

Hollow Victory

By Rosemary Kyarimpa

At last his efforts were paying off. Mr. Rwata had just received confirmation from the Ministry of Education allocating him a teaching post at Kagyera Girls' High School.

"We are happy to confirm that your application requesting for your posting to a government school has been accepted. You are required to report at the school with immediate effect, to formalize your transfer with the school authorities..."

It was true, it was real! Mr. Rwata's eyes almost popped out with excitement. Now he would see which goddamned louse would point another accusing finger at him. That excuse of a woman, the Headmistress of his former private school, almost ruined his life. Mr. Rwata hissed between clenched teeth. He still remembered the terrible ordeal in court, and his conviction for alleged defilement of a girl under eighteen years of age. If it were not for the good judge who accepted the appeal, with a smooth pat of three million shillings, he would still be rotting in prison. It was good he knew how to pat the back of the judge, who in turn used his power and position to terrorize the parents of the stupid loose girl. It was now three years since he went out of private school employment, and that filthy stinking cell of Kigo prison.

Mr. Rwata took up his post as teacher of Geography at Kagyera Girls' High School. He was allocated the teaching of Physical Geography in both Ordinary and Advanced levels. His performance as a subject teacher spoke for itself. The pupils always scored the highest marks in his subject, unlike in other subjects. The pupils nicknamed him *Firebrand*, for he had at one time said he was brand new academic fire, straight from Makerere University School of Geographical studies. He was in the school to challenge small textbook writers Monkhouse. The pupils would soon see what a firebrand he really was, and in less than a decade, he would have produced textbooks ten times more than the entire small Geography book writers' works put together. That was Mr. Rwata's declaration. He had decided to begin compiling ideas for his books, when something shameful happened to him. He was teaching a lesson on contours, and the demarcation of the world map into hemispheres. Trusting in the effective transfer of knowledge using visual aids, Mr. Rwata called out to Ameria for a demonstration. Ameria was one of the brightest girls in form four.

"Come here in front, quick," Mr. Rwata beckoned Ameria with his right hand.

The left hand clutched a big wooden ruler and a piece of chalk. Ameria got up quickly, and walked to the front of the class. Mr. Rwata told her to stand in the middle of the floor space, directly facing the other pupils.

"Now, we are going to start the demonstration," Mr. Rwata cleared his throat.

"I have already talked about the contours on a map, and the exact places where a geographer traces them. Clear?"

"Ye-e-es!" the class answered in chorus.

"Ameria, today you are going to be our contours, and also our world map," Mr. Rwata continued. He laid the big wooden ruler on his desk and put the piece of chalk in the chalk box. He approached Ameria. He started by touching her hair. The rest of the class burst out laughing.

"Listen, class. This hair on Ameria's head represents the Arctic, in short, the North Pole. Clear?"

"Ye-e-es!" the pupils answered in chorus.

"Now, let's go to the shoulders, together with the head," he pressed her shoulders, and winding his hand over the shoulder blades, he touched her head.

"Class, these parts represent the Northern Hemisphere," Mr. Rwata went on. He rubbed his hands round Ameria's belly, and told the class that it represented the equatorial region. Ameria gave a slight *ouch*, and Mr. Rwata explained that those were the hot air currents carrying the equatorial rain. He told the class that this was the most interesting part on the world map, with fertile red soils and rich flora and fauna. Then just above the equator, was a country in South America, renowned for its continued world fame in producing beauty queens. Some pupils showed signs of getting puzzled.

"I am referring to Venezuela, the world's leading beauty queen producer," Mr. Rwata continued. He was now rubbing his hand against Ameria's belly.

"No, sir!" the girl protested.

"Don't worry, girl. I was just about to reach the last but not the least sub-topic in the Southern Hemisphere. Who knows the continent where beautiful kangaroo animals come from?"

"Australia!" the whole class shouted at once.

