

# NATALIA HAD A SWEET

By Ernest Bazanye

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Natalia had a mint. Not the chewing gum mints, the ones you suck. The sweet mints.

Now, there were three problems here. One is that few people sell mints in singles. If you have a mint, you usually have a few more in a packet somewhere.

The second problem is that mints have a way of smelling without smelling. You know how other foods smell in a way— you can sense them in the air around the mouth of the person eating them? With mints it is different. It is as if they clean the air and you sense them by not smelling anything around the eater.

The third problem was that Natalia was in the middle of Maths class.

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So she got her mint out of her pocket and popped it into her mouth and began to enjoy it. She did this peacefully for a very short while. But it was just a couple of minutes before Kwezi, who sat next to her, began to smell a cleanness in the air. He looked to the left and saw Natalia's mouth moving slowly. Kwezi used to try to pay attention in class but he was one of those people who have to try very hard to keep their focus because his mind is like a football: you try to kick it straight but it ends up bouncing everywhere. Now all of a sudden Mr Kafuddu's equations were no longer making sense. All Kwezi could think of was that he also wanted a mint.

"Natti. Natti!" he whispered.

When she looked at him he hissed, "Some sweet, Natti."

She looked cross. He was disturbing her. You know when you are trying to eat mints in class, you have to be very careful. You don't want people drawing attention to you. You definitely don't want people hissing at you.

"They are finished!" she hissed back angrily, and turned her head back to the front of the class to pretend to be listening to the teacher.

"Natti nawe," whispered Kwezi, this time his whispers were getting louder. "You are lying. You have a packet. Nawe, some."

"Leave me alone. The teacher will hear you," she snapped.

"You give me a sweet and I leave you alone," Kwezi hissed.

"Leave me alone. You will get us into..."

And she didn't have to finish the sentence because Mr Kafuddu was now looking at them.

They looked up at the teacher.

He looked down at them. "I'm chrying to teach here, Mr Kweji, in case you had not nochiched."

Kwezi looked down. "Sorry sir."

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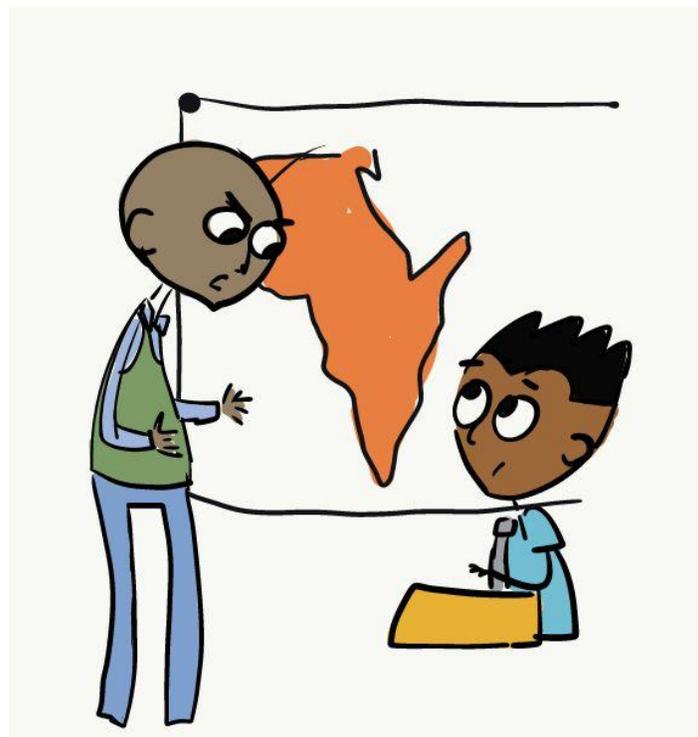
“May I ask what ijji going on?” Mr Kafuddu continued.

Kwezi was not good at thinking fast. When he tried to come up with excuses he always ended up with the most absurd ones. Like this time. “I thought I saw ... umm... something... a snake! I thought I saw something like a snake and I was trying to tell Natalia... I was trying to warn her,” he stuttered.

Mr Kafuddu smiled a small smile and lowered his eyes. “You thought you chow a chinyake?” he asked.

“Yes sah!” said Kwezi, as if he thought he was getting away with it, yet he obviously wasn’t.

“So why did you jishicide to tell Nachayiya and not tell the whole ckiyash, yeast of all, tell the cheacher? Don’t you think that if there is a chinyake in the kyashyoom, the first perchon you should inform is the cheacher? Is Nachayiya the cheacher?”



“Um.....” Kwezi trying to come up with an excuse was a sorry sight to see. But him trying to come up with an excuse to cover his earlier excuse was even worse.

