

Nonkungu and the imbulu

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English





Once upon a time there was a poor couple. They had only one child, called Nonkungu. They loved her very much.

When she was old enough, her parents decided to send Nonkungu to stay with her rich Uncle Mtonyama.

Nonkungu's mother made special clothes with ribbon, buttons and beads. She also made a beautiful necklace for her child.

Then Nonkungu set off for her uncle's village.



On her journey, Nonkungu came to a stream. She crossed the stream and met a girl wearing rags. The girl asked, "Where are you going?"

"I'm going to visit my Uncle Mtonyama," replied Nonkungu.

"Well, Mtonyama is my uncle, too! I am also on my way to visit him," said the girl.

So they walked together. After a while, the girl said to Nonkungu, "Your clothes and necklace are beautiful. Please let me try them on."

Nonkungu took off her clothes and gave them to the girl. When the girl took off her rags, Nonkungu saw that she had a tail!

Nonkungu was afraid. She realised that the girl was really an imbulu.

They walked a little further, and then Nonkungu asked, "Please give me back my clothes and beads."





The imbulu answered, "Let me wear them until we get to the next tree." And she pointed to a tree on a hill nearby.

When they reached the tree, Nonkungu asked the imbulu, "Please give me back my clothes and beads."

"Just let me wear them until we get to that field," said the imbulu. And she pointed to a field on the next hill. Nonkungu was afraid, so she agreed.



At last they reached the field. Again Nonkungu asked the imbulu, "Please give me back my clothes and my beads."

"Just let me wear them until we get to that hut where women are sitting," said the imbulu. And she pointed to a hut in the distance. So they walked on.

As they got near the hut, the imbulu pushed Nonkungu back and ran ahead.



The imbulu said to the women at the hut, "Look at this girl wearing rags. She has been following me all day. I wish she would go away."

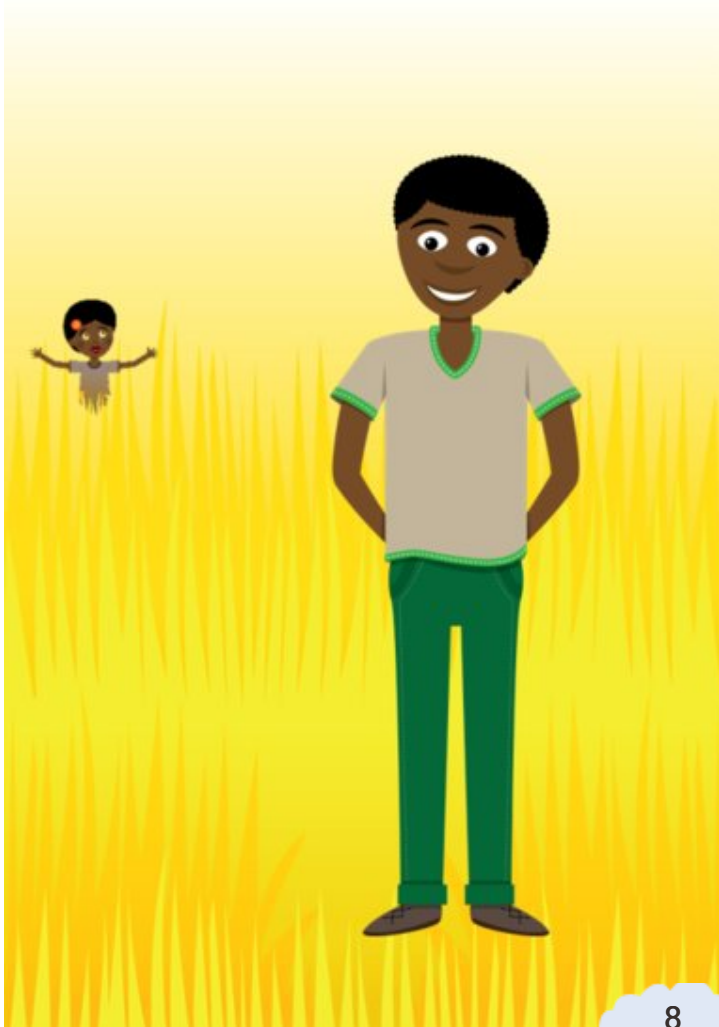
The women turned to look at Nonkungu. She was so frightened that she ran and hid in the kraal.

