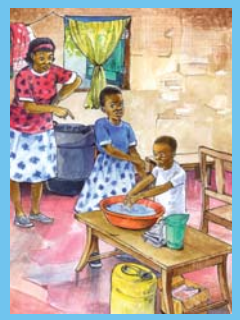
Aunt Pilipili

Mr. and Mrs. Ambache travel and leave their young children in the hands of their aunt, Pilipili. The two young chidren, Ambere and Ndiso, at first dread their Aunt. They find her strict and forbidding. Everything seems to be taboo until they find out that actually… their Aunt isn't as bad as they thought she was.

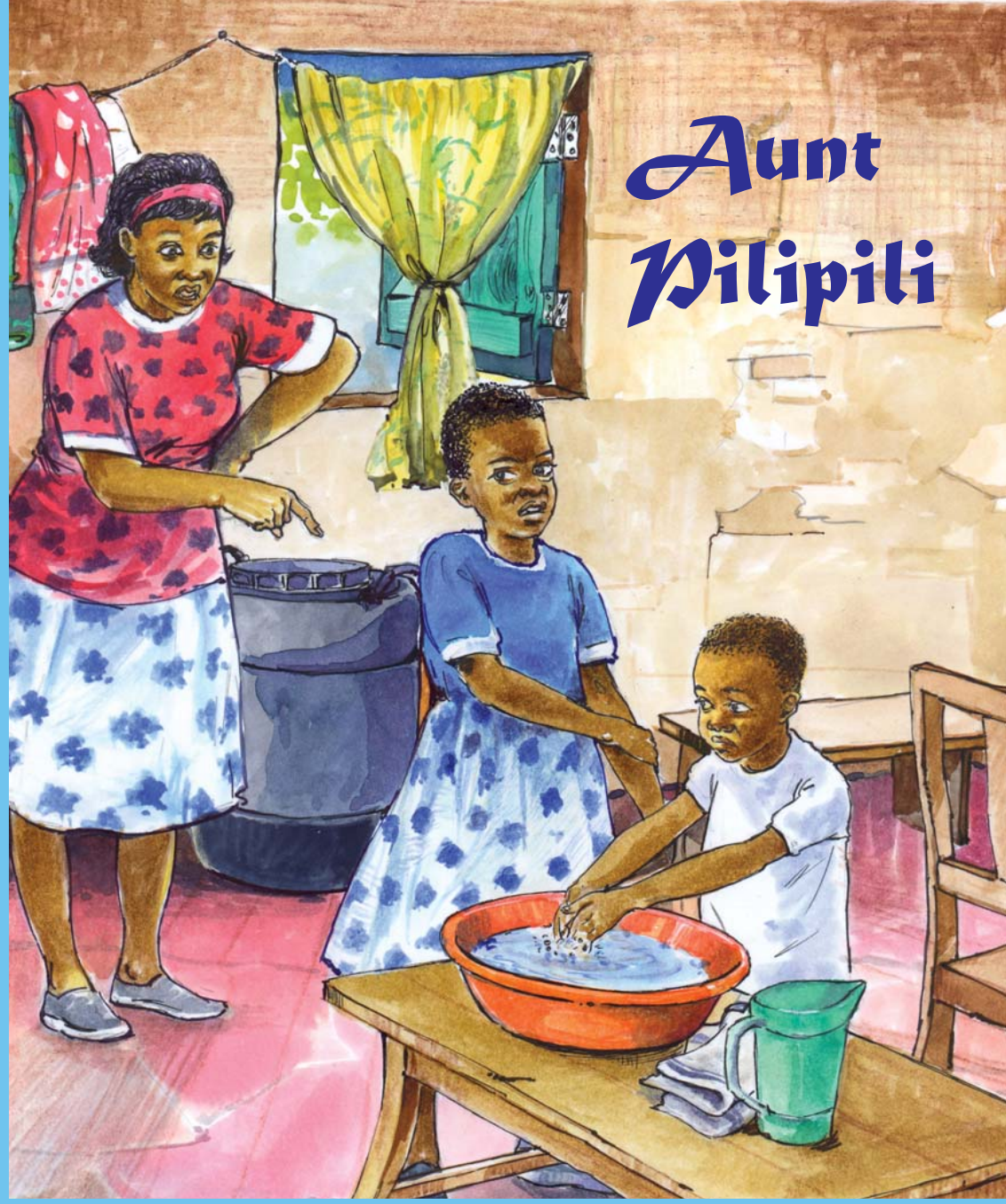


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The bus came, Mr. and Mrs. Ambache got in. They were going to visit Mrs. Ambache's sick mother in another town. They would be there for three weeks.