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“Umm... it was in her bag. I thought there was a snake in her bag so I thought I would ask her first before I interrupted the class, sah,” he stammered. “You never know, maybe it was not a snake. Maybe it was just something that looked like a snake but wasn’t a snake and there would be no reason to disturb the whole class if it wasn’t so I first wanted to check,” he drew a deep breath. “So I was just checking, sah.”

Mr Kafuddu had had enough of this. He turned to Natalia. And immediately sensed the minty scent around her. “Nyachayiya,” he said.

Natalia immediately swallowed the mint. But when she saw the way Mr Kafuddu laughed slyly to himself she knew that he had seen her swallowing it. She knew she was busted.

“Sorry sir,” she said.

“I am chure you are chorry you got caught, becoj you know which comes after being caught eaching in kyashyooms.”

She sighed sadly. Yes, she knew what came after. Punishment. Mr Kafuddu turned to go back to the front but stopped. “Oh, but fircht of all,” he said, turning around and stretching out his hand. “You can getch jem back from me at the end of the class.”

Natalia sadly pulled the rest of the mints from her pocket and handed them over.

Kwezi’s eyes burned at her when he saw them. He knew she had more!

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Natalia’s punishment was the next day. While the other kids were out having recess she had to stay in the corridors along the staffroom and mop it clean. She had a mop, a bucket and some soap.

She sighed as she mopped away, thinking to herself, “Imagine doing house chores at school. At least at home I am allowed to have a mint while I am mopping.” She wondered if she could ask Mr Kafuddu to let her have a mint while she mopped. Then she stopped wondering about that because she knew the answer would be

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No. In fact, if he found out that she had any more mints he would confiscate them and she would not see them until the end of the week.

So she mopped away. First part was mopped. Second part was mopped. Third part was mopped. But just as she had finally finished mopping the fourth and final part of the corridor she heard loud voices from around the corner. They were shouting this, in turn:

“Okay last one there smells like a rotten egg!”

“No, last one there smells like a rotten egg in wet socks!”

“No, last one there smells like the smelly smelliness in the smelliest smell of all smells in smelling!”

“No, the last one there smells like Ngiri’s fart— you know the one he made last Wednesday.”

Then all the voices went “Eeeeeeeugh!” at the same time.

But Natalia knew what was about to happen. She knew that there was going to be a mad dash and any second now a gang of kids was going to race through the corridor. The same corridor she had just mopped.

No way she was going to let that happen.

Natalia grabbed her mop and spun round the corner and shouted, “Stop!”

It was Rukia, Kwezi, Oblong, Roger, Wakayima, Akello and a few others who were gathered around the corner. They looked on in shock at Natalia, standing there like a ninja with her mop like a ninja staff.

“You shall not pass!” she said,

“Kakazi, what’s up?” asked Roger. “Why are you holding a broom?”



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“It’s a mop, not a broom,” Natalia huffed. “And ask Kwezi. He’s the one who got me in trouble.”

“I’m not the one who refused to give their friends mints,” Kwezi defended himself.

“Wamma guys, what happened, is, she was eating sweets in class and Mr Kafuddu caught her, so now she has to mop the corridor as punishment.”

Wakayima gasped and clutched his chest in deep shock. “What? How dare you! How could you do such a thing? How can you even possibly do such a thing?” he said. “You had sweets and you couldn’t even tell me?”

“It was just one mint and I was just eating it quietly when this big mouth decided to start hissing all over the place making noise till Mr Kafuddu caught me.”

“That is why you should always make sure you give Kwezi a share first,” said Rukia, wisely. “Every time I am sneaking sweets in class, I always make sure I have Kwezi covered, otherwise he will nag and nag until you get caught. I once ended up having to pick garbage from the playground for a whole period.”

“Wait a minute,” said Wakayima. “This doesn’t make sense. I remember the class when the teacher clearly said that you should have a nutritious, balanced diet, I remember because I was paying attention. And I was paying attention because it was about food. But if they are teaching us that we should eat, then why do they punish us for eating?”

The whole group replied at the same time with the same words, “I know, right?”

“I think they should feed us extra snacks, especially during Biology lessons,” said Kwezi.

“So we can have practical experience of nutrition, right?” agreed Oblong.

“Since we are right next to the staffroom, why don’t we just go in and sugges...”

Again, Natalia swung her mop, slammed it’s edge on the ground and said, “You shall not pass!”

