

UWUNGELEMA

A South African Tale

Once upon a time in southern Africa, a terrible drought hit the land, and the animals searched far and wide for food and water. They came upon a magnificent **TREE** they had never before seen, and from every branch dangled a piece of ripe, fresh fruit.

"Who can this tree belong to?" the animals asked each other, and at last they learned that the owner of the tree was a **CHIEF LION** who lived far away, near the sea. They decided to send a messenger to ask the chief if they might eat the fruit.

"We'll send the **HARE**," the animals decided. "He's very fast." And so the hare sped through the villages, across the bush, down the mountain, all the way to the sea.

"Excuse me, chief," said the hare as he bowed before the owner, "we were wondering if we might eat the fruit of your tree."

"Certainly," said the chief. "And when you eat from my tree, you will never be hungry again."

Hare's mouth was watering at the very thought. "Thank you," he said.

"There's just one thing," the chief explained. "In order to eat from the tree, you must state its name. My tree's name is Uwungelema."

"Thank you, thank you," said the hare, bowing deep. "We are forever in your debt."
And with that he turned around and raced as fast as he could back to the animals
who were gathered at the tree.

It is ours!" the hare cried. "All we must do is say the name, and the name of the
tree is ..."

The hare looked puzzled for a moment. He shook his head, and the others gathered
close. "What's the name?" they cried.

"Umawumagamba ... Uawuraree ... Umawumumumu ..." The hare kept trying to
say the name, but try as he would, he could not remember the name of the tree.

"Never mind the name," one of the elephants cried, and he reached up to grab some
fruit, but he could not pull it from the branch. "We must send someone else!" the
elephant roared. "Let us send the **SPRINGBOK**. But this time we will send two so
they can remind themselves of the name."

And so two springboks streaked through the villages, across the bush, down the
mountain and raced to the sea. "Chief," they panted heavily as they reached his
home, "please, won't you tell us the name of the tree of fruit?"

"The name is Uwungelema," said the chief.

"Uwungelema," the first springbok said to his brother.

"Uwungelema," echoed the second.

And they turned toward home, running fast, for they could almost taste that fruit.
But they ran so fast that they tripped on some rocks and bumped their heads

against each other. "Ouch!" they said in unison, and nursing their sore heads, they stood up and began the trek home.

"What is the name?" the animals cried when the two arrived back home.

"Uwuwgoo," said the first springbok. "Oh no, I cannot remember."

"Uwugaa," said the second, and he rubbed his head. "My memory is lost!"

"Oh no," the animals cried. "What will we do?"

And so they sent the mongoose, and he could not remember, either. They sent the buffaloes and then the zebras, and they too forgot. "What will we do?" they cried.

Suddenly a little voice from the ground called, "I will go."

Everyone turned to look down at the **TORTOISE**. They began to laugh. "You're far too slow," they chided him.

"I'll go anyway," said the tortoise, and with that he ambled off. Walking slowly but steadily, at long last he reached the chief.

"Thank you," the tortoise said to the chief after he learned the name of the tree.

Then he began his long, slow trek back home. As he trundled along, he remembered a lesson his mother had long ago taught him. To remember something important, you must repeat it over and over, and so, as the tortoise trudged along, he said out loud, "Uwungelema, Uwungelema, Uwungelema."

"What is that you're mumbling?" the monkeys chattered from the treetops. "Why do you talk to yourself?" They howled with laughter.

The tortoise did not care. "Uwungelema, Uwungelema, Uwungelema," he said, over and over. Even when his children saw him on the road and cried, "Father, say hello to us," he shook his head and said only "Uwungelema."

Finally he reached the tree. "What is the name?" the animals cried. They were faint from hunger.

"Uwungelema," said the tortoise, and at the sound of the word, the fruit began to fall from the tree. All the animals cheered and sang their praises to the slow, steady tortoise who had saved their lives. And never again did they tease him for his lack of speed.