

The Magic Waterman

Everyone thinks that Mzee Marende is a witch because he always has enough water, even to spare, when other people do not have water to drink. Incensed at Mzee Marende's mysterious source of water, the people decide to attack him and his family accusing him of witchcraft. They set out to burn Mzee Marende's entire family. In this exciting story, you will witness the deadly conflict as one man confronts and defeats an entire township. It is one of those stories a reader cannot forget easily.



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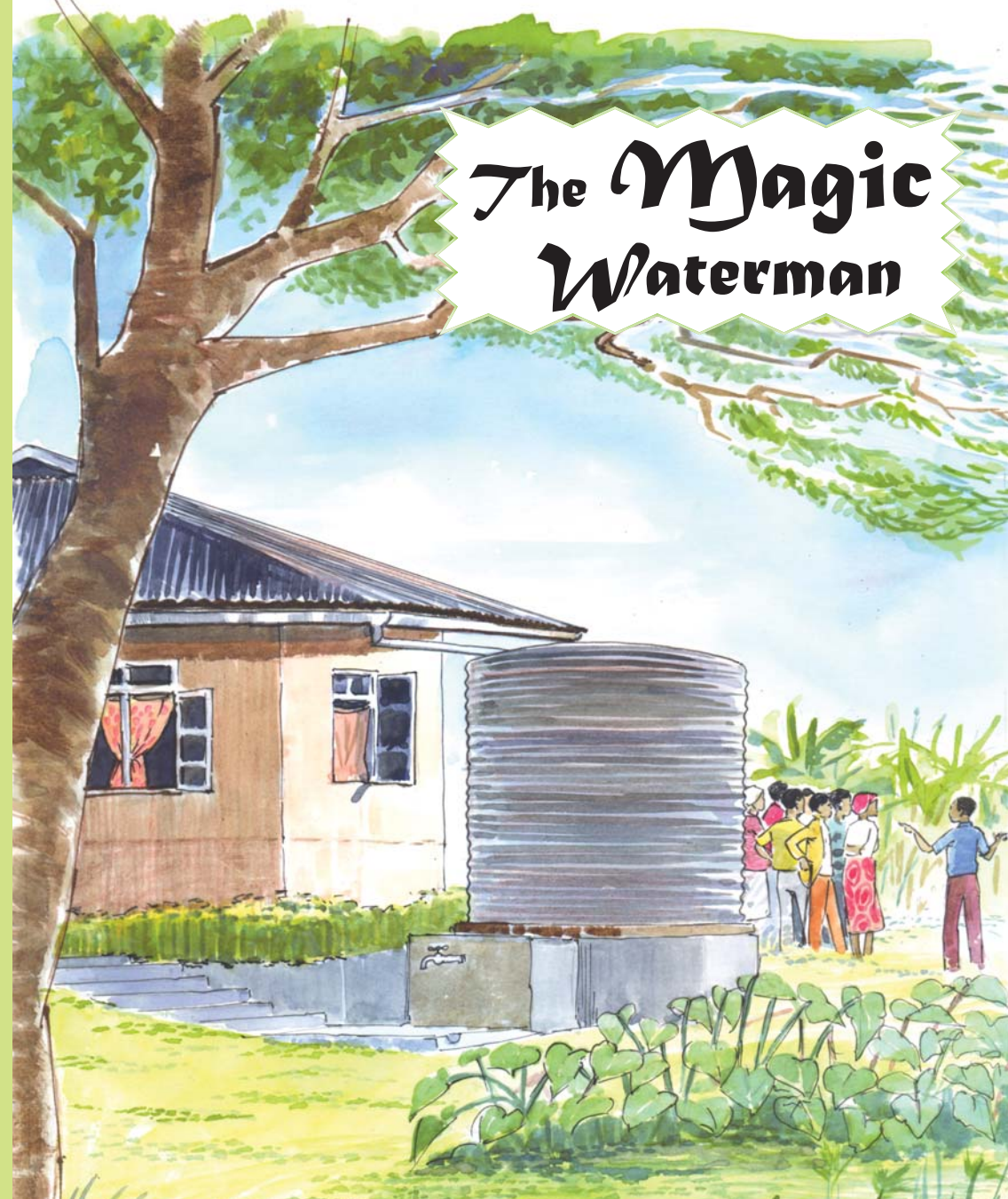
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The Magic Waterman

