

WAKAYIMA OF TROPICAL ACADEMY Episode 4

WAKAYIMA AND OBLONG'S PROBLEM

By Ernest Bazanye



Now, as we know, Wakayima was not really a school student. He was not interested in getting an education like the rest of the schoolkids. He was only interested in getting their snacks.

He wasn't the only one in the classrooms who didn't seem to care too much about whether the education the teachers kept throwing at them hit or missed their heads. There was Ngiri, who just wanted to bully everyone. There was Benedicto, who was always drawing cartoons instead of paying attention. Then there was a boy called Oblong. His name was Kironde, but there was this one time

at the beginning of the year when he was caught napping in Maths class with Teacher Namuddu that I have to tell you about.

“You! What is the name of this shape, class? What is the answer?” snapped Teacher Namuddu, suddenly shocking Kironde out of his slumber.

“Um... “ Kironde, like many other sleepy schoolkids, seemed to think that those two letters could make answers you don’t know suddenly fall out of the sky and enter your head in record time. It never worked and certainly did not work this time. Not even after Kironde said it again: Like “Ummmm...”

Luckily his friend Deo, who sat behind him in the class and was a bit more attentive, knew the answer. “Oblong,” he whispered at Kironde’s back.

“OBLONG!” shouted Kironde, very very confident now. It was as if the “um” had worked and the answer had in fact flown into the back of his head.

The teacher knew what had happened. She could see Deo whispering. But she just let it slide. “Stay awake, Kironde,” she warned, and continued the lesson.

Unfortunately, even though Kironde was able to stay awake for the remaining eight minutes of Mathematics, it was Geography with Mr Pampers after that. And staying awake during Geography with Mr Pampers was going to prove to be too much for Kironde.

You want to know why they called him Mr Pampers? You think it was because he made people sleep like babies in fresh pampers? No.

You think it is because his trousers were too big and it looked like he was wearing pampers? No.

They called him Mr Pampers because it was his name. He came with it from England. Whether he was related to the actual Pampers who invented Pampers or not, we don't know. We just know his name was Mr Pampers.

It is just a coincidence that he was, in a way, like pampers. At least his voice was.

It was soft. Can you imagine a voice that is soft and quiet and soothing and comfortable? A voice that is like a pillow in sound form? Or a nice teddy bear in sound form? Plus a warm blanket? That is what Mr Pampers sounded like. He spoke so softly and slowly that ...

...

...

...

Oh. Sorry. I nodded off for a minute. Instead of writing this story, I fell asleep briefly, just thinking about how soothing Mr Pampers' voice was.

So, into this class landed Kironde. He took a seat near the back behind Ngiri, hoping that Ngiri's broad shoulders would hide him while he slipped into a nice, sweet shot of slumber.

But it didn't last. It seemed as if Kironde had only slept for two microseconds when he heard that question again.

The only time Mr Pampers ever sounded less than usually sweet and gentle was when he snapped the words: "You! What is the answer!"

When he did this, he sounded like every other teacher. He sounded like Teacher Namuddu, Mr Kafuddu and all the rest. When they asked that question they all sounded as if they had practiced by copying police officers in shows on TV— you

know when the cops break into the criminal's place and shout: "Stop! Freeze! Ya busted!" Yeah. Teachers sound like they have broken into your sleep with their guns and shouted "Stop! Freeze! Ya Busted" at your dreams.



So Kironde panicked. "Um..." he began to say, but Mr Pampers knew that trick.

"Um is not the answer, son. What is the correct answer?"

Kironde, still panicking, said the first word that came into his head. "Oblong!"

And since then everyone called him Oblong.

Oblong and Wakayima were two of the students who didn't really seem to care about school. In fact, one time Oblong asked Wakayima, "My-guy, how come they never catch you sleeping in class? I am asleep in class all the time and, even though I am asleep all the time I still manage to see you sleeping. I don't know how. Every time a teacher shouts at me to wake me up, I look around in shock and one of the things I always see is you fast asleep. How? How come they never catch you?"

