

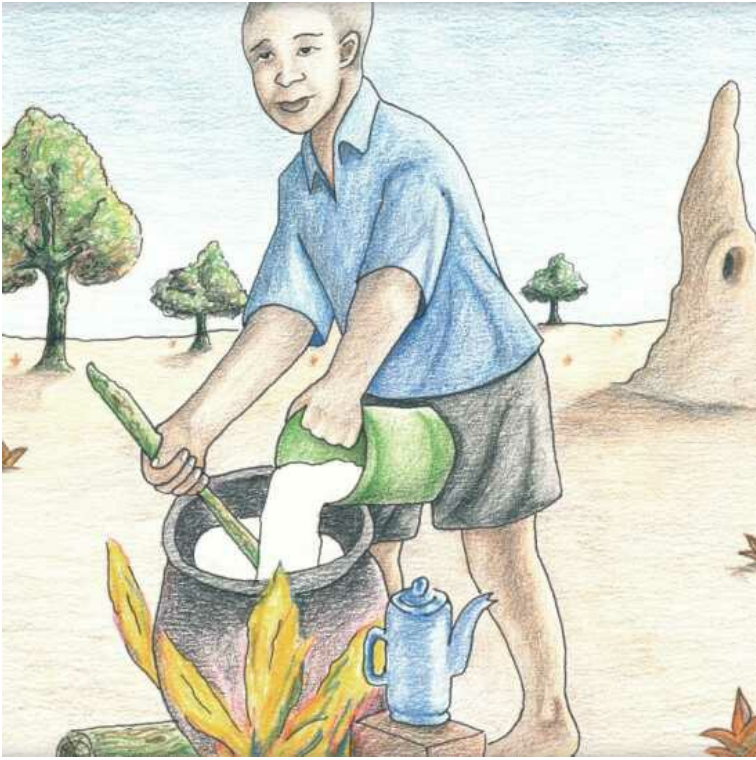
Orphans need love too

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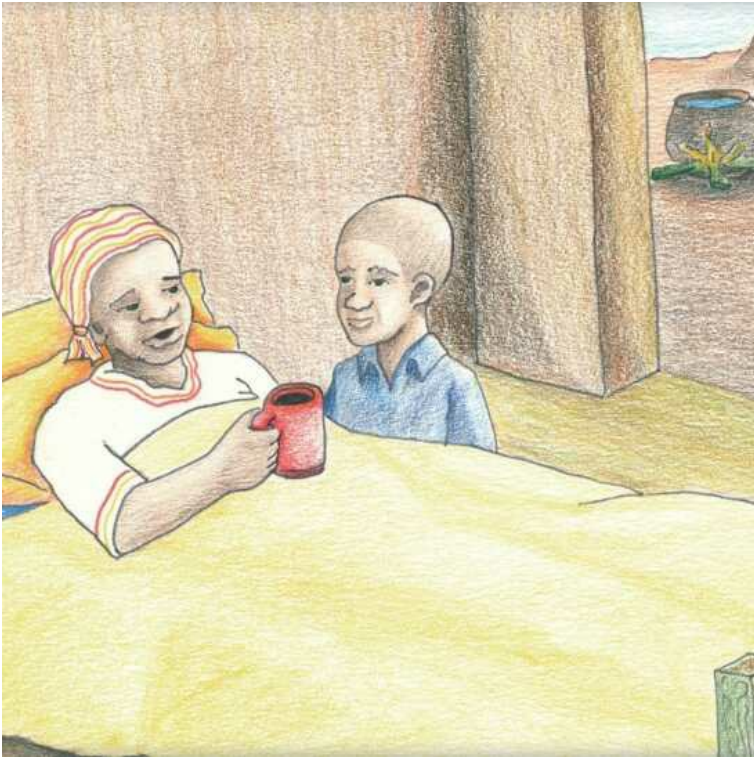
✉ Jamanovandu Urike

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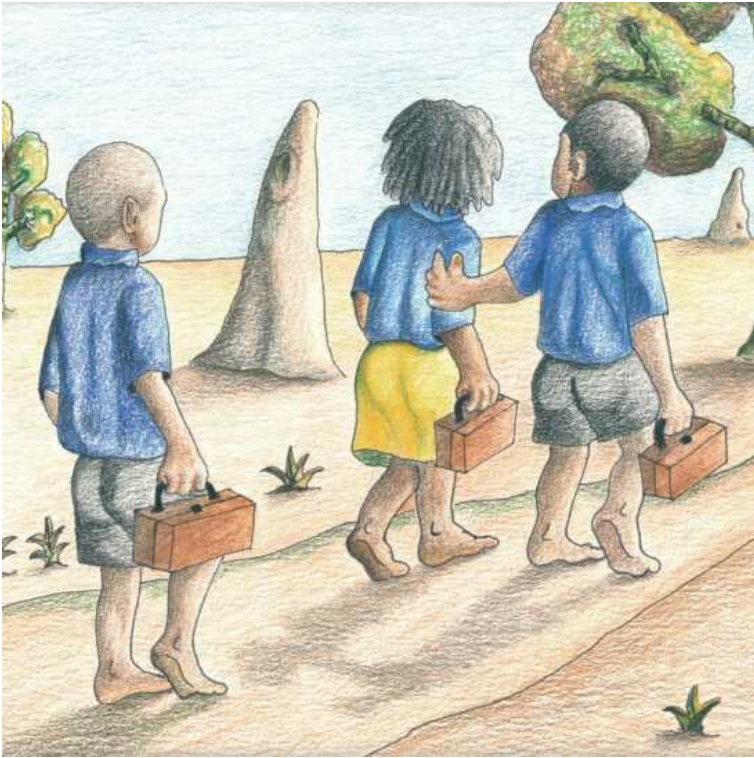
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Every morning Hilifa woke up early to prepare breakfast for his mother. She had been sick a lot recently and Hilifa was learning how to look after his mother and himself. When his mother was too ill to get up he would make a fire to boil water to make tea. He would take tea to his mother and prepare porridge for breakfast. Sometimes his mother was too weak to eat it. Hilifa worried about his mother. His father had died two years ago, and now his mother was ill too. She was very thin, just like his father had been.