UN HABITAT
FOR A BETTER URBAN FUTURE

UN-HABITAT Series on Water and Sanitation
for Upper Primary

Water and Sanitation Reader

The Magic Waterman

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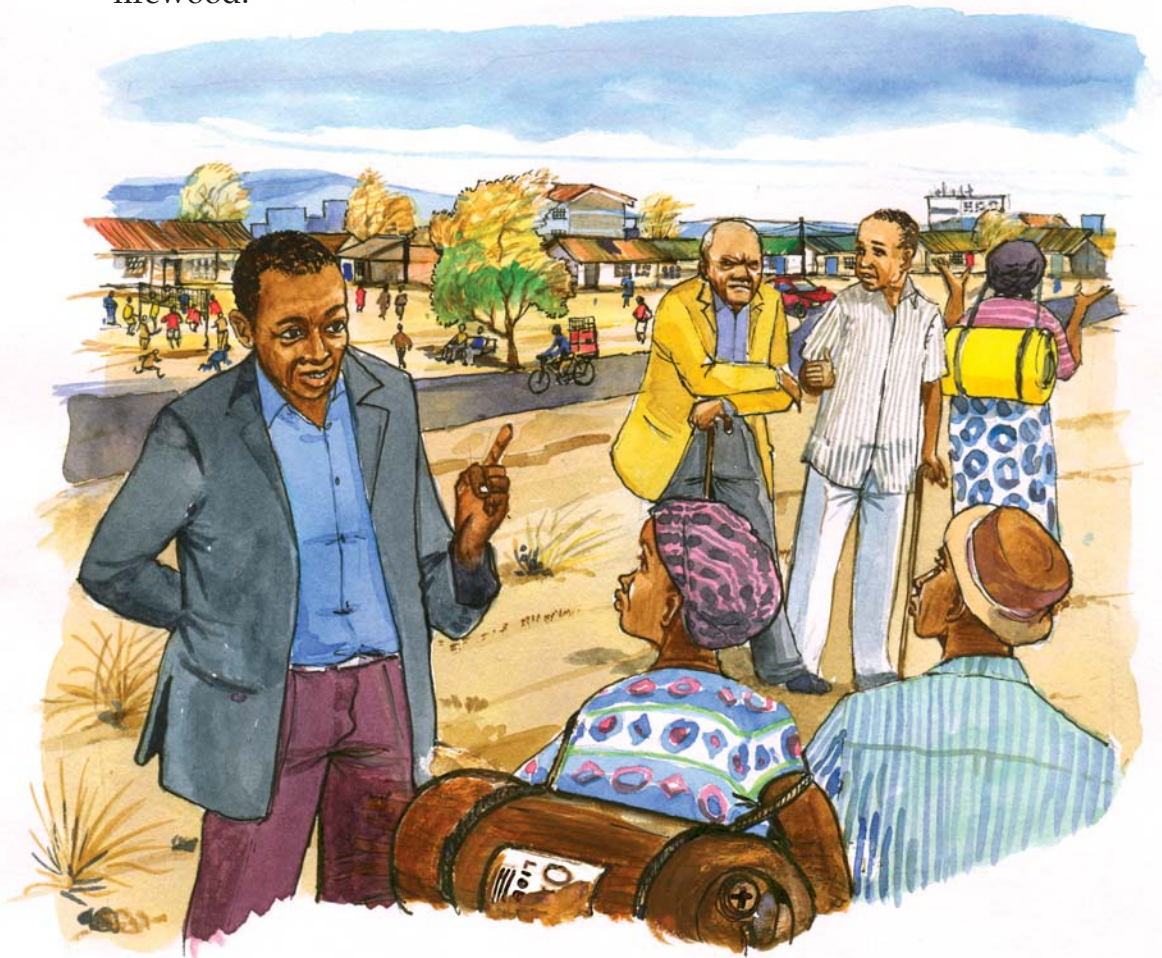
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For the first time, it was very dry in the small township of Mwamba. Rains had failed to come. It was also dreadfully windy and dusty because people had cut down all the trees to make charcoal and firewood.



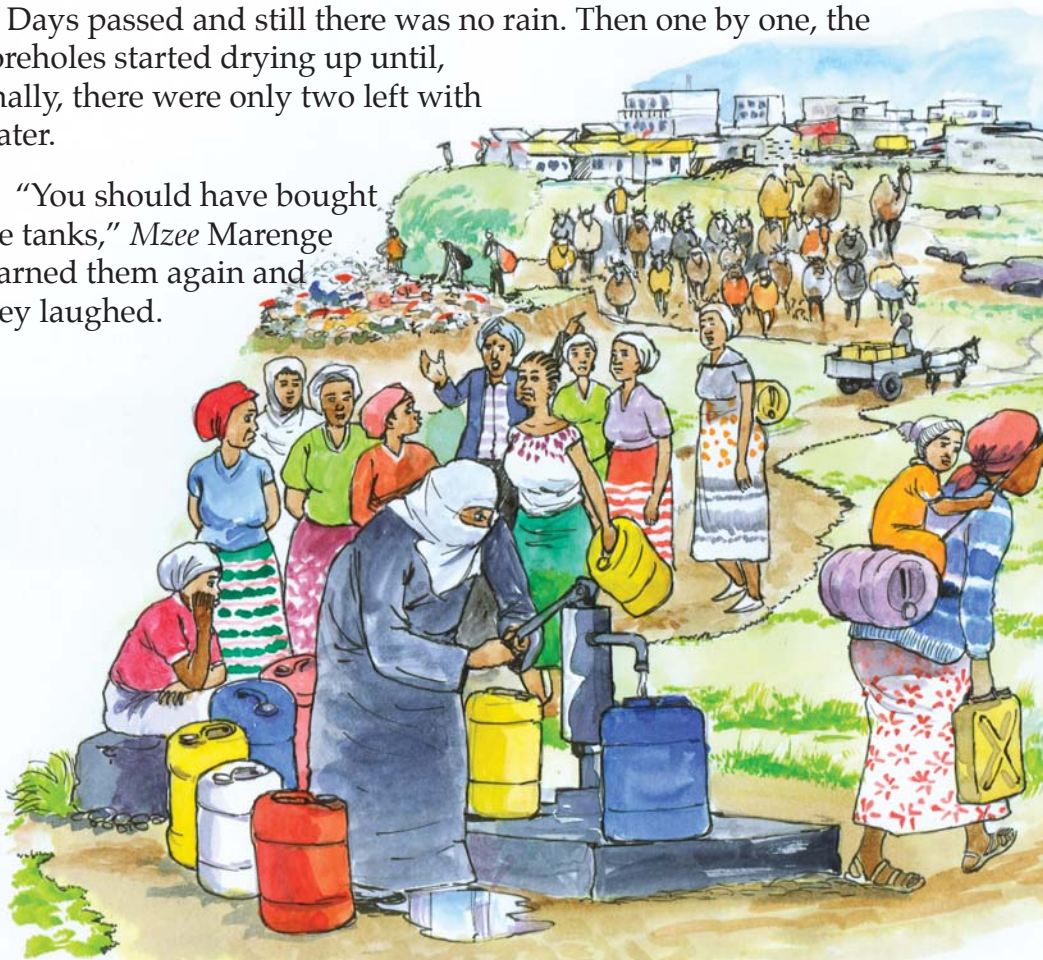
“You should have tanks to collect the rainwater,” Mzee Marengé told the people but they laughed.