"Correct, Australia is the place. The kangaroos produce their young, and carry them in a pouch between their legs. Australia-a-a-a!" As Mr. Rwata said this, his hand landed on Ameria's front part of the skirt. He spread his fingers apart, and started rubbing them vigorously on the girl's private parts. The girl shouted loud, and the whole class now started to cheer. Unable to stand the obvious assault, Ameria started clawing at Mr. Rwata's face. Two of her fingernails got trapped in the inside part of his spectacles. She twisted them forward, and Mr. Rwata's glasses fell off. They landed on the concrete floor, and smashed.

"Now see what you have done, stupid girl!" Mr. Rwata said, instantly reaching for the big wooden ruler. He hit Ameria's head with it. The girl screamed, and there was general commotion in the class. The pupils started throwing pens and textbooks at the teacher. He fled the class, and the pupils swarmed around like bees from a rifled beehive. There were shouts and abuses of all kinds.

"Karye nyoko, Firebrand! Obwe shi waareeba ngu tukaija aha kukwana!"

The pupils cursed Mr. Rwata, literally telling him to go and eat his mother. Within the next few minutes, the news had circulated in the whole school. The Headmistress called an emergency assembly. One of the pupils of form four had disobeyed a teacher and incited others to rebel. The torn textbooks and pens littered around the form four classroom were evidence enough of the rebellion. The candidate class was clearly heading for disaster. What type of pupils were they, if they could not see that the days to their final exams were numbered? The Headmistress now called Ameria to the raised platform. All the teachers stood near the staffroom, wearing shocked expressions on their faces. Some were senior teachers in the school, for as long as twenty years, but they did not remember the last time a school pupils' strike took place.

"Ameria, tell the teachers and the whole school why we are here," the Headmistress started. Ameria looked at the Headmistress, and turned her face away. She looked over her left shoulder, and fixed her eyes on the teachers. Her eyes met Mr. Rwata's, and she broke out in tears. The rest of the pupils made murmuring sounds. Mr. Rwata himself twisted the frames of his broken spectacles between his thumb and his index finger. There was silence.

"Ameria, you have exactly one second to explain your erratic behavior," the Headmistress commanded in a high-pitched voice. Ameria now sniffed with suppressed sobs, and buried her face in a white handkerchief. The Headmistress lost her patience. She asked the discipline teacher to take over the floor. He was a tall light-skinned man, with lanky arms and legs. He wore his trademark light blue shirt, and striped trousers, made out of a shiny brown material. The material was locally known as *yokasi*, and it was known to be the cheapest item in men's wear. In fact, the trousers had earned the discipline teacher the nickname, *Yokasi*. He stepped on the platform carrying a big stick in his right hand.

"Now time has come to expose the devils," he started. He talked of the constant burden carried by the disciplinary committee, in trying to restore order to a mad group of girls. He had not forgotten the trouble he faced before he finally nabbed the satanic group of girls, who had made it a habit of sleeping in Rukungiri town, with the fat traders old enough to be their grandfathers. Thanks to his unwavering commitment, he was ready to continue serving as discipline teacher, if this would help to curb the apparent erratic behavior of girls like Ameria. He was not called to count the sins of the school girls, because they were just too numerous. He now wished to show the whole school how barbaric a fool's mind could be, if not tamed early.

"Look at this," he held up a copy of Young and Lowry's textbook, whose leaves were now falling out.

"What do you call the doer of such an action? Barbarian!" he bellowed the words out. He picked a bundle of torn exercise books containing Geography notes.

"And this? *Ha-ha-ha!* A foolish pygmy burnt all family granaries after getting

satisfied with food. What do you call this, now? Barbarian!" He cautioned the school to be vigilant in reporting girls who had become barbarians. These were the girls who were good at piercing their ears with thousands of holes, girls who wore makeup, and girls who kept their hair long. Such girls were the rotten mangoes in the school, and the disciplinary committee would give them no chance to spoil the rest. He was aware that the satanic group of girls was the very one holding bogus baptism ceremonies for teachers. The teachers were aware of rubbish names like *Firebrand* and *Yokasi*. The assembly burst out laughing and stamping their feet.

