

The Smell Thief



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Writer: Joanne Bloch (retold folktale)
Illustration: Rebecca Riley and Nalibali

English

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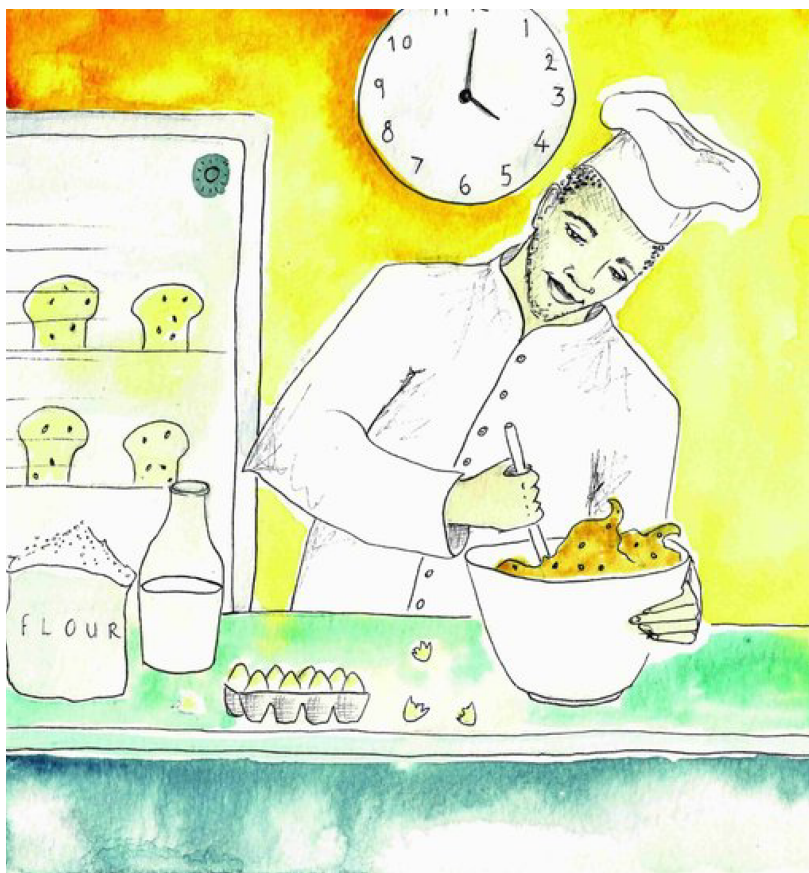
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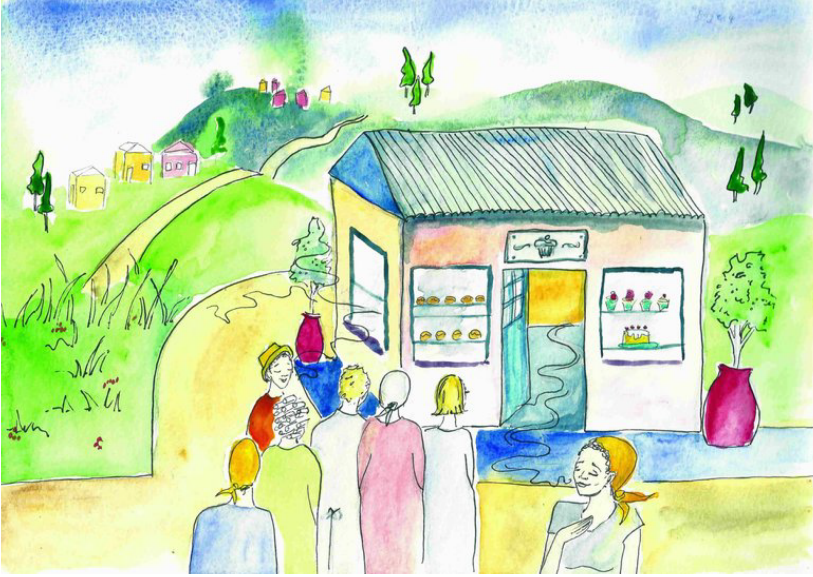
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Mr. Shabangu was the best baker in town. Every morning he woke up at four o'clock to mix and knead the dough for his famous buns, cakes and biscuits.



By eight o'clock the people of the town were walking past the bakery on their way to work and school. By this time the cakes and buns were almost cooked, and the most delicious smells wafted out of the bakery's windows.



Many of the people went into the bakery to buy their breakfast. Mr. Shabangu smiled happily at them as he passed them the fresh, tasty cinnamon buns and warm, golden biscuits that were so famous in the town.



But other people were not so lucky. Because they had so little money, the poorer people of the town could hardly ever afford to buy any of the delicious buns, cakes and biscuits. All they could do was enjoy the lovely smells that drifted out of the bakery windows. When Mr Shabangu noticed these people sniffing the air near his bakery, he said angrily, ‘How dare they sniff my delicious smells!’



‘Those are MY smells. I made them, so they belong to me! If people want to smell my wonderful smells, they should pay for them!’ He huffed and puffed and wiped the sweat from his brow, before turning back the oven to bake some bread and rolls for his lunchtime customers.



One old woman especially loved the smells that drifted out of the bakery window every morning. This was Ma Shange who slept on a bench in the park every night.



A few weeks before, a kind person had given her the money to buy herself a cinnamon bun. She had taken the bun back to the park and ate it very slowly, licking her lips and sharing the last crumbs with the birds.