“Mzee Marengé, you wasted your money just to buy a silly tank when there are boreholes with all the water you need? That was not very clever,” they told him.

The dry weather continued, but luckily, there were several boreholes in Mwamba, and water was in plenty. People used it in any way they wanted, because it was free.

Days passed and still there was no rain. Then one by one, the boreholes started drying up until, finally, there were only two left with water.

“You should have bought the tanks,” Mzee Marengé warned them again and they laughed.



“Relax, *Mzee* Marengé. You’re just nervous. The rain is coming soon. You wait and see.”

But there was no rain to be seen anywhere.

Then one of the boreholes dried up, and there was only one left. The Chief called an urgent meeting.

“We must make sure our last borehole does not dry up before the rains come. From today, no household is allowed to draw more than five jerrycans of water per day,” he announced.

“Only *five* jerrycans?” the people protested. “But that is hardly enough for bathing and cooking!”

“Only five jerrycans, full stop,” the Chief repeated firmly. “If this borehole dries up, you will have to trek many kilometres to look for water. Don’t forget I warned you a long time ago not to cut down trees. Now the land is bare, children are sick because of the dust, and the rain is even embarrassed to come visiting us!”

Nobody laughed. Things were beginning to look very serious.

More weeks passed. Still no rain came. The last borehole was beginning to take long to fill up. The Chief called yet another urgent meeting.

“From now on, no household is allowed more than three jerrycans per day,” he announced.

The people stared at one another horrified. By now, they knew the Chief was right.

“Then, why do you allow some people to get more water than the rest of us?” *Mzee* Pandika accused the Chief.

“*Mzee* Pandika,” the Chief said looking offended, “You know that is not true.”

“We all know someone is getting more water than the rest of us,” *Mzee Pandika* insisted.

“Then tell us who it is,” the Chief demanded, looking angry now.

“I can name him, but I don’t want to make enemies,” said *Mzee Pandika* stubbornly.

Everyone looked at everyone else suspiciously.

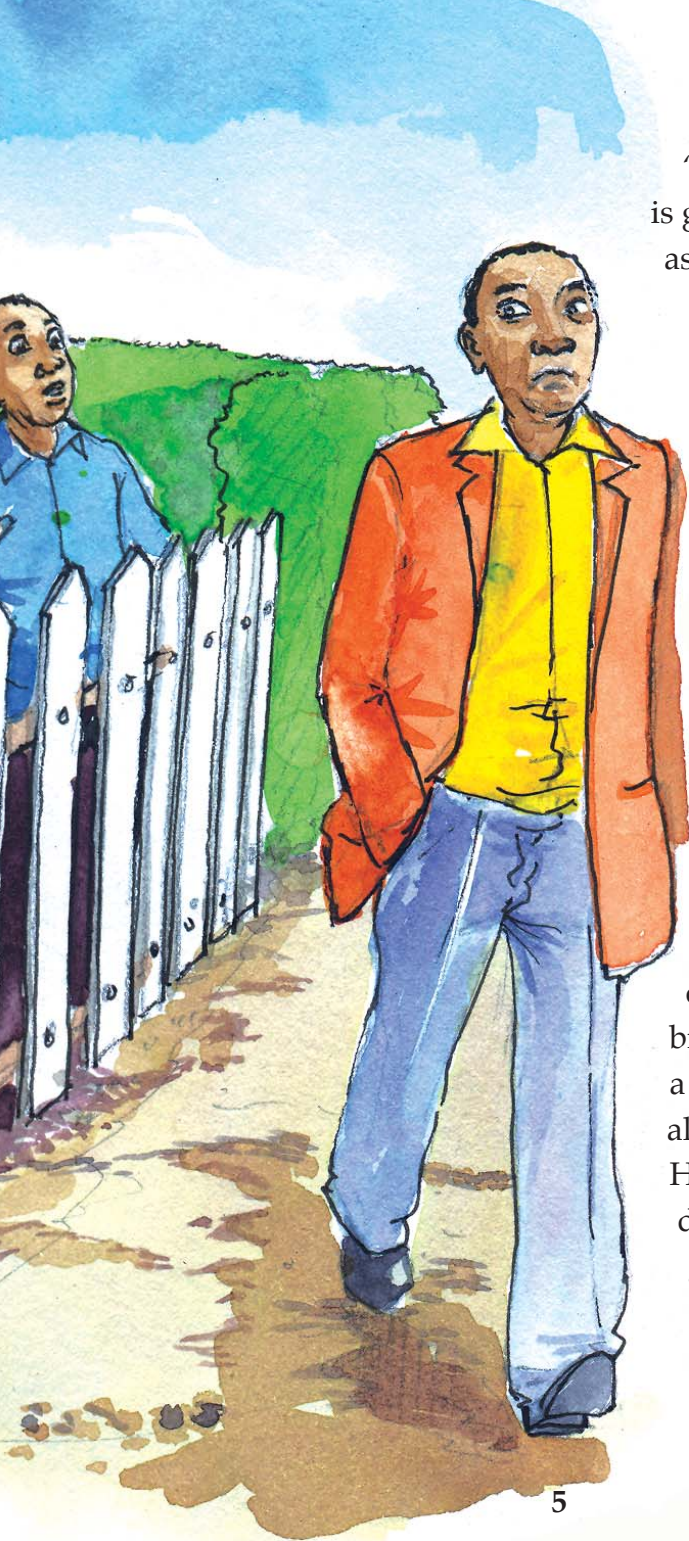
“*Mzee Pandika*,” the Chief said firmly, “you know I don’t allow anyone to draw more water than the rest, not even my beloved wife. But if you happen to see her or anyone else doing so, let us know. Otherwise, don’t accuse people of taking more water than is allowed if you cannot prove it. You have already made us all suspicious of one another, which is bad for our peace.”

Mzee Ponga passed by *Mzee Marengé’s* house later, walking rather fast. *Mzee Marengé* waved and shouted greetings but *Mzee Ponga* walked on as if he had gone suddenly deaf and blind.