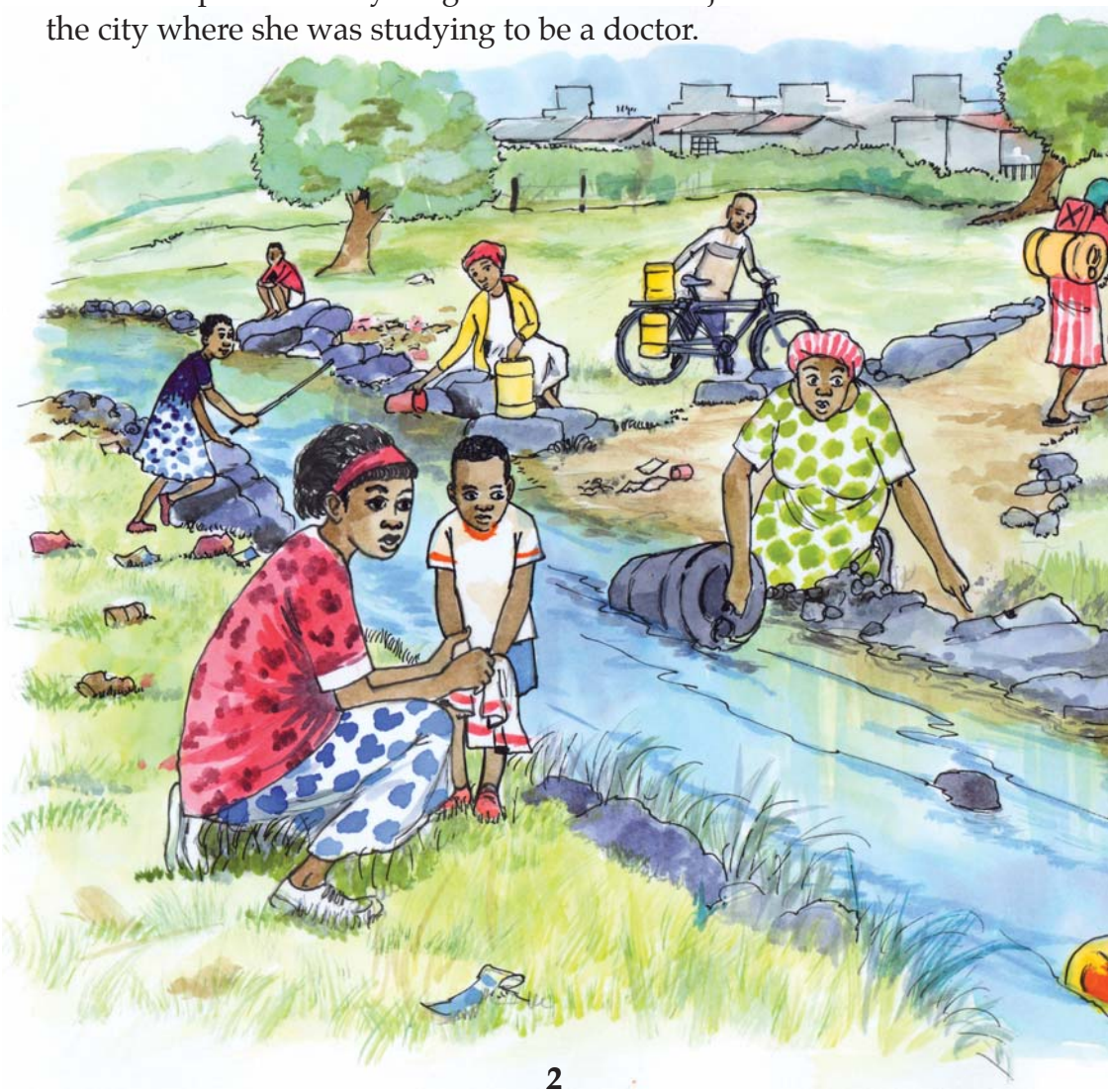
"Well, bye bye and be good," they both said, trying to look cheerful, but they were sad to be leaving their young children.



Ambere, the girl, was aged seven, and Ndiso, the boy, was aged only two and a half.

"Bye bye mum and dad!" Ambere and Ndiso said, waving back.