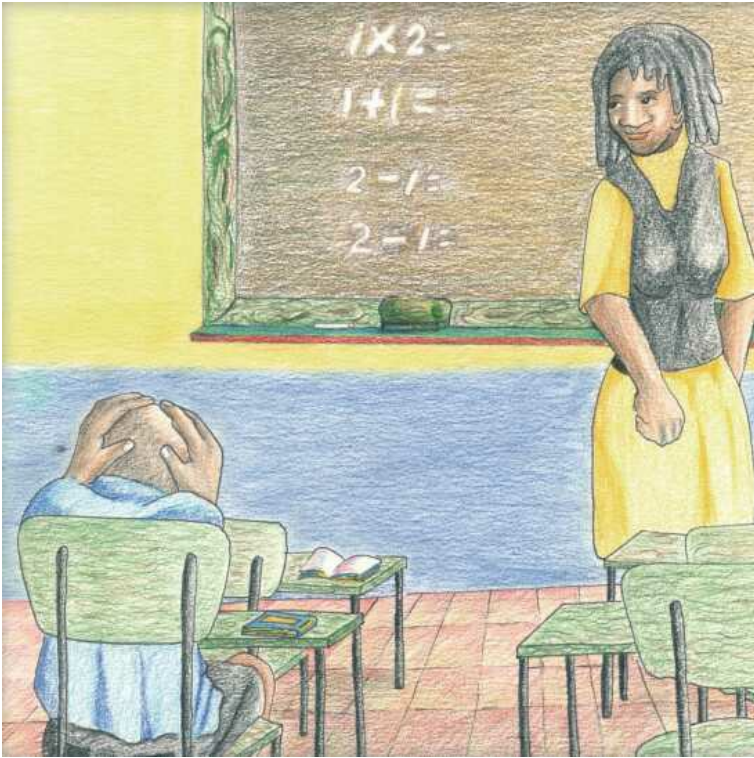
One morning he asked his mother, "What is wrong Mum? When will you be better? You don't cook anymore. You can't work in the field or clean the house. You don't prepare my lunchbox, or wash my uniform..." "Hilifa my son, you are only nine years old and you take good care of me." She looked at the young boy, wondering what she should tell him. Would he understand? "I am very ill. You have heard on the radio about the disease called AIDS. I have that disease," she told him. Hilifa was quiet for a few minutes. "Does that mean you will die like Daddy?" "There is no cure for AIDS."



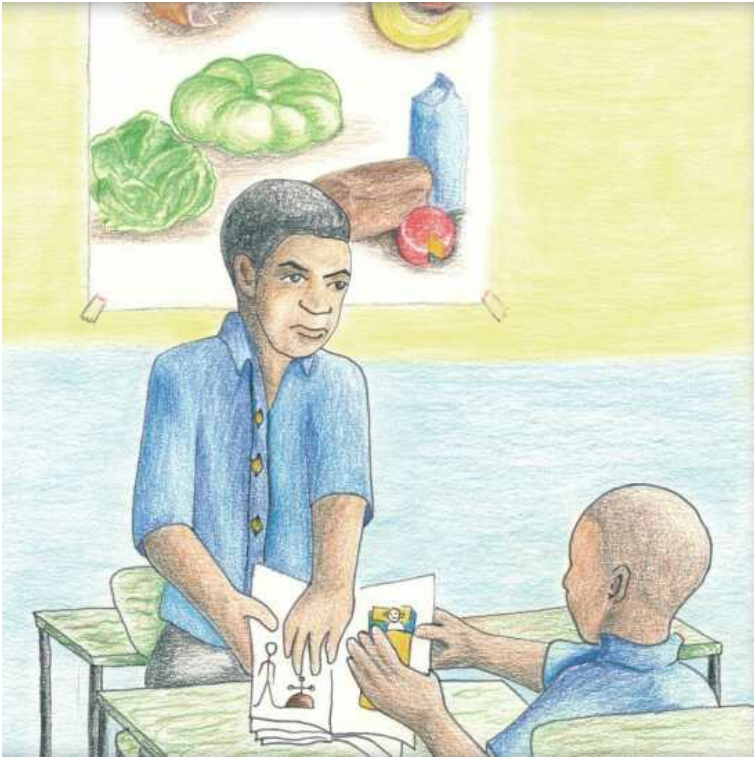
Hilifa walked to school thoughtfully. He couldn't join in the chatter and games of his friends as they walked along. "What's wrong?" they asked him. But Hilifa couldn't answer, his mother's words were ringing in his ears, "No cure. No cure." How could he look after himself if his mother died, he worried. Where would he live? Where would he get money for food?