“*Ayo-weh!*” *Mzee Marengé* whispered. What was wrong with his friend? Then some ten minutes later, *Mzee Pandika* passed by, also walking unusually fast. *Mzee Pandika* was his best friend. *Mzee Marengé* waved at him cheerfully, asking how his family was.

Mzee Pandika walked on as if he too had become suddenly deaf and blind.





"*Aiyewe, mama yoo!* What is going on?" Mzee Marengé asked himself loudly, "No one wants to speak to me, or even look at me!"

Still wondering, he took a *panga* and walked towards his neat little *shamba* on which he grew some crops. Seeing his nice crops helped him to forget his troubles and feel more cheerful.

He walked around checking the crops. The carrots, tomatoes and cabbages seemed much bigger than they did only a few days ago. They were almost ready for the market. He bent down and started digging out some weeds growing between the crops.



“Baba Epesi!” someone shouted. It was his beautiful wife.

“I am here in the *shamba*” he shouted back at her.

“How was the market?” he asked when she came close.

She did not reply. She was frowning. He looked at her and saw that she was very worried.

“What happened?” he asked quickly.

"I don't know what is going on," she said fearfully. "I went to the market and nobody would speak to me. Nobody wanted to buy my milk either."

*Mzee Mareng*e leaned against the cowshed worriedly.

"Something strange happened to me too just a few minutes ago," he told her quietly.

She stared at him looking even more frightened.

"You know *Mzee Ponga*?" he asked and she nodded. *Mzee Ponga* and *Mzee Mareng*e had been friends since they were little boys.

"And *Mzee Pandika*?"

She nodded again. *Mzee Pandika* and her husband were even greater friends.

"The two passed by the house one after the other. I greeted them but they would not even look at me," *Mzee Mareng*e said. "Something wrong has happened."

"Yes, something is wrong, but we don't know what it is. All of a sudden, nobody wants to speak to us."

"I heard there was a meeting yesterday," *Mzee Mareng*e said. "It is strange that nobody invited us."

"Yes. It is strange. Maybe someone said bad things about us at the meeting," *Mama Epesi* said, looking very afraid.

"Yes. Someone must have," *Mzee Mareng*e agreed, "But what could it be?" he wondered. "We have done nothing wrong to anyone. Do you remember I even gave some vegetables to *Mzee Wangura*'s poor family last week?"

Mama Epesi nodded. "I remember. And I also gave *Mama*

Ngongu some milk for her little child. She is one of the women who would not even look at me this morning.”

“I will go to the Chief. Perhaps he knows what is going on.”
Mzee Marenge said.

Mzee Marenge walked through a dusty road, coughing as the dusty wind blew into his face. He passed several little houses. They all had dusty compounds, and the flowers and the lawns were dry.

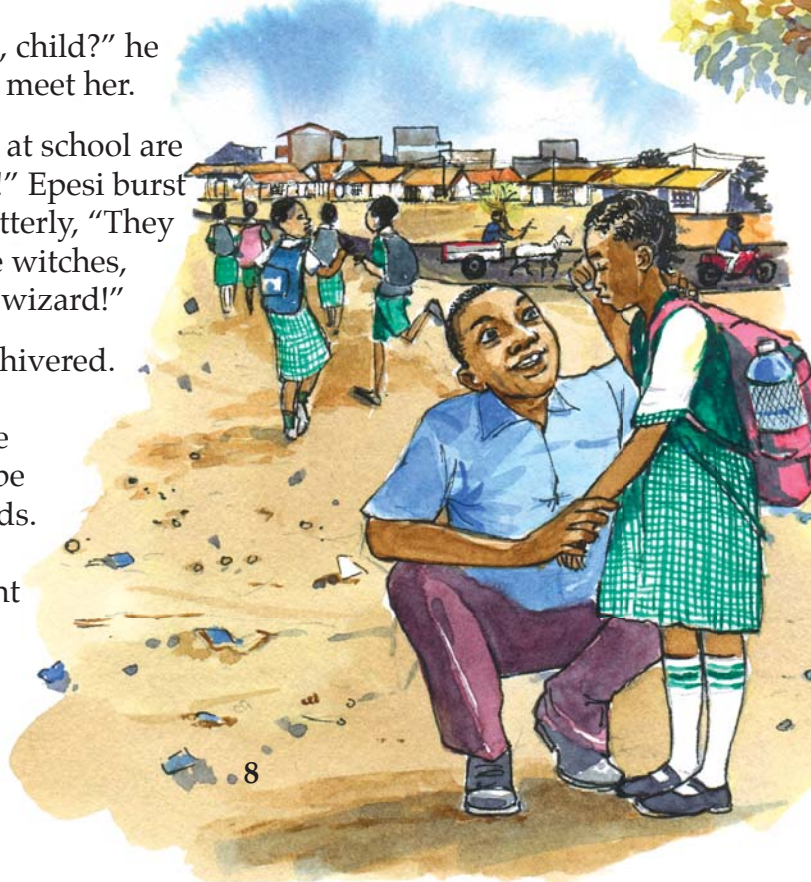
“If only people took care of the environment. Then there would be less dust,” he thought.