"Don't give Aunt Pilipili any trouble, okay?" Mrs. Ambache added. Pilipili was her younger sister who had just arrived from the city where she was studying to be a doctor.

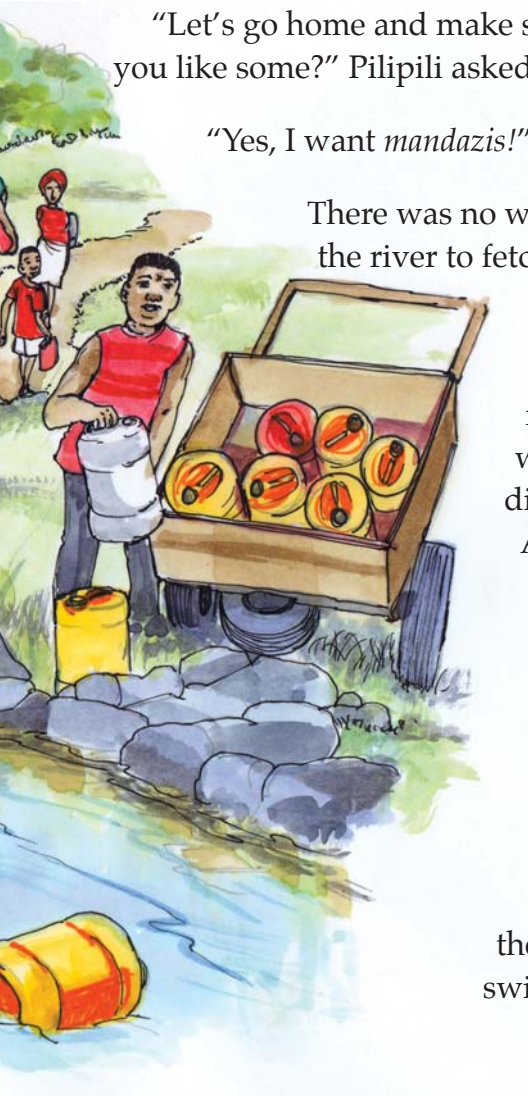


"Yes, mummy!" the children said. Mr. and Mrs. Ambache waved to Pilipili and the children as the bus started moving until it disappeared down the dusty road.

The children watched the bus disappearing down the road and felt sad. Ndiso looked as if he might even start crying.

"Let's go home and make some nice tea and *mandazis*. Would you like some?" Pilipili asked, and Ndiso's face turned happy.

"Yes, I want *mandazis!*" he said excitedly.



There was no water in the house. Pilipili had to go to the river to fetch some.

She took two jerrycans and started walking to the river. Then she remembered how Ndiso liked playing with dangerous things, even with the dirty mud. She decided to take him and Ambere with her.

There were many people drawing water at the river and carrying it home in buckets and jerrycans. Pilipili looked at the dirty river water worriedly. She would have to make sure she boiled it before drinking.

As Pilipili scooped water into the jerrycans, Ambere saw tadpoles swimming at the edge of the river. She

left little Ndiso alone and took a stick. She started scaring the tadpoles by beating the water. She enjoyed seeing them rushing away in alarm. Because he was now free, little Ndiso also ran happily to the edge of the water. He felt thirsty. He started scooping some water to drink.

"Watch the child! He's going to fall into the river!" someone shouted.

Pilipili dropped the jerrycan and grabbed him. She wiped his hands dry and told him not to drink the dirty water.

Someone else shouted. The jerrycan was floating away down the river! Another person leaned forward and grabbed it before it had gone too far.

"What a careless young woman!" someone else said, giving Pilipili an ugly look. Pilipili was hurt, but she said nothing. Little Ndiso had scared her so badly that she was still breathless.

Pilipili walked slowly back to the house with the children because the jerrycans were heavy. She went to the kitchen to start a fire. Mr. and Mrs. Ambache used a *jiko* to cook their food.