"Quiet, quiet everybody," Yokasi waved his big stick at the pupils. His eyes had a slight sparkle. The pupils knew too well what this meant. *Yokasi* could descend on any one of them in a ferocious attack. They fell silent at once. He now told them how the rules of the school were very clear. Any pupil causing rebellion or agitation in the school earned an automatic dismissal. There was no alternative, and for that matter, the disciplinary committee would sit just as a formality, to write a dismissal letter for rebellious *Ameria*. She had exactly thirty minutes to pack her belongings, and to hand over the school textbooks that survived the barbaric acts. As for the rest of the school, they would no doubt pay extra fees the following term, to replace the destroyed textbooks. He now reached for *Ameria*, who still buried her head in her handkerchief. He bent her forward, and ordered her to lie down, flat on her belly. He started administering hot strokes of the cane on her buttocks. The girl pleaded with loud screams, which made *Yokasi* increase the tempo of the whipping.

Whack, whack, went the wild sounds of the cane, as it tore at *Ameria*'s bottom. The rest of the pupils stood transfixed. They knew *Yokasi*'s brutality well enough. He could kill the poor girl. The discipline master only stopped beating *Ameria*, when part of her skirt was ripped open with the strokes. He looked at her writhing body, and gave her a big shove, using his left leg. *Ameria* fell sideways, her torn skirt falling off her hips.

"Disperse!" the discipline teacher shouted at the pupils. They shuffled their feet off the assembly grounds. Each stream entered their classroom quietly.

Mr. Rwata counted the incidence as part of his great victories. The last time he scored his other victory was when he had hoodwinked an illiterate parent about his daughter's admission to Kagyera Girls' High School. The parent came from Rweshama. He was a rich fisherman along Rweshama lake, bordering Congo. This illiterate parent had a daughter who had scored only F-9s in Primary Leaving Examinations (PLE). She was a complete failure, and there was no way she was going to get admitted for secondary school. Mr. Rwata remembered the first time he met the parent. He had taken the A' level Geography class to visit Lake George and Lake Edward, which the local people called Rweshama. He had booked the pupils into Rweshama Lakeside camping site, and ordered them supper of fresh fish fried with palm oil, *amamesa*. One of the lakeshore boys had recommended Azaria, for that was the illiterate parent's name. Azaria supplied very good fish at the cheapest price. He also offered his services of fish frying for guests at better rates, as compared to Rweshama Lakeside camping site. Mr. Rwata took the boy's advice. He contacted the fisherman, and asked him to prepare the fish for the pupils.

There must be a surplus for the next day as well. Azaria had never before received such a big order from guests. He lowered his rowing boat into the waters, and cast his nets. The lakeshore boy assisted him in retrieving the trapped fish and throwing it into the backside of the boat. Azaria was clearly a very skilful fisherman. In a short while, he filled the boat's backside space with wriggling *engyegye* fish. He was so happy, his smile widened into a continuous sheepish grin. That evening, he fried the fish in *amamesa* oil, specially smuggled in from Congo. Azaria usually rowed through the waters of Rweshama to do fish business across the border, in Congo. On such occasions, he returned with a sizable number of goods, including jerry cans of *amamesa* oil, salt, bales of patterned *kitenge* cloth, bangles, beads and tapes of *Soukous*, the lakeside's favorite Congolese music. Azaria usually sold his goods at a price three times higher than in Congo, and in turn, he used the money as additional capital investment for his fish business. By the time Mr. Rwata visited Rweshama with his pupils, Azaria was the proud owner of ten fishing boats. He taught his boat apprentices the same skills of the fish trade, and the tactics of crossing the border water with smuggled goods.

"You just *cough* a few shillings," Azaria often told them. *Coughing* involved direct bribery to customs officials from government, who would in most cases, be yawning from persistent hunger.

Azaria dipped the last five fish into the hot cooking oil. In a few minutes, he would present the appetizing dish before Mr. Rwata, to feed his young school girls. As Azaria bent down to arrange the browned whole fish onto five serving platters, the lakeshore boy emerged from behind. He carried two big buckets containing steamed Irish potatoes. He struggled to balance the two heavy buckets suspended by small curved iron rods on each side. He used both his right and left hands, and he constantly propped the buckets on the ground. Azaria relieved the boy of the heavy load, and served the Irish potatoes in five steel bowls. He added two platters of half-cooked cabbage salad sprinkled with yellow powder spices. He must display his cookery knowledge, obtained from the many visits to the Beni local food market in Congo. The only difference was that he could not cook snake or monkey meat for his customers, like most Congolese did. He himself had vowed never to touch meat cooked in the food market while in Congo, unless he was present during the slaughter of the animal.