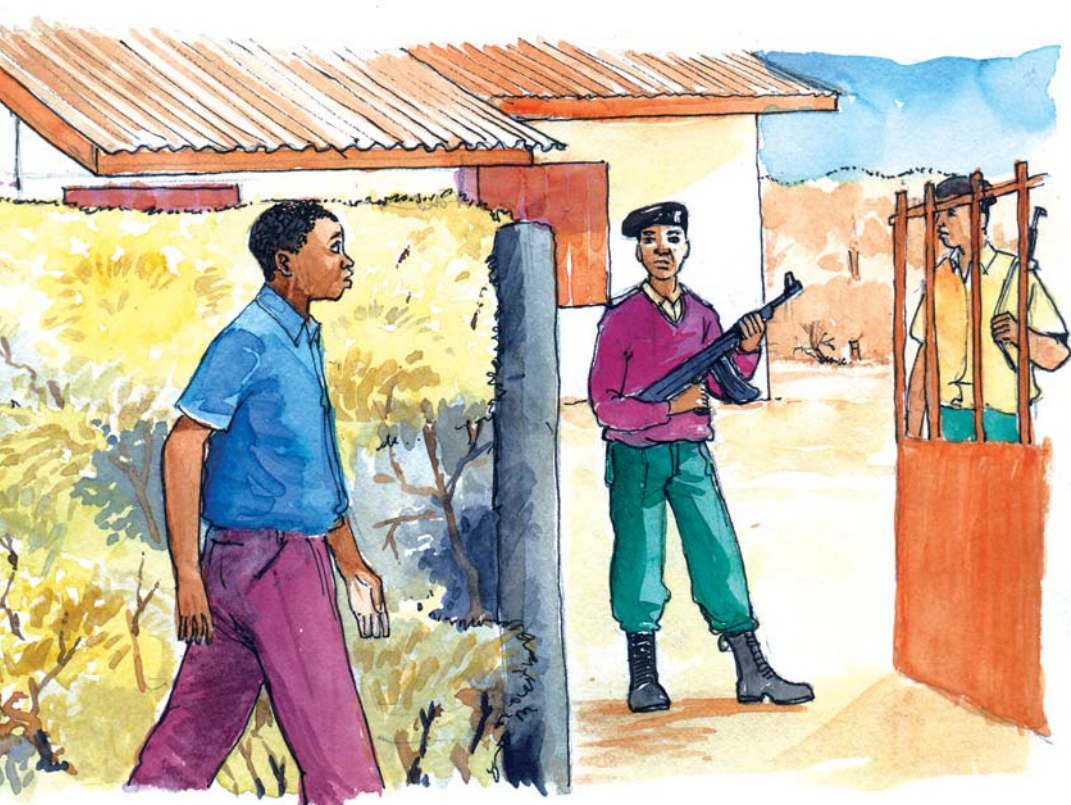
He passed several people on the way but none of them even looked at him. Then he saw Epesi coming from school and gasped. She was crying.

“What is wrong, child?” he asked, hurrying to meet her.

“Other children at school are calling me a witch!” Epesi burst out crying more bitterly, “They say *mama* and I are witches, and that you are a wizard!”

Mzee Marenge shivered. He knew what the people did to those they suspected to be witches and wizards. They locked them in houses and burnt them!





“Everything will be alright, Epesi. I am going to talk to the Chief about it. You go on home and tell your mother to make a nice cup of tea with plenty of milk for you,” he told her gently.

Epesi nodded, sniffing away the tears and hurrying home.

“A witch!” a child shouted, and Epesi started crying again.

*Mzee Mareng*e arrived at the Chief’s house. Two policemen were guarding the gate. The two were holding big guns. They called the Chief telling him he had a visitor.

“How are you *Mzee Mareng*e?” the Chief asked, shaking *Mzee Mareng*e’s hand and leading him into his big house. “Edith,” he called, “our old friend, *Mzee Mareng*e is here.”

The Chief's wife came. She was short and plump, and very jolly.

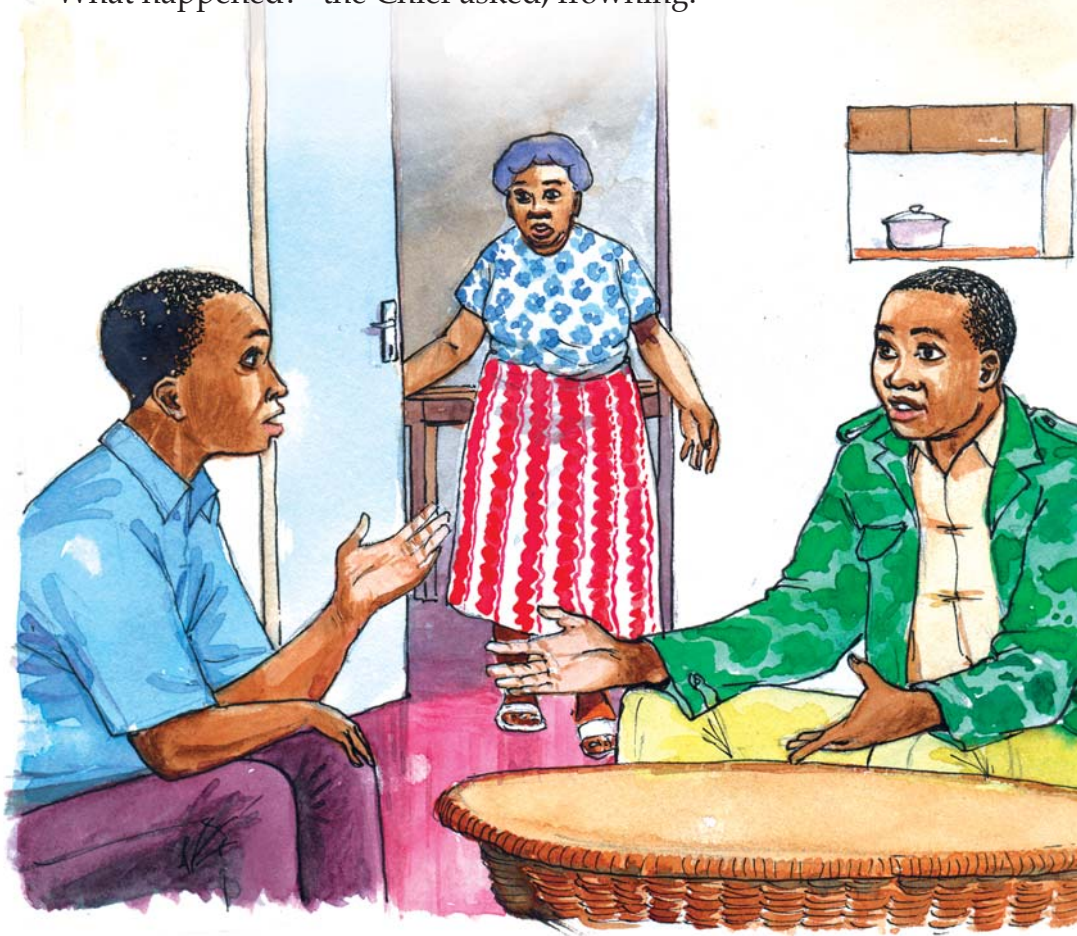
"How is your family?" she asked.