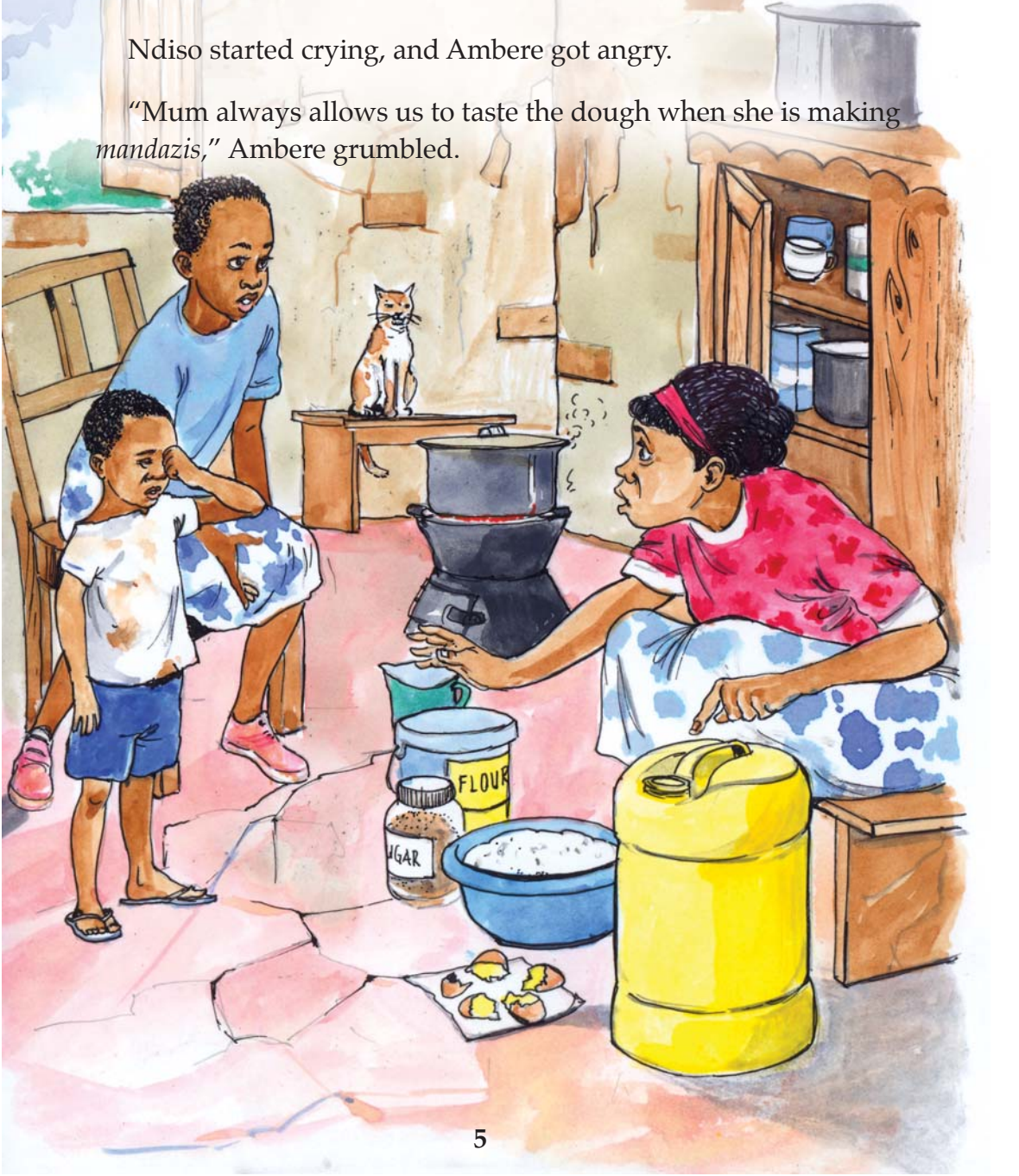
When the *jiko* was ready, she put a pot of water on it to make tea. Then, while waiting for the water to boil, she started beating some eggs in a bowl, adding some sugar, some flour, a little baking powder, and then water.

Ambere and Ndiso wanted to taste some. Ndiso tried to put his hand into the bowl to lick the sugary flour but Pilipili stopped him.

"You can't eat it uncooked like that!" she told them.

Ndiso started crying, and Ambere got angry.

"Mum always allows us to taste the dough when she is making *mandazis*," Ambere grumbled.



"The river water I have used for making the dough can make you sick," Pilipili warned her. "Wait until the *mandazis* are cooked. Then all the germs will be killed by the heat."

Ambere did not know what germs were. She thought Pilipili was just being mean.

"Mother always allows us to taste food while she is cooking, and we don't fall sick," Ambere went on grumbling.

It started raining, and soon, it was falling so hard and so loudly that even Ndiso became scared and stopped crying. He fell fast asleep in Ambere's arms.

The tea was finally ready. Pilipili put the baby on the couch and gave some tea to Ambere.

"We will let Ndiso sleep some more," Pilipili said, knowing babies need a lot of sleep.