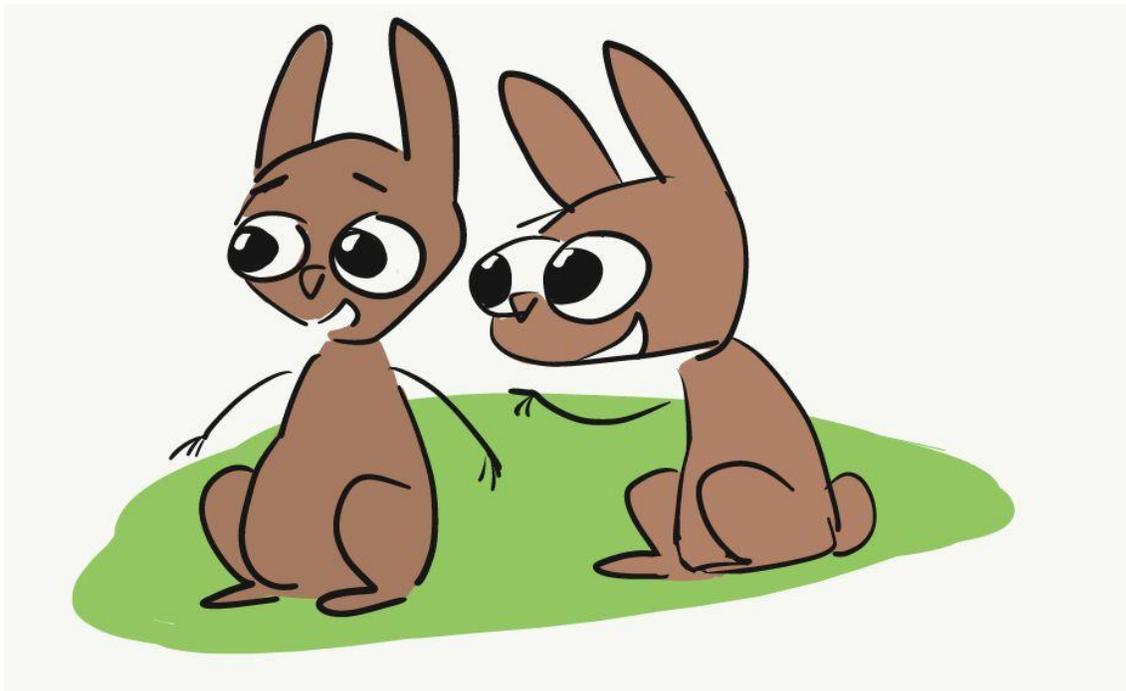
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The way Natalia’s eyes were glaring and the way she shouted reminded Wakayima of a day back in the savannah in Kenya when he was visiting his cousin there. It was close to the end of the rainy season and the bushes and trees were heavy laden with fresh fruit and berries. There was one one very delicious-looking tree that was bursting with guavas. Wakayima and his cousin Sungura could see it from across the river.

“It looks like we have breakfast fully covered,” said Sungura.

“Breakfast and lunch as well! Look, next to the tree, there is a bush bursting with fat berries,” Wakayima replied.



“I wonder what else is on the other side of this river. It seems like nothing but fruits and berries and wonderful things to fill a hare’s stomach,” said Sungura.

“I don’t know why we are still standing here wondering, when we can easily find out,” said Wakayima. “Let’s go!”

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And the two hares hopped down to the riverside to prepare to cross. That is when Sungura suddenly stopped. “Wait. Wait,” he grabbed his cousin.

“Why should I wait? Are the fruits going to come to me?”

