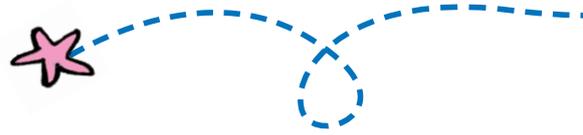


The amazing tale of floating Zimkhitha



Story by Helen Brain

Illustrations by Magriet Brink

There was once a girl named Zimkhitha who never stopped laughing. She made her dad mad. One day he was driving her home from school. When he reached the beginning of their road, he'd had enough! He stopped the car.

“Are you going to stop laughing or are you going to walk home?” he asked. But Zimkhitha just laughed louder.

“Right,” he said, “you can walk home.” He made her get out of the car and he drove home.

“Where's Zimkhitha?” asked her mom when her dad walked in the front door. “I'm cooking her favourite dinner.”

“Oh dear,” her dad said. “I made her walk home from the corner because she wouldn't stop laughing.”

“My precious baby?” cried Zimkhitha's mom. “You made my precious baby walk home? All alone? We'd better go and find her.” They looked and looked, but there was no sign of Zimkhitha.

“Where did you leave her?” asked Mom. “Where is she, Ron?”



“Oh dear,” muttered Zimkhitha’s dad, checking under every bush and up every tree.

“Zimkhitha!” called her mom. “Where are you?”

A woman stopped her car. “Can I help you?” she asked.

“We’ve lost our little girl,” said Zimkhitha’s mom. “Have you seen her?”

The woman drove round the block and came back to report, “I saw a black cat, and a yellow dog, and a man selling bananas. But I didn’t see a little girl anywhere.”

Zimkhitha’s dad looked up, and there Zimkhitha was, floating high, high in the sky above them, like a big pink balloon.

“Oh my word!” exclaimed Mom. “How in the world did she get up there?”

The kind woman stared up into the sky, watching Zimkhitha bobbing about in the clouds. “Is she ... laughing?” she asked.

“Zimkhitha always laughs,” said her mom and dad together. “We can’t stop her. Listen.” From high, high up in the sky Zimkhitha’s laugh came tinkling down like a little bell.

“Oh no!” cried her mom, wringing her hands. “She might fall into the sea.”

“Or, onto a rose bush,” groaned her dad.

“I am a scientist,” said the kind woman, “and one of the first things we learn is that air floats. She must have swallowed so much air from laughing that she has floated up like a balloon.”

“Oh, oh, oh,” cried Zimkhitha’s parents.

“There’s only one way to get her down,” said the kind woman. “We’ll have to make her cry.”

“Oh dear,” said her mother. “That’s not easy. She’s such a giggling child.”

“We’ll have to shout something horrible to her,” said Zimkhitha’s dad, sobbing into his handkerchief.

“We need lots and lots of people to all shout at once,” said the woman. “She’ll never hear just the three of us.” So they rang all the doorbells, and asked the people to come outside. Zimkhitha’s dad stopped the traffic and asked everyone to come and help. Soon a big crowd had gathered, and they were pointing and waving and filming Zimkhitha on their cellphones. Zimkhitha laughed and laughed. It was the funniest thing she had ever seen.

“What are we going to say to make her cry?” asked the kind woman.

“I know!” said Zimkhitha’s dad, and he told them what to say.

“One, two, three, altogether now...” ordered the kind woman.

And with that, the crowd pointed into the sky and roared, “Hey, Zimkhitha! We can see up your dress!” Far up in the clouds Zimkhitha heard them. She looked down and saw five hundred people pointing at her dress, and she stopped laughing.

Down she floated. But as she came down the clouds tickled her, and she thought how funny it was to be so far up while everyone else was down there. And she began to laugh again.

“Oh dear,” said her dad. “That didn’t work.”

“I know!” said her mom. “Tell her we can see her spotted panties.”

So the crowd took a deep breath and shouted at the top of their lungs, “Hey, Zimkhitha! We can see your spotty panties!”



And Zimkhitha stopped laughing and floated down fifty metres. But as she looked at the huge traffic jam and the TV crew and the thousands of people watching her, she started to laugh again. And up she went again.

The kind woman shook her head. “We’re going to have to be a little bit meaner,” she said firmly. “Any minute now the wind will catch her, and she will float away forever. What is the worst thing you can think of to say to her?”

They all put their heads together and thought and thought and thought. Finally they had it.

“Altogether now,” called Zimkhitha’s dad, standing on the roof of a Mercedes Benz. “Everybody shout as loudly as you can, all at once.”

And the whole crowd of four thousand people, and the yellow dog, and the black cat, and the man selling bananas all shouted at once, “HEY, ZIMKHITHA! WE CAN SEE YOUR PANTIES, AND THERE’S A HOLE IN THEM!”

And Zimkhitha stopped laughing.

Down she came. Down, down, down. Even further down, and further down and further down, until finally she was almost on the ground.

“My precious baby!” cried her mom, grabbing her legs and pulling her back to Earth. “Thank goodness you’re safe!”



Zimkhitha looked at the crowd of people all cheering and laughing and clapping their hands. She was so embarrassed that she covered her face and ran home.

“Oh dear,” said her dad. “We’ve hurt her feelings. She’s very upset.”

So the people put their heads together again and thought of the right thing to say to cheer her up.

“Altogether now,” called her mom.

And they shouted, “HEY, ZIMKHITHA! WE WERE ONLY JOKING!”

Zimkhitha stopped running.

“WE PROMISE YOU!” they all shouted. “WE COULDN’T REALLY SEE YOUR PANTIES, BECAUSE YOU’RE WEARING PINK TROUSERS!”

And Zimkhitha started to laugh.

“Oops, grab her quickly,” shouted her mom.

And they did. Just in time.



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● **GET CREATIVE!**



- Draw a picture of yourself floating and laughing. Then add a speech
 - bubble to your picture and write words for the sound of your laughter in
 - it. Try using letters of different sizes as well as capital or small letters to
 - show how loud or soft your laugh is. Show your picture to someone else
 - and let them try to read the speech bubble!
-

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Visual

Draw a picture of yourself floating and laughing. Then add a speech bubble to your picture and write words for the sound of your laughter in it. Try using letters of different sizes as well as capital or small letters to show how loud or soft your laugh is. Show your picture to someone else and let them try to read the speech bubble!



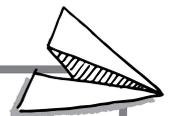
Reading

Read the story aloud using different voices for Zimkhitha's mom and dad, and making your voice louder and louder as the size of the crowd grows.



Writing

Imagine that Zimkhitha's parents put up a "lost" notice to help them find Zimkhitha. Write "LOST" at the top of a sheet of paper, then draw a picture of Zimkhitha. Underneath it, describe her so that someone reading the notice would know if they had seen her.



Craft

Use paper, crayons/paint and sticky tape/staples to make the spotty panties that the people in the story pretended they could see Zimkhitha wearing.



Performance

Move around as if you are Zimkhitha floating in the sky. Now try moving like a big pink balloon, clouds floating in the sky, Zimkhitha floating down to the ground and Zimkhitha's mom pulling Zimkhitha back to Earth.