Mzee Marenghe sighed.

"I hope they are fine," she said worriedly, looking at his face.

"I wish I could say we are fine, but we're all very worried," Mzee Marenghe replied.

"What happened?" the Chief asked, frowning.



Mzee Marengé told them how people were suddenly avoiding him and his family. "Even children at school are calling Epesi a witch," he sighed.

"What a cruel thing," the Chief's wife sighed as well. Then she got up and went into the kitchen to make some tea.

"I heard there was a meeting yesterday," *Mzee* Marengé told the Chief. "I was not invited."

"I wasn't either," the Chief said angrily, "I only heard about it later, yet I am the Chief."

"They must have been discussing me and my family," *Mzee* Marengé went on.

"Yes, they were," the Chief said, "That is why you were not invited. And because they know we're friends, they didn't invite me either."

"But what have I and my family done wrong?" *Mzee* Marengé asked hopelessly.

"You remember someone accusing someone else of taking more water than others?" the Chief asked.

Mzee Marengé nodded. "Yes. That was *Mzee* Pandika."

"He meant you," the Chief said quietly, "He is the one who arranged the meeting."

Mzee Marengé gasped. "But he is my best friend!"

"A very dangerous friend indeed," the Chief remarked.

Mzee Marengé remembered how *Mzee* Pandika had passed by ignoring his greetings. Yes, it had to be *Mzee* Pandika.

"No one has seen you taking more than the allowed number

of jerrycans," the Chief continued, "so *Mzee* Pandika has come up with another lie. He is telling people that you are a wizard."

"But why would he do this to me?" *Mzee* Marenge asked, staring at the wall.

"He has no water and you seem to have plenty of it. Your daughter is healthy while the other children are falling sick. In short, he is simply jealous of you," the Chief said.

"Yes," the Chief's wife said as she came back from the kitchen with some tea, "*Mzee* Marenge is doing very well. I'm sure *Mzee* Pandika is not the only one who is jealous."

Everyone sipped at their tea thoughtfully. Then, the Chief's wife spoke again. "No wonder everyone believed it when *Mzee* Pandika said you use witchcraft."

"Frankly," the Chief added, "it's hard for anyone to understand how you can cook, wash, and even do some farming with only three jerrycans of water per day. Unless..."

Mzee Marenge nearly choked on his tea.

"You too are suspecting me to be a wizard?" he asked, staring at him.

"No, no, of course not," he said quickly, looking away, rather ashamed.

Mzee Marenge sighed. He could see neither of them believed him. He started to get up.

"You are my friend, *Mzee* Marenge," the Chief said, "I want to help you, but be honest with me. How do you do it?"

Mzee Marenge sank down into the seat again. "To tell the truth, we don't even go for the borehole water everyday."

“What!” the Chief and his wife exclaimed. They leaned back away and stared at *Mzee Mareng*e suspiciously. “My friend,” he sighed, “this is getting very serious. No one understands how you wash your clothes, bathe, cook, water your crops with only three jerrycans of water per day,” the Chief said. “And now you’re telling us you don’t even need the water from the borehole?”

“I have a tank and a gutter to collect rainwater!” he protested, “I have enough water from the rain!”

The Chief felt his chin and sighed again.

“You are in deep trouble, my friend.”

“Stop saying that!” *Mzee Mareng*e yelled desperately, “I can’t stand it!”



“What do you mean I’m in trouble?” Mzee Marengé whispered, “I just told you I have a tank to collect rainwater!”

The Chief and his wife eyed him suspiciously.

“But when was the last time it rained?” the Chief asked.

“Don’t tell us your tank never gets empty even after watering the crops unless...” the wife added.

“You mean unless I am a wizard?” Mzee Marengé asked angrily. “To tell you the truth, my tank is still half-full, and I am *not* a wizard!”

“*Half-full?*” the Chief and his wife whispered, looking at each other fearfully. “How?”

“It’s the way we do it,” Mzee Marengé said.

“The way you do it?” they chorused, backing away from him, their eyes wide open.

“You mean you have some sort of er... magic?” the wife whispered, leaning forward carefully. She was staring at the door ready to dash for the policemen.

“It’s *not* magic!” Mzee Marengé roared again.

Mzee Marengé leaned back sighing tiredly. “Perhaps what I should do is to show you how we use our water.”

“Yes,” the Chief and his wife said, both of them looking relieved. “Then we can convince the people that you are not a wizard.”

They walked on a footpath, coughing each time the dusty wind blew into their faces. They could see faces peering at them through the windows, some angrily, others terrified. Then someone shouted.

“Chief, where are you taking that wizard?”

“We should burn him!” shouted another one.

