five with a big goat. More than anything, she would be proud that I owned and took care of the best-looking goat in Tutume. I could not wait for Mother to meet Maghubukhwane. Baledzi told me that Kuku and Papa were planning a big party for Mama where there would be lots of food, music and dancing till the morning. "Will there be beetroot salad as well?" I asked him.

"Yes, you will eat so much beetroot your stomach will hurt," he said tickling me.

Papa took time off work to prepare for Mama's homecoming. He was ordering people around.

"You, go get the tent. You! Go take the donkey cart and go collect firewood," he said as people ran around to fulfil his orders. He did very little himself. Papa-Soldier was back. That afternoon, I started to notice people acting strangely and speaking in hushed voices. I ignored it all, excited to see Mama again and hear her stories about England. I saw Papa and Baledzi pointing at Maghubukhwane as the goats browsed about outside our yard. Papa came to where I was playing morabaraba with my friends Tsietso and Uyapo.

"Phazha, we are going to slaughter your goat for Mama's homecoming," he said without looking at me. I was not sure if I had heard him right. I had heard him but could not really understand his words. My brain simply refused to comprehend the meaning of words he left hanging in the air. "You have taken good care of the goat and he will make tasty seswaa," he said jokingly. No one laughed. My brain finally understood the words he had said. I was angry and sad at the same time.

"But he is my goat Papa," my mouth said. Papa had no business deciding what would happen to my goat. A goat he gave me. My Maghubukhwane.

"There are other goats you can slaughter instead of him.... He is my friend" I doubt Papa heard the last phrase as my voice was almost a whisper.

"Don't behave like a child Phazha, we are going to slaughter that goat," Papa said in a firm voice and walked off. The way he said it sounded so final. Maybe Papa was right, maybe I was being childish. Baledzi came by and seeing the tears on my face, walked off. He must have known about the plan all along. I felt a lump in my throat. How could Papa give me Maghubukhwane then take him away from me in this way?

That Sunday Mama was arriving in Tutume. She had already landed in Gaborone on a big airplane and in the morning would take a bus to Francistown then another one to the village. Papa had invited everyone in the village. Kuku had lots of traditional beer in the big earth containers. That meant they intended on slaughtering Maghubukhwane tomorrow, on Saturday, so the meat's blood would drip overnight, ready to cook Sunday morning. I had to think and act fast.

"Stop sulking Phazha, take that wheelbarrow and go borrow a size nine three-legged pot from Mma Chubi's house," Kuku said finding me seated behind the house.

"Or do you want a stick on your behind?" she added seeing me reluctant to stand up. That

was enough to send me scurrying towards the wheelbarrow. It was mid-day, and the sun was hot so I pushed the wheelbarrow slowly down the little footpath, past my school.

“They are going to kill and eat my goat. They are going to kill and eat my goat,” was all my mind could repeat as I dragged my feet one in front of the other. My poor goat. As if he could see I was thinking about him, I saw Maghubukhwane browsing to my left with our other goats. He had two feet on the ground and two on a shrub he was eating leaves off. His bell would ring from time to time as he got tired, went back on his fours and commenced to chew and chew and chew.

Then suddenly it came to me what I was to do to help Maghubukhwane. I had to act fast. I broke a stick off the nearest mophane tree and charged towards the goats. I separated him from the other goats and threw stones at him sending him running off into the bush. His bell was ringing loudly. I abandoned the wheelbarrow on the footpath, I had more important things to do. I am sure he was surprised; his usual gentle Master was acting strangely. Still, he ran off and I gave chase. The bell sound rang in the mophane bush, it sounded louder than usual today. Off past Mma Chubi’s house, past the post office heading towards the river. I drove him into the soft sand and across we went.

We emerged from the river at full speed, goat chased by boy, past Denjebuya school towards the main Tutume kgotla. Still, we did not stop, I chased Maghubukhwane past the large metal buildings where Kuku bought seeds for planting. I ignored all curious onlookers. Soon, there were no more houses, we were outside the village but still I chased him. I was afraid either me or Maghubukhwane would fall down due to fatigue. I knew we had gone far enough but ending this was as hard as starting it. Finally, I stopped as Magubukhwane disappeared into the bushes. The last I saw was his bushy tail disappearing.

“Goodbye my friend,” I said in between trying to catch my breath.

I got home before sunset and hid the empty wheelbarrow behind a pile of firewood. I gave myself other tasks so I was not assigned to collect the goats into their pen for the night. Baledzi was sent to get the goats. It got dark and I heard Kuku muttering under her breath what could have kept him out so long. Kuku had made zengwe and nyevi. Papa sat on a stool with his food before him on the ground. I enjoyed zengwe and nyevi but today they had no happy taste. My ears were still ringing from the sounds of Maghubukhwane’s bell.

“I wonder what has kept Baledzi out so long?” Papa finally said what was on everyone’s mind. Baledzi walked in dejected, with his arms seeming too heavy for his body.

“What’s wrong?” Kuku asked.

“I looked everywhere the goats normally browse. I found all the goats except Phazha’s goat.”

“What?” Papa and Kuku said at the same time.

“It’s nowhere to be found, I even asked the neighbours. No one knows where it is.”

I took a handful of zengwe and nyevi into my mouth as I felt three pairs of eyes bore into me in the soft firelit rondavel. I looked back at them innocently and continued eating my zengwe and nyevi.

Acknowledgements

Published by the generous support of The Mastercard Foundation

Writing workshops supported by the University of East Anglia

Editor: Zukiswa Wanner

Illustrator: Onica Lekuntwane

Translator: Dr. Naledi Kgolo-Lotshwao

In 2022 as International Chair of the University of East Anglia's Creative Writing Programme, Tsitsi Dangarembga invited Gaborone Book Festival (GBF) to be one of the literary projects for Africa. GBF, with its interest in encouraging literacy from a young age, focused on stories for children and had a callout for children's stories. The emerging writers who were selected then went through intensive writing workshops with some of the top children's writers in Botswana and across the continent. *The Peculiar Tree and Other Stories* anthology is the result of that workshop. A project that GBF was able to fully finalise thanks to funding from the Mastercard Foundation. We hope Botswana children, children beyond our borders and all our inner children can see ourselves in each and every one of these stories.