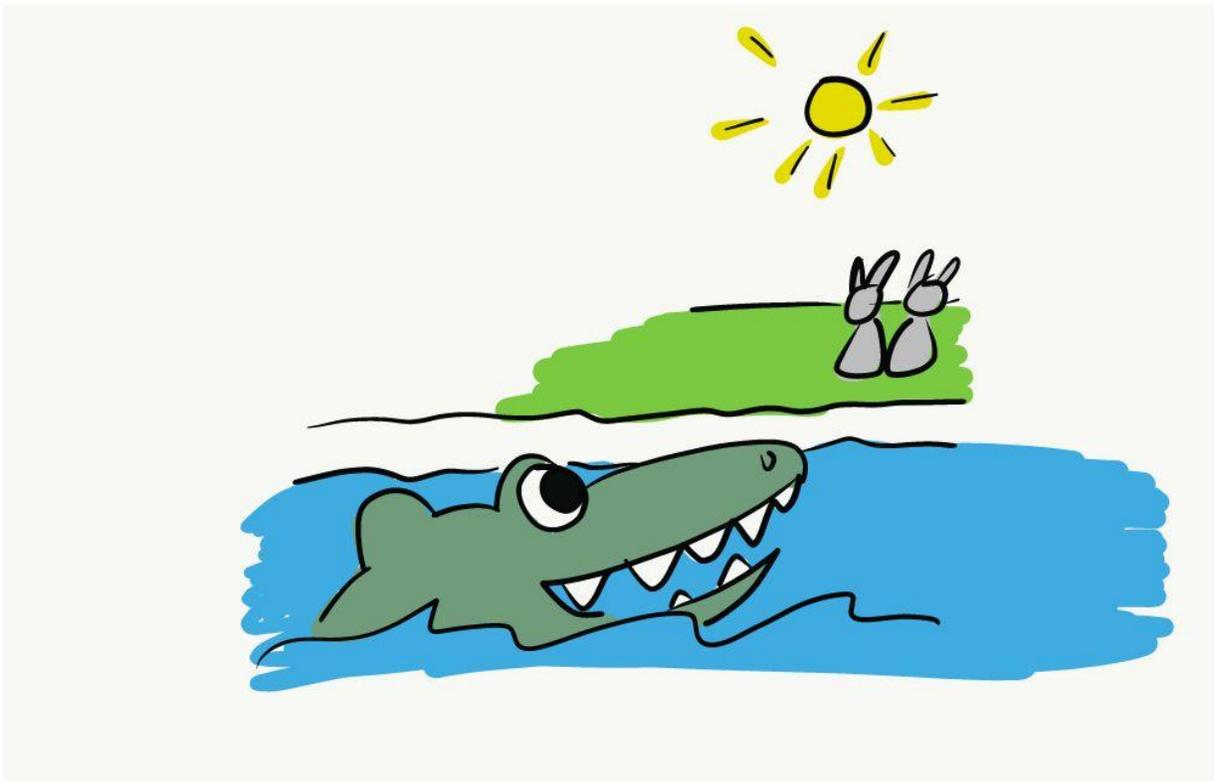
“No, but I think I saw something in the water,” said Sungura.

Wakayima looked. The river was flowing past them fast and energetically, the way rivers flow after they have been filled with fresh rain. Wakayima was looking forward to feeling just like that, after he had been filled with fresh fruits.

But Sungura stopped him. “Look over there,” he pointed with his nose.

And as Wakayima looked he noticed it. There was something that looked like small and round floating up and down in the water. It would bob up for a moment then disappear again. Then it would appear again, then disappear again.

Wakayima looked at his cousin. They both knew what that was. It was obviously a crocodile’s nose.



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“Hey!” shouted Sungura. “Hey, you in the river! What are you?”

The thing just floated up for a second and floated back down again.

“I hope you are not a crocodile. Are you a crocodile? Because my cousin and I want to cross the river but we don’t want to be eaten in the process. Are you a crocodile?”

The thing stayed underwater and stayed silent.

When it bobbed up again, Wakayima spoke, loudly enough for it to hear, even though he pretended he was speaking to Sungura. “I don’t think it is a crocodile, bro,” said Wakayima. “I think it is a mango. A nice, juicy mango that fell into the river from a tree on the other side and is just floating up and down.”

“You think that is a mango?” Sungura asked, wondering what was wrong with his cousin for just a second, then quickly, remembering that they were hares, figuring that this must be a cunning trick, deciding to play along.

Wakayima said, “I don’t just think, I am sure it is a mango. You think it is a crocodile?”

Sungura replied, “It might be a crocodile. And if it is, it will eat us if we try to cross the river. I think we should just go back to the forest and look for mangoes there,” Sungura was getting the gist of the trick.

“Why go all the way back when there are mangoes in the river?” Wakayima continued speaking loudly.

“How do you know it is a mango?” argued Sungura.

“How do you know it is a crocodile?” argued Wakayima.

“Okay, okay, I have an idea,” said Sungura, who had, by now figured out the plan. “Let’s ask it.”

Sungura turned to the river and shouted, “Hey you! Are you a mango or are you a crocodile? Should we go back so you don’t eat us, or should we jump into the river

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and swim towards you? Because if you are a mango, that's just what we are going to do. We are coming to eat you!"

That is when the crocodile, not wanting to miss a chance at two fresh hares, called back, "I'm not a crocodile. I'm just a mango. A ripe, juicy mango. Come in and get me before I float away!"

The two hares laughed and laughed.

The crocodile peeped out of the water and saw them. She wondered what they were laughing at.

"Crocodiles are crazy," said Wakayima. "You think we are going to fall for that? No way."

The crocodile was angry now as well as hungry. "Okay! I am not a mango. I am a crocodile. And you know what? Even if you don't come into the river, it doesn't matter, because I am coming out there to get you!"