She put on a frying pan and started cooking the *mandazis* and Ambere watched as the *mandazis* turned bigger and bigger, and more and more brown until they were properly cooked. She could hardly wait to eat one.

Pilipili put the *mandazis* in a clean plate to cool, and as soon as Ambere thought they were cool enough to hold, she reached for one of them but Pilipili stopped her.

"No. Go and wash your hands first!"

"Why?" Ambere demanded, her face turning gloomy.

"Because you can get sick eating with dirty hands," Pilipili said.

Sulking, Ambere went to a basin of water and dipped her hands. Then she wiped them on her dirty dress.

"Ambere, that is not the correct way of washing your hands!" Pilipili warned. "You should wash them properly using soap to get rid of all the germs."

"But my hands are clean now! See?" She said angrily.

Pilipili shook her head, smiling.

"No, Ambere," she said gently, "they look clean, but they are not clean. Those little things called germs are crawling all over them."

Shocked, Ambere shook her hands, then stared at them closely. There was nothing. Her hands looked very clean.

"You are cheating!" she said angrily.

"I'm not cheating," Pilipili told her. "Germs are too tiny to see, but some of them are very dangerous. One day, when you're older, you'll be able to see them at school using something called a microscope."

"You are lying! I don't want your *mandazis*!" Ambere shouted and ran to her bed.

Pilipili continued cooking.

Later, Ndiso woke up rubbing his eyes with his tiny fists. Then he saw the buns and hurried to get out of the couch. Pilipili refused





to let him eat until he washed his dirty hands and he started crying again. She washed his hands and gave him some tea and *mandazis* and he stopped crying.

In the morning, Ambere woke up. She went to see if they had finished all the *mandazis*. She was happy to see a whole big bowl full of them. Pilipili must have been cooking them the whole night.

"Good morning," Pilipili said. She had already made tea.

Ambere was still sulking. She mumbled back "Good morning" then reached for the *mandazis*.

"Brush your teeth first with that water," Pilipili said, pointing at a jug of water which she had boiled the night before.

"Why?" Ambere demanded angrily. Now she was sure her aunt was just punishing her.

"Because there are also germs which spoil teeth if you don't brush," Pilipili told her. "That is why some people have bad breath."

Ambere grumbled, but she was too hungry to protest anymore. She went to brush her teeth, and

Pilipili stood right behind her to make sure she did it properly.

It was now raining everyday, and the river water was becoming muddier and muddier. Pilipili sighed as she walked to the river for more water.

"I will tell Mr. Ambache to buy a tank to collect the rain water from the roof. It will be much safer, and it will save his wife the trouble of walking all the way to the dirty river," she thought.

There were many other women at the river fetching the dirty water. None of them ever thought of boiling it first before using it. They let the mud sink to the bottom, then used the clearer water on the top.

"You should boil it first to kill germs," Pilipili warned them but they laughed.

"Who has all that time?" they demanded.

Then in the second week after the rain had started, many people started having running stomachs and vomiting. Then some of them started dying. Ambere's best friend at school also became sick and died. The doctor said she had caught bad germs because of the dirty water. Ambere cried all that morning.

"Now you see why I kept telling you to wash your hands properly and to drink only boiled water?" Pilipili asked gently.

Ambere nodded tearfully. Her aunt was not mean after all. She was making her wash her hands because she cared.



Later in the day, Pilipili took her and little Ndiso to the shops. She bought fruits and some toys to cheer them up. Then they went home and she showed Ambere how to play a new game called snakes and ladders. They played all afternoon using a carton on which Pilipili had drawn snakes and ladders. It was fun, and little Ndiso thought it was fun too. He kept grabbing the dice, and each time he threw it, they told him he had won some points, and he shrieked in joy.

In the third week, people started falling sick with malaria. Everyone panicked. It seemed this was the end of their town.

After the rain, there were many dirty pools of water. Pilipili knew mosquitoes were laying their eggs there, and that was why there were so many of them at night. She told the women about it but they laughed.

"So what do you want us to do?" they demanded. They were already getting tired of Pilipili.

"Since you don't have chemicals to kill the mosquitoes, you should drain the pools or fill them up with soil," Pilipili advised them. "You should also use mosquito nets at night."

Everyone laughed again at her.

"Go and teach that nonsense to others," they told her.

"She is a witch," someone said. "She is the one who has brought us bad luck. That is why she and those two children are not falling sick like other people."