Then the imbulu went to Uncle Mtonyama's hut. She said sweetly, "I am your niece, Nonkungu. My parents sent me to stay with you."



Mtonyama and his family welcomed the girl. They were very kind to her.

Poor Nonkungu had to sleep in the kraal and share the dog's food. During the day she hid in the fields and sang this song:
"Oh misery me, misery me.
I was sent by my father and mother to stay with my Uncle Mtonyama.
On the way I met an imbulu and she took my skirt and my beads.
Oh misery me, misery me."



One day, Mtonyama's eldest son was walking in the fields. He heard the strange and sad song. He didn't know who was singing, but when he got home, he told his father the words.

Mtonyama went into the fields. He heard the song, and looked until he found Nonkungu.



Nonkungu told her uncle everything that had happened. Mtonyama took her back to the village and hid her in a hut. He knew what he was going to do to catch the imbulu.

Mtonyama had heard that an imbulu's tail loves milk and that it can't go past milk without drinking some.

So he told his men to dig a hole and fill it with sour milk.

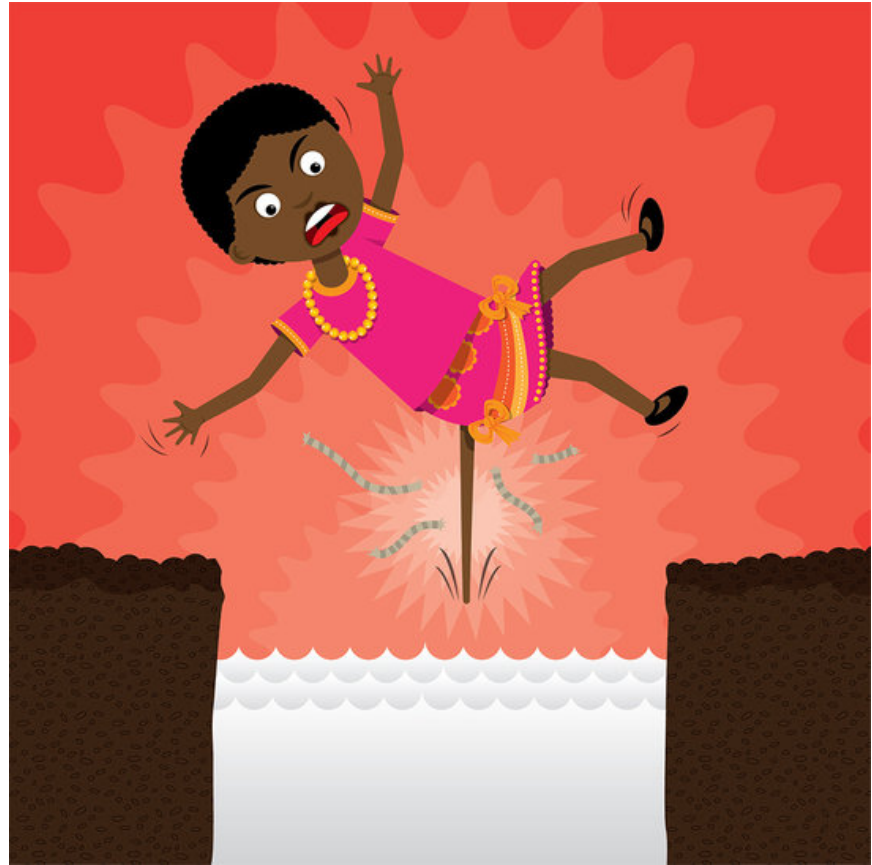
Then Mtonyama called all the girls of the village to take part in a jumping competition. The imbulu was worried. She did not want to jump over the hole.

The imbulu knew that her tail would be thirsty for the sour milk. So she went into a hut and tied her tail to her body as tightly as she could. Then she took her place with the other girls.



One girl after another jumped over the hole with the sour milk. At last it was the imbulu's turn. She tried to jump high over the hole, but her tail broke loose.

The imbulu's tail pulled her down, down, down into the sour milk.



As the imbulu struggled in the milk, the men quickly filled the hole with sand and buried her. That was the end of the imbulu.

Nonkungu stayed happily with her uncle for a long, long time.



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