Mr. Rwata and his pupils ate the food with relish. Azaria was indisputably a good cook. Would he mind taking up a job at Kagyera Girls' High School, as the chief cook?

"Ye-ee-es!" the pupils shouted in support of Mr. Rwata's proposal. Azaria smiled with his sheepish grin, and adjusted his straw hat before he could answer. The offer was a good opportunity, but he was too busy with the fish business. He wanted to stay at the lakeside so that when Mr. Rwata came back with his pupils, he would still find a friendly welcome. However, there was something else he thought he could talk over with Mr. Rwata. It was about his daughter's schooling. Could Mr. Rwata give him some time to discuss it?

"Sure, as soon as we finish eating," Mr. Rwata responded, some fish bones peeping at the corners of his mouth. He pulled them out, before he could swallow the chewed flesh of the fish.

He reached out his hand, and got the fourth helping of fish. Some of the pupils looked at him, bewildered. One of the girls known for her naughty manners remarked about it in a whisper. Mr. Rwata must be a descendant of the small tribe of *Bakenyi*, who lived along the shores of Lake Kioga, and ate fish as their only food. The rest of the girls burst out laughing. Mr. Rwata thought they were laughing because of the funny appearance of Azaria's straw hat. He reached for the fifth helping of the fried fish.

"My friend, I have a problem. My daughter," Azaria started.

"Go on," Mr. Rwata replied.

"She has finished primary seven, but has not been taken in any secondary school yet. To tell you the truth, I think some people are merely jealous of her. That child had never missed a day in all the seven, in fact, nine years in primary school," Azaria continued.

"Sorry? Do your schools ask pupils to spend nine years instead of seven at school? God forbid!" Mr. Rwata asked, with a faked tone of concern in his voice.

"Not that. My daughter spent some extra years in primary school, because she had to repeat some classes-primary four and primary seven," Azaria explained. So the man's daughter was actually dense? Mr. Rwata mused. She must no doubt have harvested failure grades in the final exams. Well, he would not judge her so fast. He would first see the results.

"It's a pity we are leaving tomorrow, I would have looked at her results," Mr. Rwata replied.

"Oh, blessed be the gods of my fathers. I have a copy of her results with me," Azaria answered, and reached his hand into the inside pocket of his greased coat. He pulled out a faint photocopy of his daughter's school results. He handed the copy to Mr. Rwata, who adjusted his spectacles to read them. His eyes were shocked at what they saw. The girl, Annette Bakareeba, had not just performed poorly, she had failed completely. She had 9-9-9-9 in all the four subjects done at primary seven. Mr. Rwata was about to hand back the piece of paper, when an idea struck him. He must dig a garden of gold out of the man's ignorance. His daughter would never be admitted to any secondary school, but Mr. Rwata would make it look a very big possibility to Azaria.

"Your daughter did very well in her exams, she can join our school," Mr. Rwata said. Azaria smiled at the news with his wide sheepish grin. He had not met a person with such kindness in a long time. His thoughts were interrupted by Mr. Rwata's next words. Azaria must provide the initial deposit of school fees, so that his daughter could have an assured place. It was good Azaria had met Mr. Rwata in time, he was the one in charge of school admissions. As soon as he got back to school, he was going to include Azaria's daughter on the newcomers' list. Azaria interrupted him with a wave of his hand. He did not have to wait until Mr. Rwata went back to school. He was ready to pay the full amount of school fees, so that his daughter could go straight to senior one. Mr. Rwata's plan was working. Azaria was actually getting hooked. Mr. Rwata had to play his cards well. He told Azaria that his suggestion would do no harm.