The hares just laughed.

"Come on over," taunted Wakayima. "You are welcome to this side of the river. Sungura and I are going to be on the other side anyway."

"You are not crossing this river!" snarled the crocodile.

"Oh, yes we are," grinned Sungura. "Cos that is where the real mangoes are. Not just crocodiles pretending to be mangoes, but real mangoes."

"No, you won't get through this river!" growled the crocodile.

"Yes, we will!"

"You shall not pass this river!" the crocodile snapped.

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Back in school Roger asked his friend, "What are you grinning to yourself about?"

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“When she said ‘You shall not pass,’ it reminded me of something,” Wakayima said.

Roger asked, “I know. That movie, right?”

“What is a movie?” asked Wakayima.

“Speaking of movies, weren’t we just about to start a race?” said Kwezi, while Roger looked at Wakayima the way he always looked at his friend when he asked such questions like, “What is a movie?”

“Oh yeah. The last one is supposed to smell like Ngiri’s farts,” said Rukia. “Heh heh. I wonder who it will be.”

“It won’t be that easy to beat me,” Roger said to her. “I have been training.”

“Well, we shall have to see,” said Rukia. “Ready, steady...”

Natalia slammed the mop onto the ground again. “Didn’t you hear me? No one is passing here!” she said.

“You can join the race if you want to,” said Akello. She secretly hoped Natalia would join the race. Because Akello felt she could run faster than Natalia and if Natti was in the race, that meant a better chance that she won’t be last. Oblong, meanwhile, was saying, “Vroom, vroom,” to himself.

“I just mopped this whole corridor. You guys will make it all dirty with your shoes, running around like little mad people,” she said.

“I think you mean running around like little awesome superheroes in my case,” said Rukia.

Roger sensed the challenge. “Okay. If the last one is a fart, the first one is a king!” he said, now that he knew he had been coached enough to, at least once in a while, beat Rukia.

“It’s going to be a queen,” said Rukia. “Because it is going to be Her Royal Majesty Queen Rukia.”

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“You guys are not listening. I just said, over and over and over again, that I just mopped the corridor and if you run through it before it is dry I will have to mop it again,” moaned Natalia.

“You guys, bambi, Natti just mopped the floor,” said Akello. “Maybe we should race later.”

“Wapi! You are just scared of losing the race and smelling like Ngiri,” said Oblong.

Akello put her hands on her hips. “You? You Oblong? You know there is no way I will lose a race to you. Dude, you run like slow slowness slowing itself in slow motion.”

“Watch me,” said Oblong. “Vroom, vroom!”

“If anyone steps on this corridor, I will make them mop it. I will make you mop it afresh,” threatened Natalia.

The kids looked at her. She looked serious. And the way she was holding the mop made her look even more serious.

“I know what we should do,” said Wakayima.

He still remembered the day in the savannah with Sungura. He remembered how they got the fruits on the other side of the river.

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The crocodile stuck his head out of the water and snapped his jaws at the hares that day. “You are not getting past me!” she said.

“So I guess we will just stay this side, then,” said Sungura. “We don’t get to eat any fruits, and you just stay there in the river, and you don’t get to eat any hares.”

The crocodile paused when she heard this. She gave it a think. Then she made a decision. She swam through the river to the river bank. She climbed out of the water and onto the bank. She got ready to run and capture the hares but all of a sudden, in a blink, they were gone. There were no hares on the riverbank.

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“Hey crocodile. Enjoy eating our dusty footprints!” a voice carried across from a distance. It was Wakayima on the other side of the river.

You see, one thing about hares is that they are not just good at hopping, but they can also jump very far. As the crocodile was clambering out of the river, the hares just took a short run and leapt over the river.

Now they were up in the trees eating the fruits and laughing at the crocodile.

And back at the school, in the corridor, while the kids were arguing, Wakayima took a huge leap and, in an instant, was on the other side of the corridor.



“Yes! I am the King! King Wakayima! The king of the corridor!” he shouted. “And don’t look at me like that Natalia, I didn’t even step on the floor you mopped. I jumped right over it.”

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Natalia looked at the floor. It was still shiny and clean.

“Now, my first order as king is that we go to the staffroom and ask Mr Kafuddu to allow us to study nutrition during class. The king has spoken!”

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*What is going to happen in Tropical Hills under the reign of King Wakayima. I can tell you it is not what you expect. See you for the next story when we find out!*

*The adventures of the cheeky, cunning hare that sneaks into the human school continue with a fresh story each week. Join the mailing list by at >>>>>or visit [bazanye.com/wakayima](http://bazanye.com/wakayima) for the latest. Stay tuned!*