Soon Pilipili was too afraid to speak to anyone at the river. No one wanted to hear anything she said, and no one wanted to speak to her either. She began to wish Mr. and Mrs. Ambache were back. She wanted to return to her home.

At the beginning of the fourth week, Mrs. Ambache called to say they would have to stay a little longer. Her mother was still unwell, and the doctors had said she needed an operation.

"How is everything?" Mrs. Ambache asked, "Are you having much trouble with the children?"

"Everything is fine, and the children are okay," Pilipili said. "I hope mother gets well soon. Tell her we are praying for her."

"Was that mummy you were talking to?" Ambere asked, and Pilipili nodded.

"Now, shall we go and play?" Pilipili said, "I will teach you another new game."

Ambere cheered. "You are the best aunt in the whole wide world," she told her.

The children were happy, but they did not know Pilipili was sad because she had no one to talk to. Everyone was hostile to her.





Then one morning, there was a knock on the door. Pilipili frowned worriedly. Who could it be?

She went to the door and opened it timidly. The Chief was standing there staring at her. Ambere came and stood behind her aunt and stared at the Chief terrified. Even little Ndiso stopped making noise and started sucking his fat thumb.

"I hear you have been telling people many strange things," the Chief said in a deep voice and Pilipili got afraid. Now she was in deep trouble.

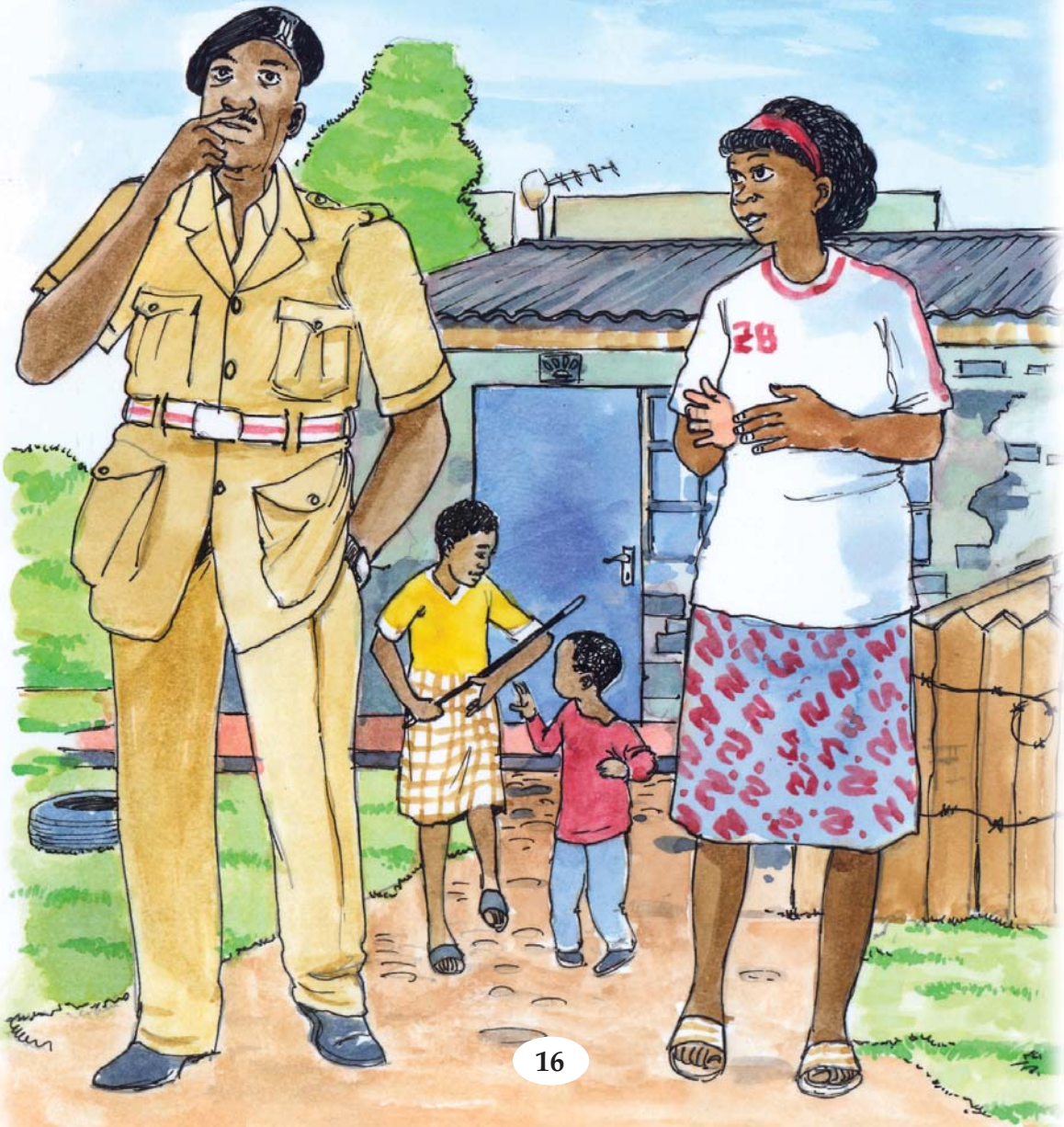
"*Bwana* Chief, I… I was just … advising people to live hygienically," she stammered.