Hilifa sat at his desk. He traced the worn wood markings with his finger, "No cure. No cure." "Hilifa? Hilifa, are you with us?" Hilifa looked up. Ms. Nelao was standing over him. "Stand up Hilifa! What was my question?" Hilifa looked down at his feet. "You won't find the answer down there!" she retorted. "Magano, tell Hilifa the answer." Hilifa felt so ashamed, Ms. Nelao had never shouted at him before.



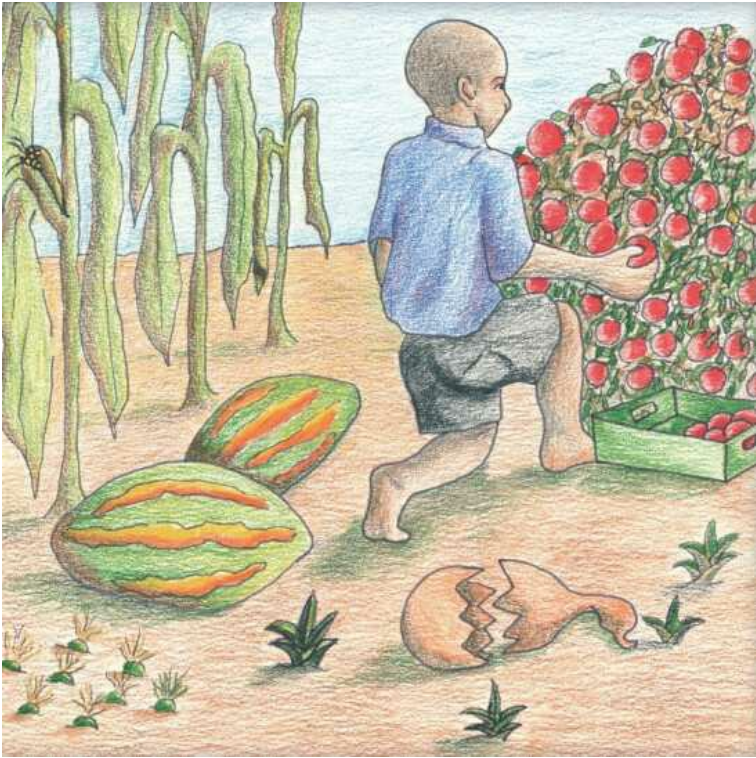
Hilifa struggled through the morning. At break time he sat in the classroom. "I have a stomach ache," he lied to his friends. It wasn't a big lie, he did feel sick, and his worried thoughts buzzed inside his head like angry bees. Ms. Nelao watched him quietly. She asked him what was wrong. "Nothing," he replied. Her ears heard the tiredness and worry in his voice. Her eyes saw the fear he was trying so hard to hide.



When Hilifa tried to do his maths the numbers jumped around in his head. He couldn't keep them still long enough to count them. He soon gave up. He thought of his mother instead. His fingers began to draw his thoughts. He drew his mother in her bed. He drew himself standing beside his mother's grave. "Maths monitors, collect all the books please," called Ms. Nelao. Hilifa suddenly saw the drawings in his book and tried to tear out the page, but it was too late. The monitor took his book to Ms. Nelao.



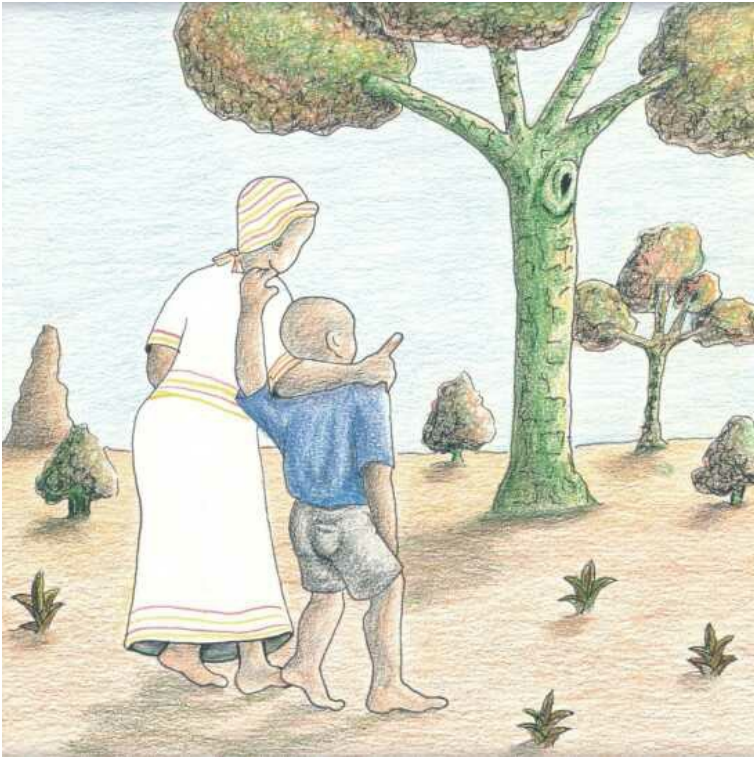
Ms. Nelao looked at Hilifa's drawings. When the children were leaving to go home she called, "Come here Hilifa. I want to talk to you." "What's wrong?" she asked him gently. "My mother is ill. She told me she has AIDS. Will she die?" "I don't know, Hilifa, but she is very ill if she has AIDS. There is no cure." Those words again, "No cure. No cure." Hilifa began to cry. "Go home, Hilifa," she said. "I will come and visit your mother."



