

Hair magic | Nal'ibali

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Zinhle loved skipping in the playground with her friends Sindi and Zongi. Just one thing worried her. When her friends skipped, their hair flew up and down, and flicked from side to side. Zinhle had a thick mop of soft hair that formed a big round shape, and it never moved in the same way as theirs did.



One Saturday morning Zinhle asked her mother, "Mama, why doesn't my hair grow down like my friends' hair? Their hair flies about when they skip. It looks so pretty! It makes me sad that my hair doesn't move like that. It just stays still!" "Your hair may be different from your friends' hair, but it's just as beautiful as theirs!" said Mama. Zinhle made a sad face, but her mama just smiled at her. "Look around you, Zinhle," she said. "Your hair

grows from the roots up, like the trees and plants. It's also round and big, just like the earth we live on. You can play around with it too and make beautiful patterns and shapes in it. Your hair is magical – and that is special!"

These words made Zinhle happy. She ran outside to tell her friends about her magical hair. But when she told Zongi and Sindi what Mama had said, they just looked at each other, and burst out laughing. "How can hair be magic?" asked Zongi. "Ha-ha-ha!" laughed Sindi. "Don't joke like that, Zinhle! Magic? Never!" Zinhle's eyes filled with tears, but she didn't cry. She didn't want Zongi and Sindi to laugh at her again. Just then, the girls saw Gogo waving to them. She was standing in her doorway nearby.

"Look, Gogo's calling us," said Zinhle.

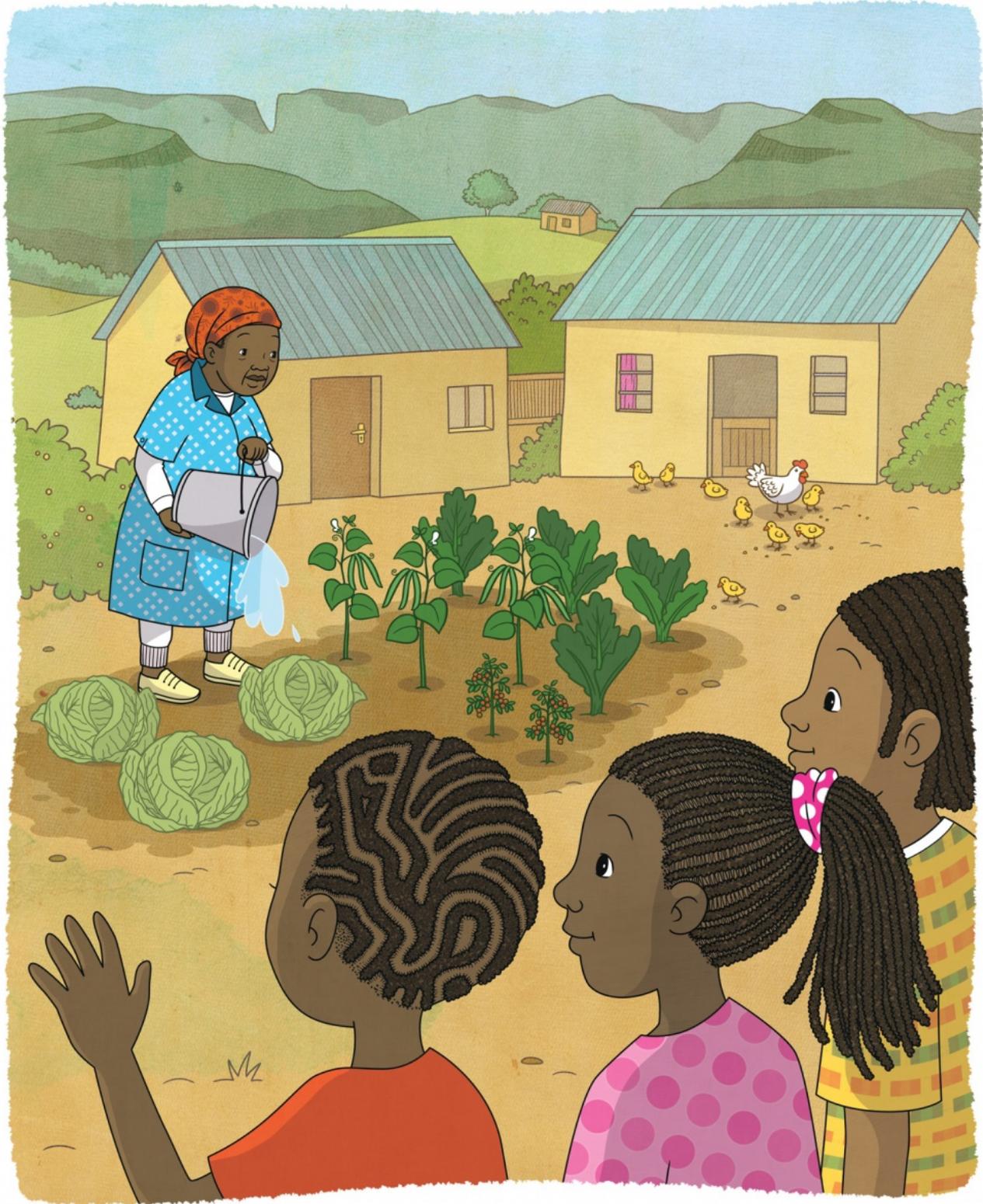
The three children loved helping Gogo. She told them lots of stories and gave them dried fruit every time they visited her. So Zinhle, Zongi and Sindi hurried to find out why Gogo was calling them. "I'm not well today," said Gogo. "I want to send you to kwaNtuli to get some medicine." The children were sad to hear that Gogo wasn't well and agreed to go and get her some medicine.