"Oblong, my friend Oblong, my dude Oblong, my-Guy Oblong, I would teach you my ways, but," he put his arm around Oblong (We are also going to call him Oblong from now on, if you don't mind. He doesn't. He actually likes the nickname,) "Are you ready to learn? If you can't pay attention in class, how do I know you are ready to pay attention when I teach you how to sleep in class?" And with that, Wakayima hopped two steps away, remembered that he was in disguise, and walked the rest of the way.

Oblong was not going to give up so easily. He ran after Wakayima. "Come on, nawe. Just tell me your secret. What is the trick? I need to know."

"Dude, why don't you just try, I don't know, staying awake in class? It is much easier and there is no trick to it," sneered Wakayima. "You just do one eye up like this, and then the other eye up the same way, and you keep them both like that throughout the lesson."

"I wish I could," said Oblong sadly. "But the truth is, no matter how hard I try, I still end up falling asleep."

Wakayima had slowly begun to understand humans since he started hanging out in their school, but there were some things he still did not fully get. "Wait a minute. Don't you people sleep at night and stay awake during the day?" he asked.

Wakayima was remembering the ways of the forest where there were two types of animals. There were animals that slept during the night and were awake during the day, and there were animals called "Nocturnal" ones. Unlike normal animals like hares who were not crazy and understood that if you are going to be up and about looking for food and meeting your friends and living your life like a proper animal should, why not do it when the sun is giving you light, instead of being like those crazy nocturnals who decided to run around when it was dark and everyone else was asleep anyway?

Wakayima remembered the day in the forest when he was going back to his home to sleep, and he met hyena, one of the nocturnals, leaving home, having just woken up.

Wakayima was tired from a long day of trickery and cunning. He had spent the whole day getting the warthog to stick its head down a hole so that once he was stuck, Wakayima could take the warthog's yams and run away.

Wakayima was tired and full of yams, so he wasn't not paying attention to the path around him.

Meanwhile, the hyena, Wampisi, was refreshed and alert, having just woken up. He was full of energy and was very hungry. So it was only with one pounce that he landed on Wakayima and captured him.

It was a very embarrassing thing to be captured by a hyena and Wakayima was quite ashamed. First of all, hyenas are not hunters. They usually just eat the leftovers after other stronger animals have eaten; that is why they are called scavengers. They eat leftovers.

All the prey in the forest said it was because hyenas are too stupid to capture their own prey, and that is why they are scavengers and nocturnals. They have to wait until night time when the stronger animals have gone to sleep, then they sneak around looking for their leftovers.

So you can see why it would be very embarrassing for Wakayima to be seen captured by a hyena.

As Wakayima dangled in Wampisi's mouth he had two thoughts running at the same time: How to escape and how much he hoped nobody saw him.

But it was too late. As Wampisi carried him off, they passed by a guinea fowl.

The guinea fowl laughed and laughed, loudly and with a lot of energy. Have you ever heard guinea fowls make any noise? It's annoying, right? Well, their laughter is even more annoying.

"Hah hah! Check it out! Wakayima is always bragging about being the smartest animal in the forest, but he's been captured by the dumbest predator in the bush! Hah hah! I hope you are delicious, Wakayima! Hah hah! Enjoy your dinner, Wampisi!"

And that is when the two threads of thought came together and tied themselves, like a nice weave, into a cunning plan.

"Your fur looks kind of dry and rough, Wampisi. Are you sure you are getting

enough vitamins in your diet?" Wakayima asked his captor.

"What are vitamins?" asked the hyena, making the first mistake you should avoid when you capture a hare, which is to actually talk to it. He even opened his mouth wider to ask, letting the Wakayima fall out.

But instead of running away, Wakayima just brushed himself a bit and stood there to continue talking.

"Vitamins are things found in food that make you stronger and faster and give you a beautiful, soft, luxurious coat of fur. Like mine. Feel my fur. Nice, eh?"

The hyena ran his paws over the hare's pelt and felt that he agreed. He was beginning to consider eating the fur as well, when Wakayima continued to talk.

"You need to eat food with vitamins in it, instead of scavenging all the time," he said.

Wampisi looked at Wakayima. "Lucky thing I captured you then. You just said you have vitamins. They make your fur so soft. I can't wait to eat you, then my fur will be as soft as yours and the lady hyenas will let me be friends with them. I am so lonely. None of the lady hyenas want to be my friend."