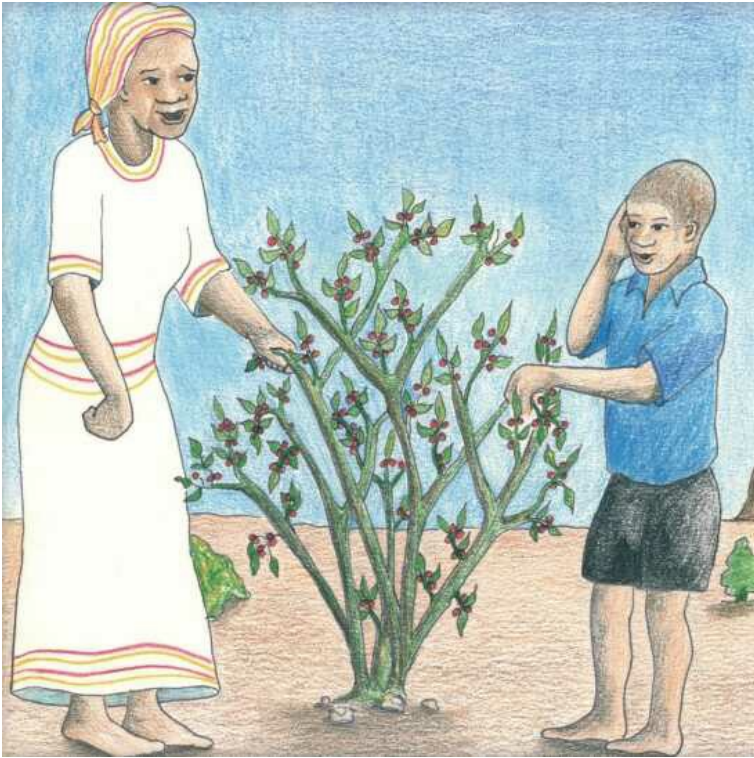
Hilifa went home and found his mother preparing lunch. "I've cooked for you today, Hilifa, but now I am very tired. Look after the vegetable garden and take some tomatoes to the shop. They will sell them for us." After lunch Hilifa went to the vegetable plot. He looked at the bright colours of the vegetables, bright red tomatoes and chillies, long green beans and dark green spinach, the green leaves of the sweet potato and tall golden maize. He watered the garden and picked a bag full of ripe red tomatoes to take to the shop. "What would happen to their garden if his mother died?" he wondered.



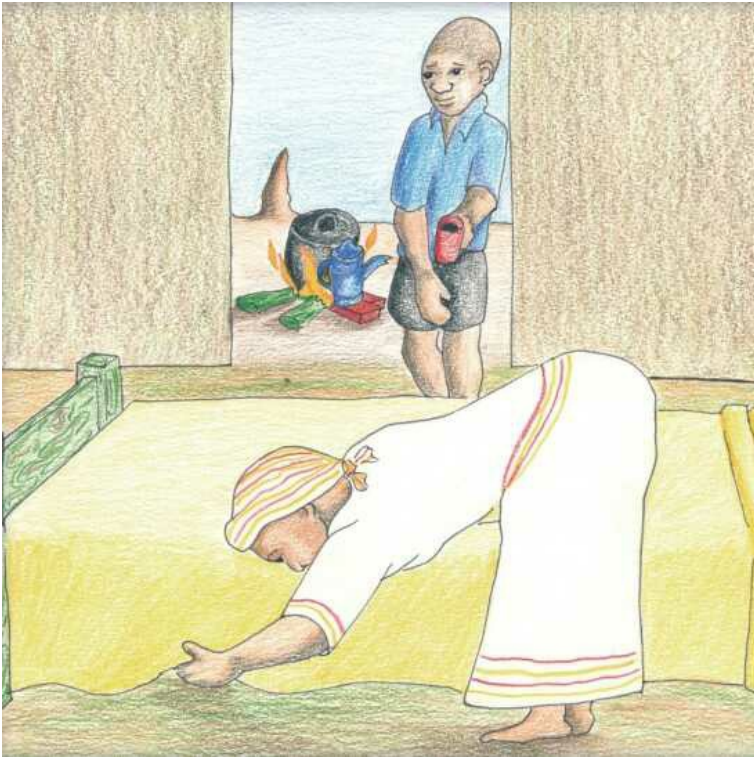
Ms. Nelao arrived soon after Hilifa left. She spent a long time talking to his mother. She asked Hilifa's mother, "Meme Ndapanda, are you taking the medicine for AIDS?" "After my husband died I was too ashamed to go to the doctor," she told Ms. Nelao. "I kept hoping I wasn't infected. When I became ill and went to the doctor she told me it was too late. The medicine would not help me." Ms. Nelao told Meme Ndapanda what to do to help Hilifa.



When Hilifa came home his mother asked him, "Hilifa, my son, I want to take a walk with you. Will you help me?" Hilifa took his mother's arm and she leaned on him. They walked to where the tall thorn trees grew. She asked him, "Do you remember playing football here with your cousin Kunuu? You kicked the ball into the tree and it got stuck on the thorns. Your father got scratched getting it down for you."



“Look, there’s an omandjembere bush. Go and pick some to take home.” When Hilifa was picking the sweet berries, she said, “Do you remember when you were small you ate the berries and the seed inside. You didn’t go to the toilet for a week!” “Yes, my stomach was sooo sore,” remembered Hilifa, laughing.