"In fact, it's better to pay all the amount at once," Mr. Rwata said. He went on to count the total amount, and it came to six hundred thousand shillings. The costs included textbook fund, building fund, Parents-Teachers Association (PTA) fund, and feeding costs. Mr. Rwata also counted the money for the mattress, the bed sheets, the bedcover, underwear, sanitary towels, and the shoes. He added the costs of uniform, exercise books, pens, and a mathematical set. Azaria listened carefully, with a slight nod of his head. He would have to go to the Beni market in Congo first, in order to buy the additional school requirements cheaply.

"Don't mind, my friend. There are plenty of those things in Rukungiri District town. In fact, they are cheaper than the goods here in Rweshama. The traders in Rukungiri town smuggle them in from Rwanda, through the Katuna border," Mr. Rwata explained. He was ready to help Azaria in buying the requirements for the girl. He would buy them in Rukungiri town. He now counted the equivalent of the costs, and it came up to four hundred thousand shillings. *Aya-ya-ya! Mr. Rwata thought. If this goat gives me all the money, I will quit teaching right away. I am tired of peanut earnings offered by the government, I am fed up with hand-to-mouth life,* Mr. Rwata silently resolved in his mind. Without any further delay, Azaria reached out in his trouser pockets and pulled out big bundles of money. *The monkey has more money than I imagined,* he thought. He wished he had exaggerated the costs more, but comforted himself with the saying that one bird in the hands was better than two in the bush. Azaria handed him the money, and Mr. Rwata pocketed the bundle in his coat pocket.

Mr. Rwata returned to Kagyera Girls' High school a very jolly man. His fellow teachers wondered what the Geography tour had done to him. During break tea in the staffroom, the discipline teacher called for silence. He wanted to announce very important news. He stood in the middle of the staffroom and cleared his throat.

"Permit me to convey very good news to you, my colleagues," he started.

"My friend, Mr. Rwata, has asked me to deliver special news," he continued.

"Out with it at once!" some teachers shouted.

"Well, the point is that Mr. Rwata has offered each teacher three bottles of beer in Kagashe drinking joint. Each drinker will also be entitled to a quarter chicken serving, and roasted bananas to accompany it," he concluded, and took his seat.

Pwa-pwa-pwa-a-a-a! the teachers clapped their hands loudly, and added shouts of *oyee-e-e!* The discipline teacher smiled, with his usual sparkle in the eyes. If it was not for the jovial mood in the staffroom, one would have wondered whether the glint in his eyes was not a prelude to his ferocious attacks with the cane. With obvious excitement, the Chemistry teacher shot up from his seat. He waved his hands in the air, calling for attention.

"I am really catalyzed by Mr. Rwata's offer. I feel as if I am already having a chemical reaction in my proton circle.

For that matter, I have resolved to add litmus to the offer, so that all the staff members can have a taste of ionized beer!" he pulled a few notes out of his pocket, and handed them over to Mr. Rwata. The rest of the staff members cheered and clapped again.

The Biology teacher stood up immediately. She also waved her hands frantically, calling for attention. She stood akimbo, and started:

"Fellow teachers, I am very glad about the specimen offers by my friends. I call them specimen because there is nothing proved either living or non-living so far. However, I want to ask about the origin of such a big growth in the internal structure of Mr. Rwata and the Chemistry teacher. As you all know, there is always a muscle attachment to bone by means of tendons," she concluded amid yet louder cheers, and sat down. Mr. Rwata answered that the origin of the apparent volcanic action would be studied that evening, in Kagashe drinking joint. The whole staffroom burst into a deafening roar of laughter, accompanied by more clapping.

In the evening, all the teachers met in Kagashe drinking joint, except Keiguru, the Christian studies teacher. Keiguru was always telling people that she was saved by the blood of Jesus Christ. There was no way she could mix with the rest of the teachers in a bar, because according to her, such a place was the devil's wicked workshop.