Wakayima hated it when his predators began trying to share their problems with him as if he was a counsellor and not a meal. He cut in quickly.

"Oh, eating me won't help. I already used my vitamins. You need an animal that is the source of vitamins. Like ostriches, or eagles or guinea fowls."

"How am I going to find an ostrich to eat? Do you think I am stupid? Those things are huge!"

Wakayima demonstrated his legendary cunning by not answering the second question and only replying to the first. "You don't have to find an ostrich or even an eagle. We just passed a nice juicy guinea fowl down the path. It was full to the brim with vitamins, I could tell. If we go back I could show you."

The hyena shook his large head. "Nah. Guinea fowls are too much trouble. They

have beaks and they peck you when you try to pounce on them. I'd rather eat you. How badly do I need vitamins anyway?"

Wakayima continued. "Is that the problem? Just the beak? Pssst. So easily solved."

Wampisi gave him that look. If you are ever fortunate enough to have a fool actually listen to you, you will know the look. Most of us are not so lucky. Fools never listen.

Wakayima replied to the look by explaining: "Catch the guinea fowl, cut off its head, then it will be much easier to pounce on it because it won't have a beak to peck you with."

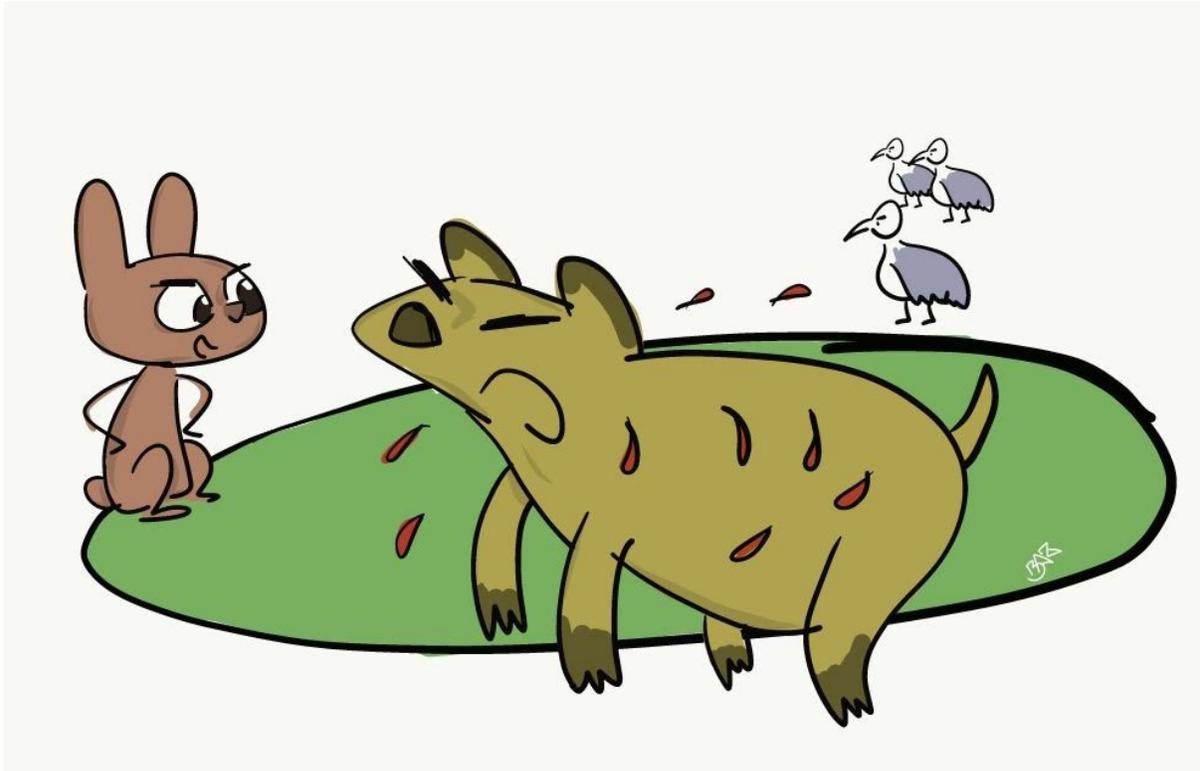
Wakayima watched the hyena as his yellow eyeballs rolled upwards and towards the left as he considered this idea. Wakayima tried not to laugh.