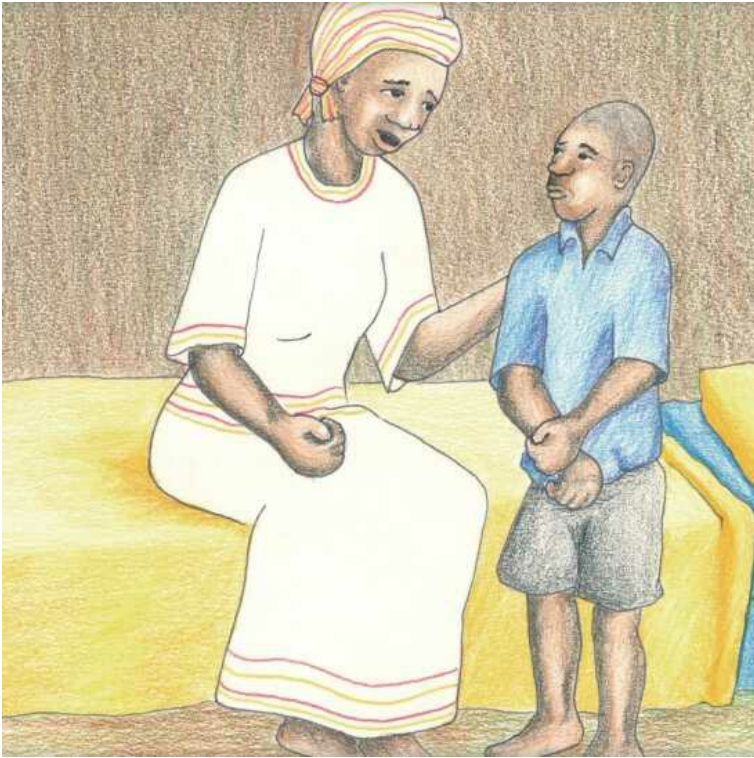
When they got home Hilifa's mother was very tired. Hilifa made some tea. Meme Ndapanda took a small box from under her bed. "Hilifa, this is for you. In this box are things that will help you remember where you come from."



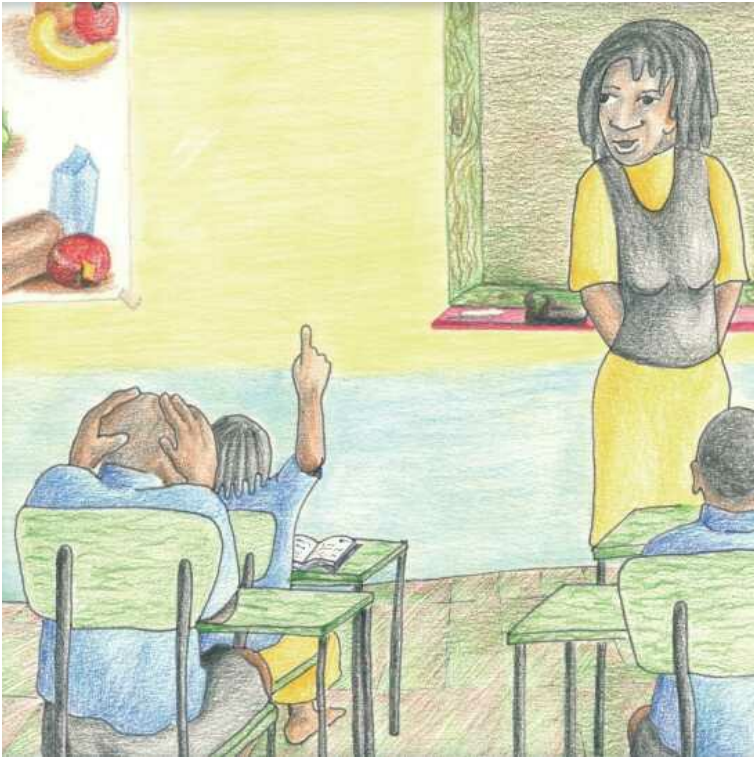
She took the mementos out of the box one by one. "This is a photo of your father holding you. You were his firstborn son. This photo is when I took you to see your grandparents, they were so happy. This is the first tooth you lost. Do you remember how you cried and I had to promise you that more would grow. This is the brooch your father gave me when we were married for one year."