"My people have never heard such things," the Chief told her. "Where did you learn them?"

"I am a medical student," Pilipili said quietly, staring at the ground. "I know why people are falling sick."

The Chief looked impressed.

"If I arrange a meeting, can you teach them these things?" he asked, suddenly smiling.



Pilipili nodded quickly, then frowned worriedly again.

"But they say I am a witch," she said fearfully.

"If they do that again, I will make sure they drink all the dirty river water until it is dry!" the Chief growled dangerously. Then he grinned. "Of course I'm only joking."

Ambere giggled, and Pilipili laughed. Even Baby Ndiso shrieked. Everyone was laughing.

"So what else can you teach the people?" the Chief asked.

"People should have good sanitation," Pilipili told him.

"What is sanitation?" the Chief asked.

"It is making sure they use proper toilets and proper places to dump their rubbish," Pilipili said. She had noticed there were very few toilets in the place. Most people sneaked into the bushes when they wanted to relieve themselves.

"Why do we need toilets?" the Chief asked.

Pilipili told him how human faeces can contain germs which cause dangerous diseases like cholera and dysentry. She told him how rainwater can wash those germs into rivers.

The Chief stared at her, his eyes shinning like marbles.

"So, you think that is how our people have been getting sick?" he asked.





"Definitely," Pilipili said.

"Should I then order everyone not to drink the river water?" the Chief asked worriedly.

"No," Pilipili said. "but they should always kill the germs by boiling the water first."

"Anything else?" the Chief asked, looking even more impressed.

"People also catch germs from the sick if they don't wash their hands properly."

"How?" the Chief asked, staring at her again like a sleepless owl.

"Can you imagine all the things people touch everyday?" Pilipili asked. Pilipili invited the Chief into the house.

As he sat down in the sitting room, the Chief thought of shaking dirty hands of people who have just come from the toilet. He shuddered.

"You are very right, Pilipili. Now tell me more about throwing the rubbish around," he asked.

"Rubbish attracts insects such as flies, and flies carry all sorts of germs from other places. Creatures like rats like hiding in rubbish."