"That is actually a great idea," hyena said.

Wakayima tried harder to still not laugh.

"All I have to do is remove the head and then all the vitamins I want will be right there. And I will finally get a lady hyena to love me and be my friend."

"And all you have to do is get the head off," Wakayima said in his special wise-friend voice.



Now, the hyena got pecked quite heavily when he attacked the flock of guinea fowls, but the difference was that this time he was not going to let that stop him. He had had a change of attitude. Before this, he saw the pecking as a problem to be avoided. Now he saw the pecking as just part of the process, knowing that once he got the heads off the fowls, the rest would be easy.

Wakayima didn't see Wampisi for a few weeks after that but when he did, one evening, when they met again, one waking up to go do his nocturnal thing, and the other on his way home to rest, Wakayima noticed that the hyena was covered in pecking scars. The guinea fowls had really gone in on him.

Wakayima got ready to run away when Wampisi sadly groaned. "Don't even bother. I am not going to pounce on you. I am done with hunting. From now I stick to scavenging leftovers at night. Even though they have no vitamins, at least leftovers don't peck you."

But that was back in the forest. For now, we were in the hallway of the school and Oblong was looking at Wakayima with a pleading look in his eyes. The poor guy. It actually felt as if he was looking up at Wakayima, even though he was taller than Wakayima; that is how much the pleading was.

“My Guy, I am kind of getting worried. The teachers have given me too many warnings. They are tired of punishing me because when they send me to detention I just fall asleep there. I am worried that if they keep catching me sleeping,” Oblong’s voice quivered, “I may get expelled next.”

“You are serious? You really want my help?”

“I need your help!”

Wakayima thought about it. He looked at Oblong’s head, then looked at his shoes, then looked all over him as if trying to understand what was wrong with this picture. What was confusing him?

“But Oblong, why don’t you just sleep at night?” Wakayima asked.

Oblong looked sheepishly at his feet. “Well, it all started when my cousin came to visit and he had a PSP and he would never let me play with it. So when he was asleep I would take it and start playing. Then next thing you know, because, my-guy, those things are so addictive, you start playing one game and next thing you know you have played all night and the parents are coming to wake you up to get ready for school and you haven’t slept all night. And I did this so many times that I forgot how to sleep at night and...”

Wakayima didn’t even know what a peeyespee was, but it sounded dangerous if it could steal someone’s sleep.

He looked at Oblong and felt very sad for him. Not being able to sleep at night and having to sleep in the middle of classes must be awful, Wakayima thought,

thinking of his soft, comfortable burrow in the forest, which he loved curling into at night when he had had a nice dinner and a full, adventurous day.

“Oblong,” said Wakayima, “Shut up now. I am going to go away. Don’t follow me this time pleading for help because I have a plan. Go in that other direction instead, okay?”

And Wakayima hop-walked up the corridor.

Oblong stood there for a moment. Then turned and walked in the opposite direction.

Now, I would like you to meet the ants. They were walking in a straight line along the edge of the wall when the one in the front stopped and commanded:

“Nsanafu Squad, Halt!”

The whole line stopped.

The second ant in the line asked, “What is it?”

The ant in the front, who had delivered the command, delivered another one, “Sergeant, observe and report!” he commanded.

The second ant asked, “Really? Are you even serious?”

The first ant was getting impatient. “Observe and report, sergeant.”

The second ant, the sergeant, was also impatient. He asked “Captain, with all due respect, the thing is right in front of you. You are looking at it. With compound eyes moreover. You can see the thing. Why do you want me to tell you what it is?”

“Because I am the captain. I give the orders in this Nsanafu Squad,” replied the first ant.

“Okay, but some of your orders are a bit silly, Captain,” said Sergeant. “I’m not trying to be rude here, but really? Dude, really?”

“Observe and report, Sergeant!” said Captain. “Or I will demote you to Corporal.”