"I'll draw you a map so you won't get lost," said Gogo. "The map will lead you to Baba Ntuli's place, and he'll give you some herbs." Then Gogo went inside to find paper and a pencil to draw the map. She looked in her drawer, but she couldn't find any paper. "I'll have to make another plan," she said. She looked carefully at each of the girls. Then she said, "Zinhle, you have very beautiful hair. It looks strong. I will braid cornrows to make a map in your hair. The map will help you get to kwaNtuli." Gogo sat on her favourite red chair, and Zinhle sat on the mat in front of her. Gogo braided Zinhle's hair. The other girls watched eagerly. As Gogo combed and braided different patterns, Zongi and Sindi were amazed by the length of Zinhle's hair.

"Wow! Your mama is right," said Sindi. "Your hair really IS magical! It looks so short, but it's longer than you think!" "It's true," said Zongi. "It's a big surprise!"

Zinhle smiled at them happily. When Gogo had finished braiding Zinhle's hair, the cornrows looked just like a map to guide the children to kwaNtuli! As they walked along the narrow paths through the veld, Zongi and Sindi often stopped and studied Zinhle's hair to make sure that they were still going in the right direction. While they walked, they sang a song they had made up:

"Gogo's not well, Gogo's not well. We're going to kwaNtuli, we're going to fetch herbs – herbs to make Gogo well!" The children finally arrived at kwaNtuli. There Baba Ntuli gave them two packets of herbs for Gogo. On their way home the girls again used Zinhle's cornrow map to guide them. When they arrived safely at Gogo's house, they gave her the medicine. The next morning, Zinhle, Zongi and Sindi went to Gogo's house to see if she was better. When they arrived, they found her watering her garden.



“Good morning, my children,” said Gogo with a big smile. “I’m feeling much stronger today, all thanks to you!” The girls were happy to hear that they had helped Gogo, but they were thinking about something else too. “Gogo, would you please braid my hair the same way you did Zinhle’s hair?” asked Sindi.

“Mine too, please!” said Zongi. “Of course,” said Gogo. “Come inside.”

During news time at school the next morning, the three friends told their class all about their magic hairstyles. At break, they had just started skipping when some children asked to see their cornrows that made a map to kwaNtuli. "It really is magic," said someone, and everyone else agreed.