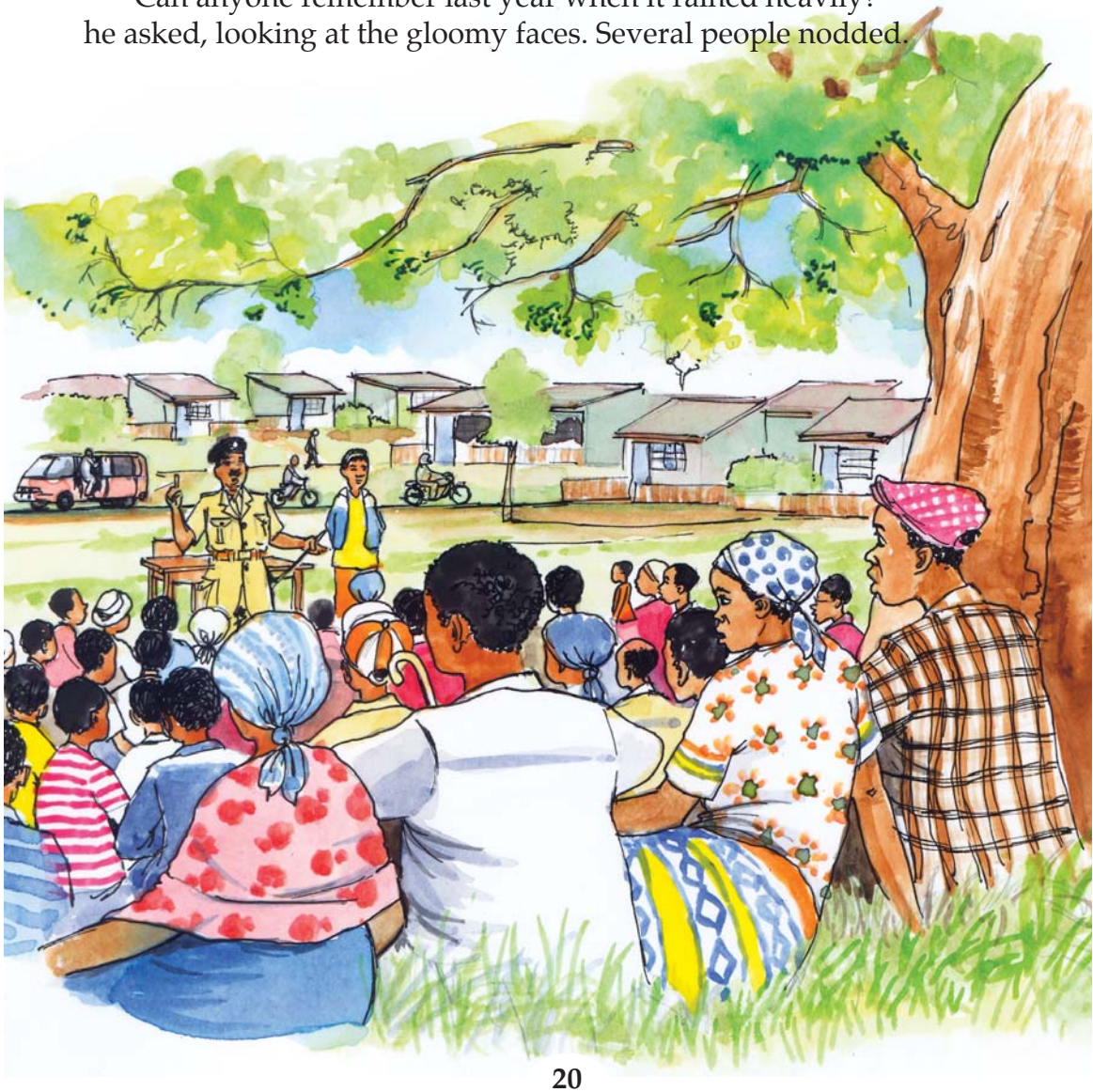
"Well, what's wrong with rats?" the Chief asked.

"Rats can spread diseases such as the plague," Pilipili said, and the Chief stared at her, his eyes now wider than those of a sleepless owl.

"You have given me very useful advice," the Chief said, as he rose to go. "I'll arrange a meeting next week so that you can advise our people about sanitation."

On Friday the following week, everyone gathered in a big field near Mr. Ambache's house. None of the people talked to Pilipili or the two children. They were staring at them as if they really were witches. Then the Chief came and the meeting started.

"Can anyone remember last year when it rained heavily?" he asked, looking at the gloomy faces. Several people nodded.



Everyone remembered those heavy rains.

"Many of our people became sick, and many died," the Chief said.

Everyone nodded again.

"Was this girl here at that time?" the Chief asked pointing at Pilipili. Everyone shook their heads.

"Then why are you calling her a witch?" he demanded, and everyone looked away from his angry eyes.

"Pilipili is training to be a doctor," the Chief went on, "I have asked her to tell us why we have been falling sick."

Everyone stared at Pilipili. They had not known she was going to become a doctor. Most of them were ashamed for calling her a witch.

Pilipili repeated what she had told the Chief, and everyone was very impressed. At the end, they all agreed to build more toilets, and to always boil the river water before they use it for cooking and drinking. They also promised to keep everything clean. Pilipili also advised them to make tanks for collecting rainwater.

"That way, you won't have to go all the way to the river so often," she said, and several women nodded.

Then one little girl raised her hand.

"Yes, child?" the Chief said kindly.

"Can I ask Pilipili something?" she asked.

"Of course," Pilipili said, smiling.

"Will you come back when you become a doctor?"

"Yes, please come back!" everyone shouted.

Pilipili smiled brightly. She had been wishing she could come back and start a small hospital after finishing her studies.

"I believe Mr. and Mrs. Ambache are coming back," the Chief said, looking at the road.

Pilipili turned and her smile grew wider. Mr. and Mrs. Ambache were back. Ambere and Ndiso saw them too and ran to meet them.