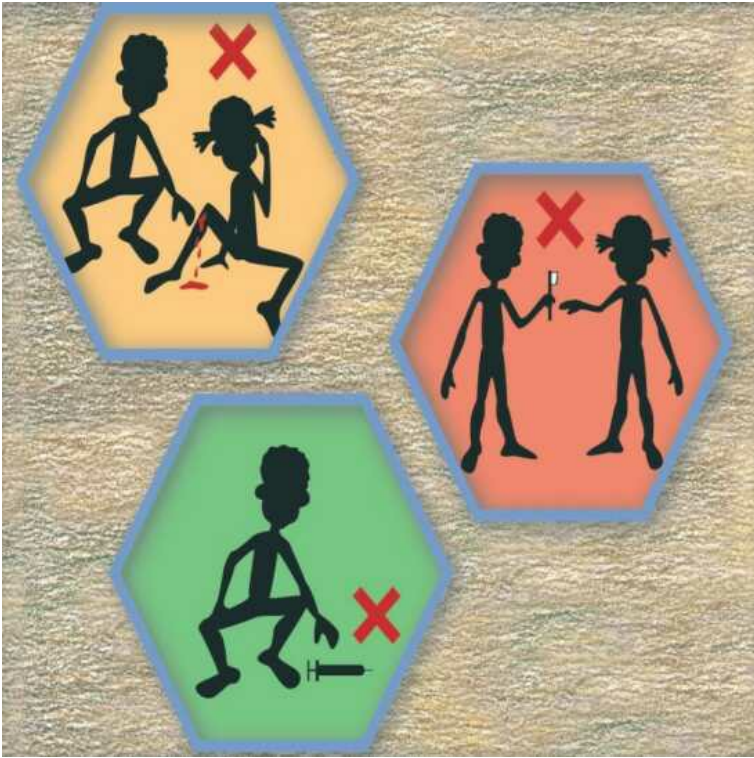
Hilifa held the box and began to cry. His mother held him close by her side and said a prayer, "May the Lord protect you and keep you safe." She held him as she spoke. "Hilifa, my son. You know that I am very ill, and soon I will be with your father. I don't want you to be sad. Remember how much I love you. Remember how much your father loved you."



His mother continued, "Uncle Kave from Oshakati sends us money when he can. He told me that he will care for you. I have talked to him about it. You'll go to school with Kunuu, his son. Kunuu is in Grade 4 like you. They will take good care of you." "I like Uncle Kave and Aunt Muzaa," said Hilifa. "And I like playing with Kunuu. Would you become well if they look after you?" "No, my son. I won't become well. You look after me very well. I am proud to have such a good son."



The next morning at school Ms. Nelao taught them about HIV and AIDS. The learners looked afraid. They heard about this illness on the radio, but no-one spoke about it at home. "Where does it come from?" asked Magano. "How do we catch it?" asked Hidipo. Ms. Nelao explained that HIV is the name of a virus. When a person has the HIV virus in their blood they still look healthy. "We say they have AIDS when they become ill."



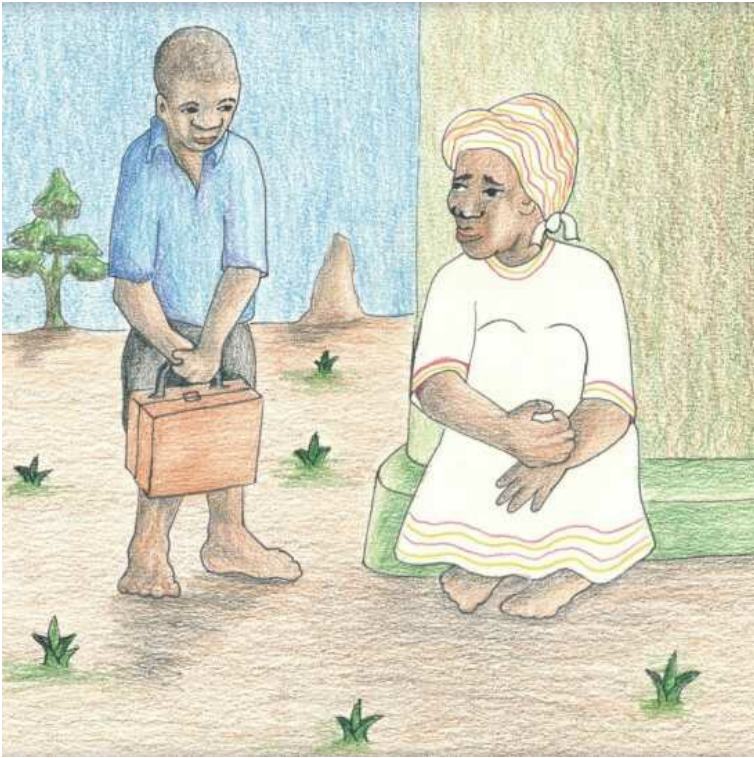
Ms. Nelao explained some of the ways we can be infected with HIV. "If someone has HIV or AIDS we can catch the virus from their blood. We should never share razors or toothbrushes. If we get our ears pierced we must use sterilised blades and needles." She explained how needles and blades should be sterilised. "If we hurt ourselves and there is blood we must ask an adult to clean the wound. We must cover the wound to protect it," she told them.



Then she showed them a chart. “These are all the ways you can’t catch HIV,” she told them. “You won’t get HIV from using the toilet, or sharing a bath. Hugging, kissing or shaking hands with someone with HIV or AIDS is also safe. It’s OK to share cups and plates with someone who has HIV or AIDS. And you can’t catch it from someone who is coughing or sneezing. Also, you can’t get it from mosquitoes or other biting insects like lice or bedbugs.”



“What do you do if you’ve got it?” asked Magano.
“Well, you must take care of yourself and eat lots of healthy food. Look at our food chart,” she said. “Who can remember what food is good for you?” she asked.



