



Lost in the forest

Lerato was being naughty that night because Ma would not give her more sweets.



“You’ve already brushed your teeth; you can’t have more sweets at this hour.”
said Ma.

Lerato folded her arms.
“I want sweets” she said, angrily.

“I’ve already said no. You will have nightmares if you continue with that attitude,” said Ma.

Furious, Lerato pushed all her Teddy bears away as she climbed into her bed and fell asleep in a huff with folded arms.

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The following day, Lerato woke up in the forest. It smelled funny and there were grass and trees everywhere. She could hear sounds of wild animals, but she could not see them.

“Ma, Ma! Where are you?” she screamed. But there was no answer. She was all alone in the forest.

Lerato began crying. She thought about how mean she had been to her mother the night before.

She heard something approaching, and through the undergrowth, a tortoise emerged.

“Do not be afraid. I am Nkulu, the tortoise. I heard you crying. What’s wrong? Are you lost?” asked Nkulu.

“My mother abandoned me,” sobbed Lerato. “I was naughty and she left me here.”

**Nkulu studied Lerato's face, then asked:
"you look so much like Nufi, is she your
mother?"**

**"Yes, that is my mother's name," replied
Lerato, surprised.**

**"Everybody knows Nufi in the Forest. She
is the sweetest human the forest has
ever seen," said Nkulu, smiling.**

"Really?" she asked, returning a smile.

**"I know your mother very well. There is
no way she has abandoned you. Hop on
my shell, we'll find the way to your
house!" said Nkulu.**

**Though tortoises are pretty slow, Nkulu
had to be the fastest one in the forest.
She ran like the wind and Lerato was
enjoying the ride.**

**After a little while, Nkulu got tired and
wished to rest. They both sat down in the
shade of a tree.**

**"Well, well, what do I have here?" said a
menacing voice above them.**

**"It's Zee the leopard," said Nkulu,
scared.**

**“How kind of you to deliver my lunch!”
said Zee with glee, perched on the
branch of a baobab tree, above Nkulu
and Lerato.**

**“You can’t...you can’t eat her. She’s
Nufi’s daughter,” said Nkulu, trembling.**

**“Nufi? Are you sure of what you’re
saying, Nkulu?” growled Zee.**

“Ye...yes,” said Nkulu.

**“If you are really Nufi’s daughter, I will let
you leave. She is the kindest human the
forest has ever seen. But if you’re lying, I
will eat you both, right here, right now.”**

**The leopard added: “if you are her
daughter, you have to sing. Nufi always
sung the best songs to help me sleep.”**

**Singing? That was easy. Her mother sang
to her all the time. Lerato started singing
one of her mother’s favourite songs.
Both Nkulu and Zee were so charmed by
Lerato’s voice that they didn’t want her
to stop.**

**“I am convinced now that you are Nufi’s
daughter, I will let you both be on your
way,” said Zee.**

“Who gave you permission to drink my water?” snapped Moktar.

“Apologies, Moktar. We were thirsty,” replied Nkulu.

“This young girl looks familiar. Who is she?” asked Moktar.

“My name is Lerato, I am Nufi’s daughter,” replied Lerato.

“Nufi? Be careful young lady! She’s the most precious human the forest has ever seen,” said Moktar.

“She’s telling the truth,” said Nkulu.

“Well, she will have to prove it! Nufi used to be such a great dancer. She could move to any tune. Lerato, let’s see if you are who you claim to be.”

Dancing? That was easy. Lerato and her mother danced together all the time. They could dance to any type of music.



Nkulu found some sticks and a stone to play the drums. Lerato recreated some of the dance moves that her mother had showed her. She was dancing so well that Moktar came out of the water to copy her moves.

Moktar was pleased. He wished them well and let them be on their way.

Lerato and Nkulu kept on marching until they were hungry. Nkulu spotted a tree that had the juiciest fruits in the forest. Lerato wanted to try. As she reached out to grab one, she heard a voice: “Who are you? And why are you stealing our fruits?”

A giant gorilla came down from the tree.

“Harambee, we are sorry to disturb your peace. We were just hungry,” said Nkulu.

“This does not mean that you must steal from me,” boomed Harambee the gorilla.

“Lerato is looking for her mother, Nufi and we have been travelling for so long,” said Nkulu.

“Are you Nufi’s daughter? She’s the most beautiful human the forest has ever seen” said Harambee. “I need to make sure that you’re not lying.”

“What do you want me to do?” asked Lerato.

“Nufi used to juggle these fruits to entertain my children. They have been bored lately. Show me what you can do.”

Juggling? That was easy. Her mother had shown her tricks to juggle anything. Lerato took two fruits, juggled them, then added another one, and another and another. All of Harambee’s children came out to witness Lerato’s tricks. They all applauded as they had never seen somebody juggling so many fruits before.

Harambee was satisfied. He offered them more fruits and let them be on their way.

Lerato and Nkulu kept on marching through the forest asking birds, monkeys and rabbits how they could find their way to Nufi's home. Nobody knew but they all wished them well.

“Everybody loves my mother. They all wish they could be with them all the time like me. I was so mean to her,” said Lerato, sadly.

“It's not your fault. I am sure Nufi will be so happy to see you when you return. You need to rest now. Tomorrow, we will continue walking,” said Nkulu.

Lerato opened her teary eyes. She was back in her bedroom and it was the morning. Her mother opened the door.

“Did you have a bad dream, my princess?” asked her mother.



“I thought you abandoned me in the forest,” said Lerato, through teary eyes

“I will never do that! Even if you get lost, the love that I have for you will always find a way to bring you back,” said her mother, as she took her in her arms.

“I love you Ma,” said Lerato.

“I love you my princess,” replied her mother.

The love of your mother will always help you find your way home, even when you think you’re lost.



THE END



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