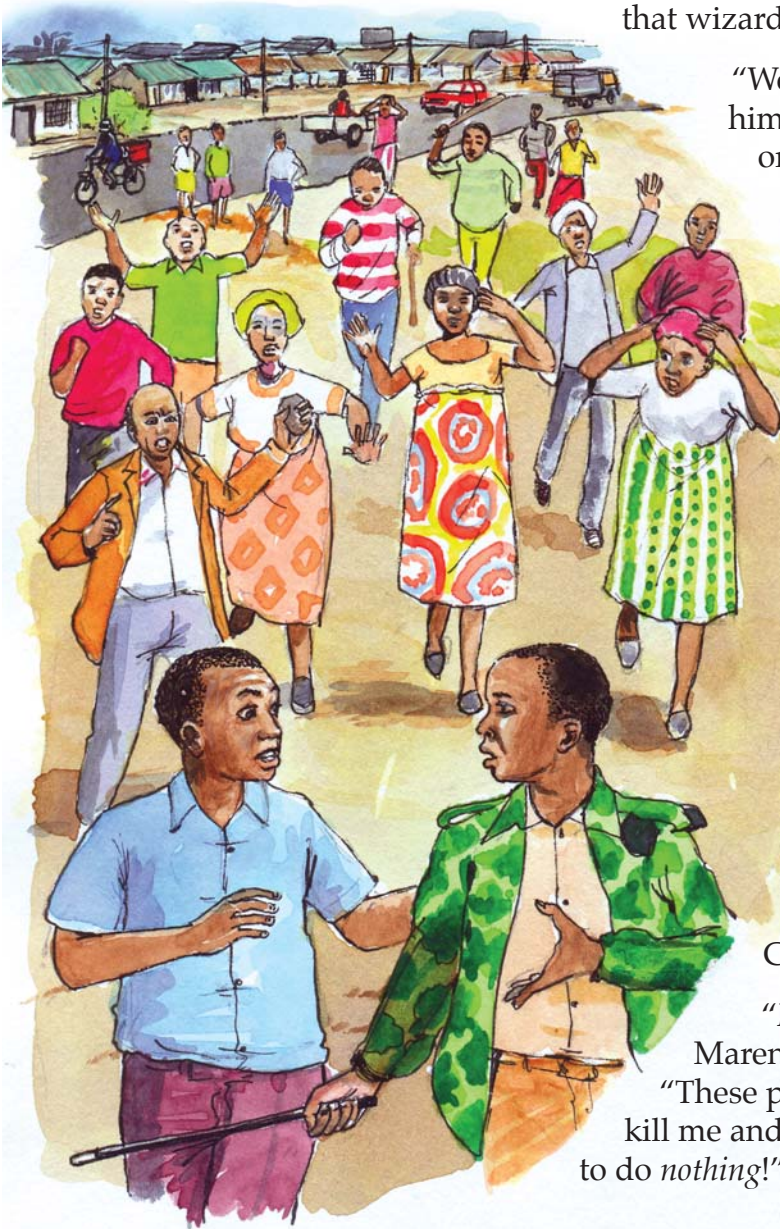
“We should burn him together with his wife and child!” shouted yet another one.

“What do we do, Chief?” Mzee Marengé asked, staring at the dangerous crowd rushing towards them.

“Nothing,” the Chief said calmly.

“Nothing?” Mzee Marengé screamed.

“These people are going to kill me and you’re telling me to do *nothing!*”





“Let them come,” the Chief said calmly again, “Now you have a chance to show them how you use your water so cleverly.”

Then the Chief sighed and said, “I really hope you’ll be able to convince them.”

As the noisy crowd surrounded them, the Chief raised his hand and there was silence immediately.

“Yesterday,” he said angrily, “someone called for a meeting without my permission. And he did not have enough respect to invite me!”

Mzee Pandika took out a handkerchief and wiped his face. He was suddenly looking very uncomfortable.

The Chief went on, "That person accused *Mzee Mareng*e of being a wizard even though he didn't have any proof. We all know *Mzee Mareng*e. He is a respected man here. We all know how kind he and his family are."

Several people nodded. It was true that *Mzee Mareng*e and his wife were kind. They always gave food to poor families.

The Chief continued.

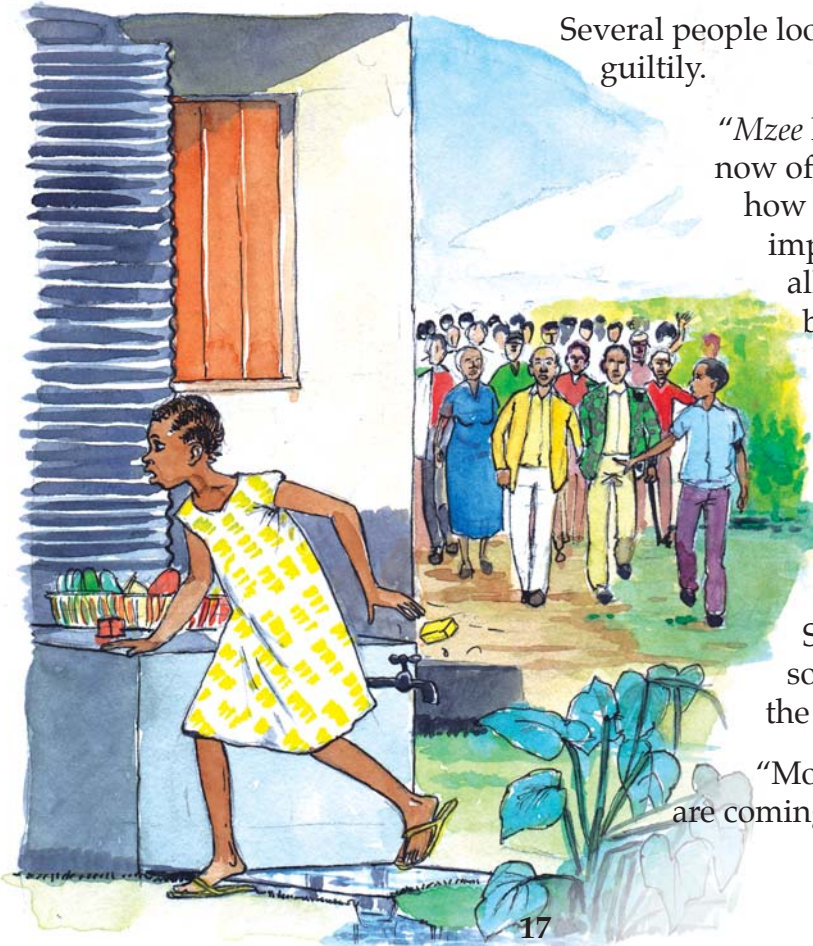
"*Mzee Mareng*e has used his water wisely, but instead of asking him to show us how he does it, we have chosen to be jealous."