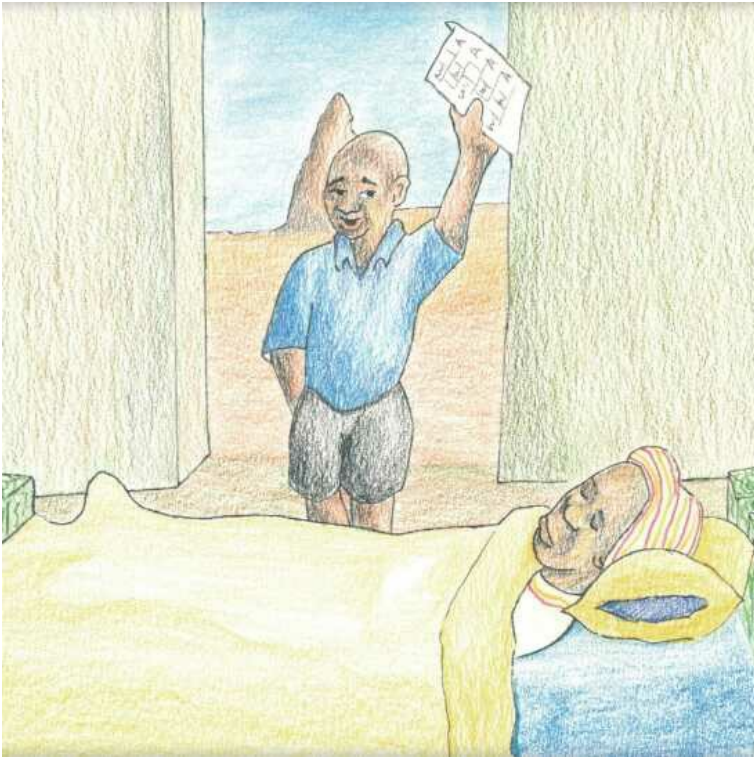
When Hilifa got home he told his mother what he had learned at school that day. "Ms. Nelao told us about HIV and AIDS and how to look after someone who's ill. Magano and Hidipo are going to help me with my chores and we will do our homework together," he told her.



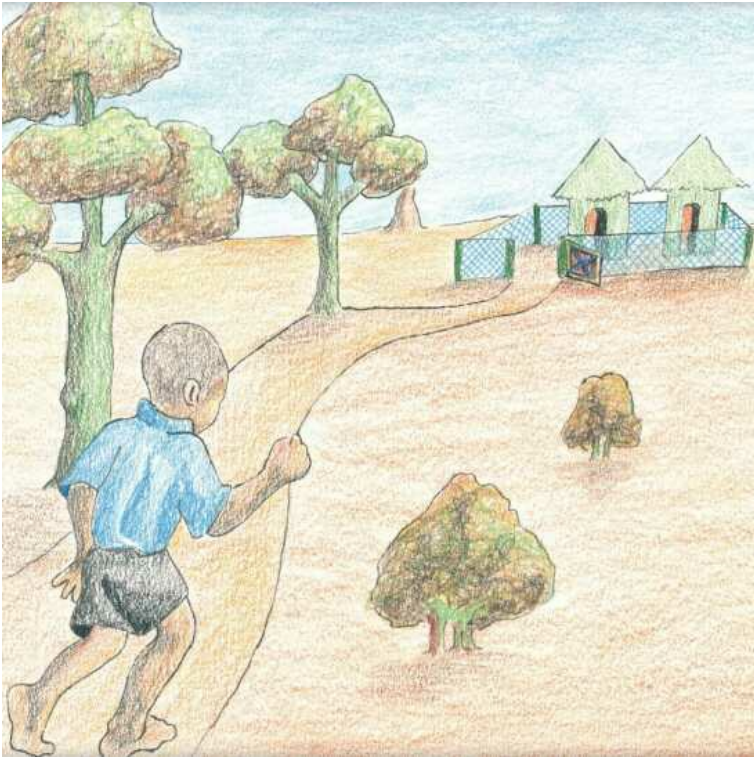
That afternoon Magano came and helped Hilifa to fetch water. Hidipo helped him to gather firewood. Then they sat and did their homework in the shade of the marula tree.



Ms. Nelao had also told Hilifa's neighbours that he was looking after his mother. They had promised to help him. Every night a different neighbour came with hot food for them to eat. Hilifa always gave them some vegetables from the garden.



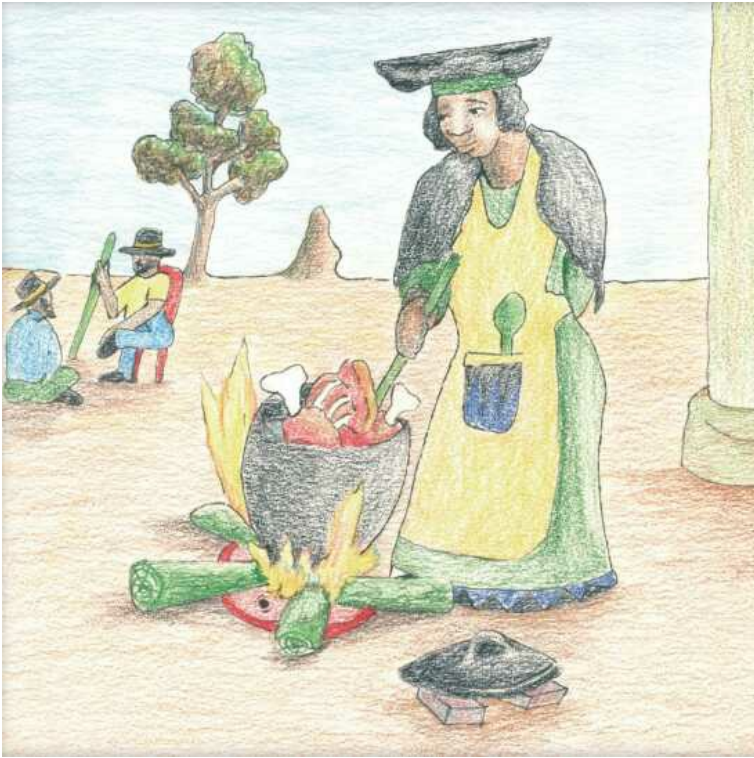
On the last day of the school term Hilifa was very happy. He ran home to show his mother his report card. He ran into the yard calling, "Mum. Mum. Look at my report card. I have got 'A', 'A', and more 'A's'." Hilifa found his mother lying in bed. "Mum!" he called. "Mum! Wake up!" She didn't wake up.