After that, although the old woman didn't have enough money to buy breakfast, she longed for the delicious bun again. So every morning she walked slowly past Mr Shabangu's bakery, sniffing the air and smiling blissfully at the mouthwatering smell.



Ma Shange's new habit made the baker very angry. As each day went by, he grew angrier and angrier with her. Finally, one winter morning when he was in an especially bad mood, he stormed out of his bakery and grabbed the old woman by the arm.

'How dare you steal my smells!' he shouted.
'You're nothing but a smell thief!'

He wiped his hands on an apron, then pulled it off and threw it back into the bakery.

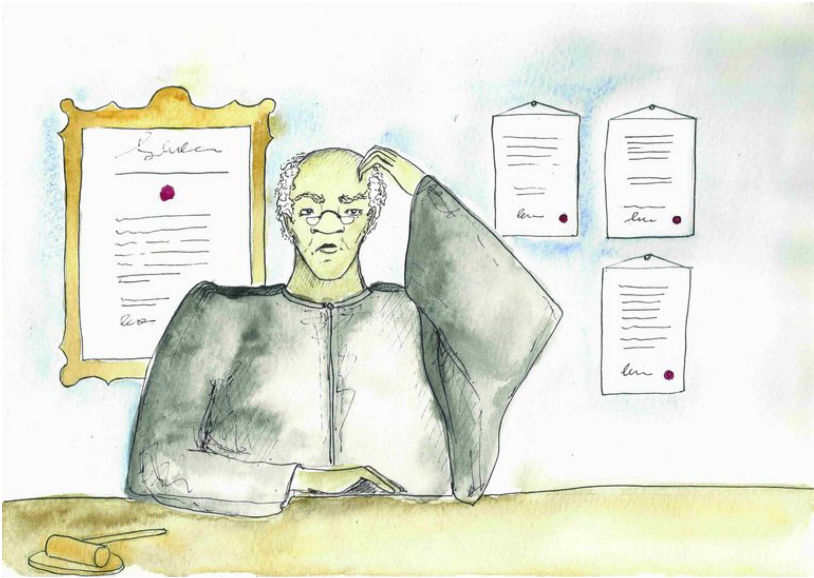


‘This is the last day this cheeky woman will steal my smells!’ he shouted. And with these words, he dragged Ma Shange off to the court to see judge Ngwenya. The judge was sitting down at his huge, shiny desk when the angry baker stormed in, dragging the quivering and confused Ma Shange with him.



‘ Good morning,’ said the judge in his deep voice.

‘Sir,’ said Mr Shabangu furiously, ‘I demand justice! I wish to lay a complaint against this woman. Every day for the last three weeks, she has walked past my bakery early in the morning when my delicious smells are at their best, and stolen them. I demand that she pays for those smells!’



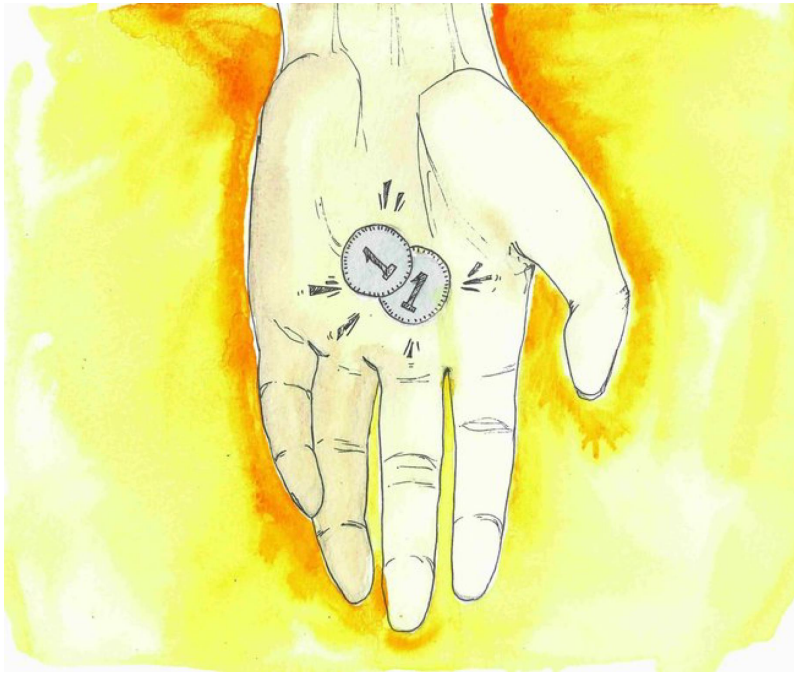
The judge scratched his big, bald head for a moment. Then he cleared his throat. 'Fair enough,' he said to the baker. 'Justice will be done.' He turned to Ma Shange. 'How much money do you have on you, Madam?' he asked.



‘Only two rands,’ stammered Ma Shange.

‘Well,’ said the judge, hand it to me, please.’

Meekly, Ma Shange reached into the pocket of her tatty old cardigan and pulled out two one rand coins. She handed them to the judge. He took them, thanking her politely.



Then he shook the coins in his big fist, so that they made a clinking sound. ‘This is my judgement,’ he said to the baker. ‘The punishment must fit the crime. Therefore the sound of Ma Shange’s money is the payment you will get for the smells she stole. And now I wish you a good day.’

The baker looked thoughtful. Then, realising how unreasonable he had been, he turned slowly and walked out of the room.



The judge smiled kindly at Ma Shange, and handed her back her money.

'Now, Madam, ' he said, pulling a brown paper bag from his briefcase, ' would you care to join me for breakfast? These buns are still warm, I bought them only half an hour ago.'