Mr. Rwata asked the bar attendant to bring each of the teachers two rounds of beer. He also asked her to bring them specially roasted goat meat, *muchomo*, accompanied by roasted *matooke*. As the revelers munched loudly, their jaws moving up and down, Mr. Rwata stood up to give his speech. He told the teachers that during his Geography tour with the pupils, he met the star of his heart. This thief of his heart was some tall slender Congolese girl called Annette Mwanaudi. Her father, Chief Azaria Mwanaudi, was a great chief of the royal Congolese tribe that lived in the eastern borders of Congo. Chief Mwanaudi was a very generous man, and he offered the Geography class free meals and lodging while in the small town of Rweshama. The chief had come to follow up on his gold and diamond trade with the border traders, accompanied by Annette, his charming young daughter. So Mr. Rwata had met and fallen in love with the chief's daughter. This girl was so used to staying in many of the small Ugandan border towns, that she sometimes called herself Annette Bakareeba. The two planned to get married in four months' time. The teachers clapped loudly, and cheered. *Yokasi* spilt his beer on his usual brown trousers, as he jumped to his feet to cheer at the news of Mr. Rwata's engagement. Mr. Rwata called for calm and continued with his story. As soon as the two got married, the chief would whisk them off for the honeymoon in Kinshasa city. He had already booked a deluxe suite for the bridal couple, in a five-star hotel in Kinshasa. Much as Mr. Rwata appreciated his father-in-law to-be's offer, he did not want to cut the image of a total dependant. That was one of the reasons he called his colleagues to discuss fundraising possibilities, in addition to breaking the news of the planned wedding.

Pwa-pwa-pwa-a-a-a! went a loud hand-clapping from the teachers. Mr. Rwata was the luckiest man alive. He had managed to win the heart and hand of the rich chief's daughter in marriage, and had a honeymoon planned and funded in the bargain!

He was surely going to quit teaching. With the chief's rich trade in gold and diamonds, Mr. Rwata had landed a great opportunity to get connected to the prosperous border trade. The war in the Congo was also a blessing in disguise. Like some enterprising ministers and army officers, Mr. Rwata would probably be able to smuggle some cars to Congo. His rich father-in-law would undoubtedly clinch lucrative business deals for him, deep down in the Congo. The major step for Mr. Rwata now was to prepare a well-designed and attractive budget to raise money for the *kasiki*, or bachelor's party. The rest was already catered for, thanks to the large heart of chief Azaria Mwanaudi.

The staff members set up a committee for Mr. Rwata's wedding, whose job was to raise money for the *kasiki*. Were the rest of the costs not footed by Chief Mwanaudi already, then the committee would have included the wedding cost as their responsibility as well. The name of the committee was RWAKA, which stood for Rwata's *kasiki*. They made a budget which catered for the groom and his best man, *Yokasi*. The items included two pairs of suits from Marks and Spencer, two handkerchiefs, two bow ties, three pairs of underpants, three pairs of socks, two pairs of shoes, two shirts, and a fly whisk. The committee also made a fundraising timetable, and hung it on the staffroom notice board. They also made a pledge list and asked all the contributors to sign their names against the amounts donated. The chairperson of RWAKA was *Yokasi*, the best man to-be, while the treasurer was Mr. Rwata, the lucky groom. The fundraising took place every Friday evening in Kagashe drinking joint. It was now three months since the activity started, and RWAKA had so far collected two million shillings. They still had a task of raising an additional three million, to cover the remaining gap in the budget. And there was only one month left to the *kasiki* and the wedding.

End of Part One

Adapted from R. Kyarimpa, 2000, *Songs of the Third Life*, CreaMA Productions, Kampala-Uganda.

© R. KYARIMPA, 2007. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rosemary Kyarimpa is a Ugandan-born Writer and Winner of the First Prize in Short Stories, National Book Trust of Uganda (2000). With a rich International experience and strong academic background, the author is a committed woman activist and human rights crusader. She has published two Short Story Books, in addition to contributing articles and academic papers to several International Journals. Her third book, a collection of feminist poetry, is lined up for the next literary project. Recently, Ms Kyarimpa expanded her writing talents into filmmaking, at the prestigious Boston University (USA).

Watch this space for the continuation of *Hollow Victory Short Story*, PLUS more exciting updates on Featured Writers.

EaUnited.com