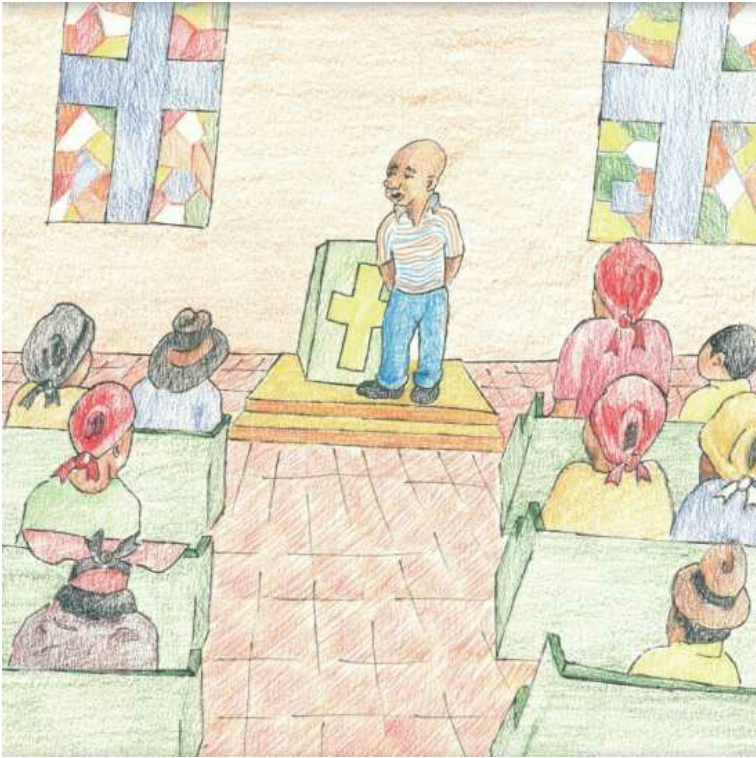
Hilifa ran to the neighbours. "My Mum. My Mum. She won't wake up," he cried. The neighbours went home with Hilifa and found Meme Ndapanda in her bed. "She is dead, Hilifa," they said sadly.



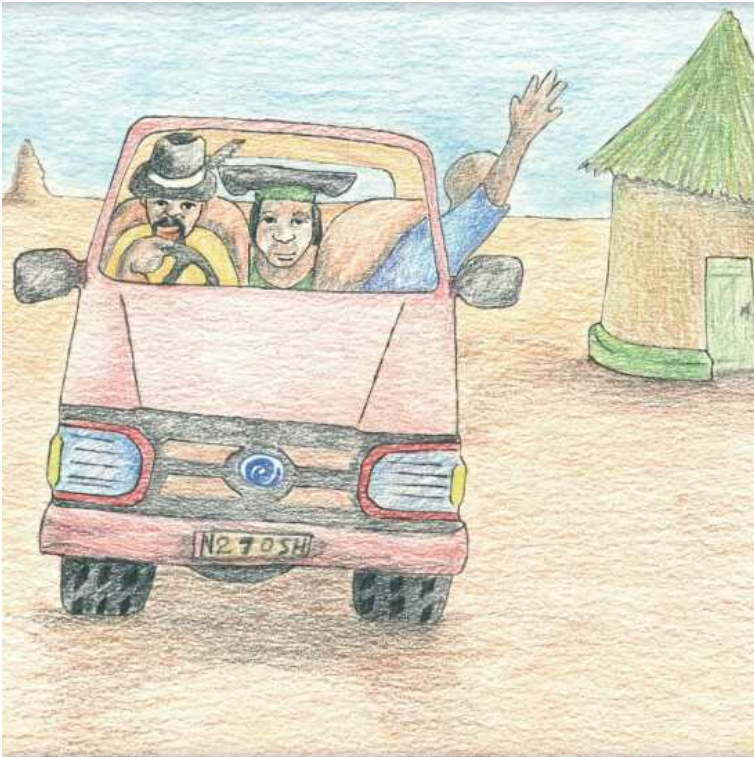
Very quickly the news spread that Meme Ndapanda was dead. The house was full of family, neighbours and friends. They prayed for Hilifa's mother and sang hymns. They talked about all the good things they knew about her.



Aunt Muzaa cooked for all the visitors. Uncle Kave told Hilifa that they would take him back to Oshakati after the funeral. His Grandfather told him stories about his mother when she was a little girl.



At the funeral Hilifa went to the front of the church and told everyone about his mother. "My mother loved me and looked after me very well. She told me to study hard so that I could get a good job. She wanted me to be happy. I will study hard and work hard so that she can be proud of me."





After the funeral Uncle Kave and Aunt Muzaa helped Hilifa to pack his things to take to Oshakati. “Kunuu is looking forward to having a new friend,” they told him. “We will care for you like our own son.” Hilifa said goodbye to the house and got into the taxi with them.



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