Several people looked away guiltily.

"*Mzee Mareng*e has now offered to show us how to do it, and it is important that we all learn from him before our last borehole goes totally dry."

Epesi saw the huge crowd while outside washing dishes. She dropped the soap and ran into the house terrified.

"Mother! The people are coming!"



Her mother ran to the window and looked out. A big cloud of dust was rising into the sky, and she could see many people.

“My God!” she wailed, “they are coming to burn us! Perhaps, they have already killed my husband!”

Then she saw *Mzee* Marengé and sighed in relief. He was walking ahead with the Chief chatting, and he was even smiling.

“It’s okay, Epesi,” she assured her daughter, “They are not going to harm us.”

“Sure, mum?” Epesi asked fearfully.

“Yes, I am sure, dear.”

Epesi crawled out from under the bed and joined her mother at the window. The compound was full of people.

“*Mama* Epesi,” her husband called, “we have visitors!”

Epesi and her mother walked outside and stared at the whole crowd gathered there. *Mzee* Marengé explained that the people had come to learn how to use water carefully.

“I notice you were washing the dishes,” he told Epesi.

Epesi nodded shyly.

“Please go on. Show us how you do it.”

Epesi continued washing the dishes, selecting the cleanest ones first and washing them in soapy water. Then she rinsed them in another basin of clean water and placed them on a clean tray. She took dirtier ones and did the same until all the dishes were clean. Everyone was surprised to see how little water she had used.

“I do the same with dirty clothes,” she told them, “I always wash the cleaner ones first, then the rest.”

“You poured the soapy water and kept the one for rinsing?” a woman asked.

“I use the rinsing water to wash the house floor,” Epesi told her.

“Well done Epesi,” the Chief’s wife said, smiling at her.

“I still don’t believe one can do all those other things using only three jerrycans,” someone said. He was still looking suspicious.

“I’ll show you,” *Mzee Mareng*e said, walking to the back of the house where there was a big tank.

“By now it must be empty! It’s many months since it last rained!” someone shouted.

“It’s not,” *Mzee Mareng*e said quietly. “I still have about half a tank left.”

“Half a tank!” everyone exclaimed. “He is cheating!” someone growled. It was *Mzee Pandika*.

“Prove it,” *Mzee Mareng*e pointed at *Mzee Pandika*.

Mzee Pandika rushed forward and turned the tap on angrily. A jet of cool water rushed out, and he was surprised. A few children rushed to wash their dirty hands and to drink the cool water.

“That’s not the way to do it!” Epesi told them, “Use soap. If you wash your hands and dishes properly with soap, you will not fall sick with stomach aches.”

The children picked a bar of soap next to the tank and started soaping their hands.

“Don’t keep the tap running while you’re soaping your hands!”

Epesi told them. The children turned off the tap and rubbed the dirt off thoroughly with both hands. When the dirt was all off, Epesi turned on the water again, just enough for them to rinse off the soap.

“You should do the same thing when washing your body,” Epesi told them. “Wet yourself just enough to soap yourself. Then scrub thoroughly. Then use the water at the end to wash off the soap.”

“Now show us how you keep your garden green without finishing all the water in the tank!” *Mzee Pandika* challenged *Mzee Mareng*e.

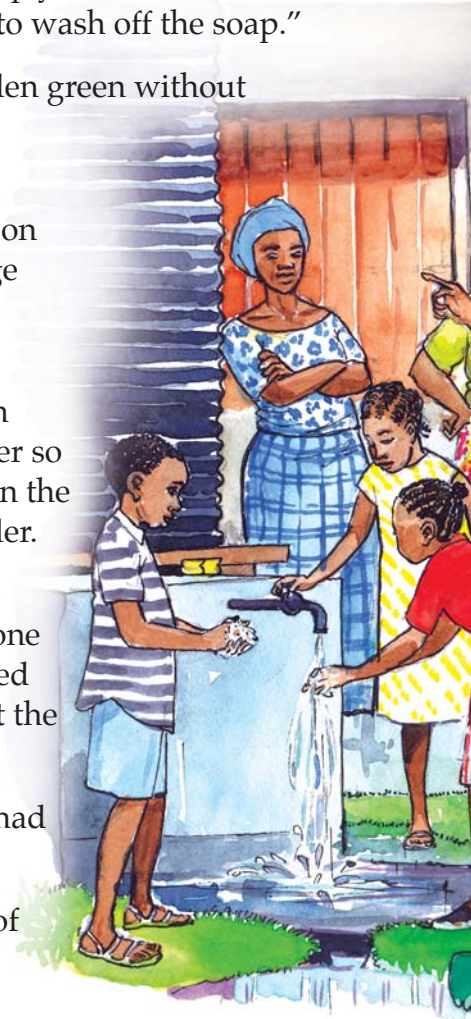
“Then walk carefully without stepping on my crops and I’ll show you,” *Mzee Mareng*e said, smiling.

They went to see the cabbages and the tomatoes first. *Mzee Mareng*e showed them how he watered them with just a little water so that none of it was wasted. He did it only in the evening or early morning when it was cooler.

“I would like to have a tank like that in my house. How much does it cost?” someone asked, and another nodded. They all wanted to have such tanks in their homes to collect the rainwater.

*Mzee Mareng*e told them how much he had paid for his, and they all groaned.

“We can’t afford so much money!” one of them said.



“I will find out if the government can give us loans to buy tanks for each home,” the Chief said, and they nodded gratefully. They could all imagine everyone with a nice green compound. Their homes would look wonderful.

“But even with a tank, you must use the water wisely,” Mzee Marengé reminded them.



“We should thank *Mzee* Marenge and his kind family for showing us how to use water properly,” the Chief said, and everyone clapped.