Sergeant thought about this and said, “Honestly, I don’t mind. We are a bunch of ants. We all just walk in a straight line looking for little bits of food, and it doesn’t make a difference whether you are a corporal or a sergeant, we are all doing the same thing.”

“Well, it makes a difference if you are the captain, okay? The captain gives orders, and you follow orders, Sergeant!”

Sergeant Ant sighed. “Okay, okay. I’ll observe and report. Whatever.”

Usually the line of ants whose conversation you have just been reading marched around the edge of the schoolyard until they found a simsim seed, or a biscuit crumb or any other little morsel of food that had been dropped by the lunch-time eaters at the school. Lately, their marches had been quite successful, especially around this particular part of the schoolyard because there was always something delicious that had been dropped.

The past few days there had always been at least four simsim seeds for the Nsanafu Squad to take home. But today it was different.

So different that the captain, leader of the march, had to order the squad to stop, and then argue with his sergeant so that he could follow a simple order to observe and report.

The sergeant ant said, “Okay okay.” Then he said, “Get out of the way then so I can see.”

“What?” the captain was offended. “How does a sergeant tell his captain to get out of the way?”

Sergeant replied, “Oowaye, it is right in front of you, and you are right in front of me. I can’t see it properly with you in the way. Move.”

“Sergeant,” the captain glowered, frowning his compound eyes at him.

“I’m demoted, right?” guessed the now-former sergeant.

“You are demoted. Get to the back of the line.”

“Nawe, man. The line is so long, the back is so far away. Maybe I’ll just stand here and wait until we are going back, then I’ll be the last one to leave,” the former sergeant and new corporal moaned.

“Whatever, suit yourself. You! Third guy, you are the new sergeant. Now, observe and report on this thing here!” The captain pointed with his antenna.

The new sergeant approached bashfully.

“Um, captain, first of all I would like to thank you for the honour of promoting me to this new rank. I am very grateful to be made sergeant. I would like to thank my mother, the Queen ant, who is actually everyone’s mother, and I would like to thank everyone who believed in me and I would like to thank my predecessor for ...”

“Would you please just shut up and observe and report?” the captain was getting more impatient.

“Of course, captain. Just one thing,” said his new sergeant.

“What thing?”

“We are still in a line. Would you mind stepping aside so I can see the thing?”

Wakayima sighed as he listened to the argument below. Yes, he is the one who had been dropping the crumbs and the seeds and other bits and pieces at this corner so that the ants could have something to eat. It was his way of looking out for his fellow animals in the world of humans. He felt that they had to stick together and help each other out. But right now, this was going too far. These ants were just becoming too much for him. He looked down and said to the ants, “It’s a simsim ball! A simsim ball! There! Now you don’t have to observe and report, because I have told you what it is! It is a ball made up of simsim seeds rolled up into a ball! Can we stop demoting and promoting and arguing and ordering and get to the next part, please?”

“Hey, did that guy just talk to us?” asked the just demoted ant. “I thought humans can’t speak.”

“I’m not a human,” said Wakayima. “I’m an animal. I’m a hare. I just disguise myself as a human so I can come to this school to get simsim and biscuits and all these cool human snacks. Look,” said Wakayima.

He shook his ears loose and squished his hands back into paws and scrunched his nose back into its normal shape and was soon a hare again.



“Nice! Clever trick,” said the ant. Now that he was not the sergeant and didn’t have to be in the line, he walked around to look up at Wakayima. He climbed up the hare’s paw and onto his face and stood on his nose.

“Really cool way to get simsim. That stuff is delicious!” said the ant.

“I know. I love the way the humans fry it and mix it with treacle and make it so nyummy,” said Wakayima. “We never had anything like this in the forest.”

“Munange, I wouldn’t know about the forest. Never been there. We live here in the school. Our legs are so tiny it would take us months to even get outside the gate, much less out of town. So you have been leaving us the seeds and crumbs all along, eh?”

“Yeah. Just looking out for my fellow animals trying to survive in the world of humans,” said Wakayima.

“We appreciate it, munange. As fellow animals,” began the ant, when from below them they heard a shout.

“What is going on up there? What are you doing up there, corporal?”

“Oowaye! I’m trying to have a conversation!” the ant shouted back from Wakayima’s nose. “Sorry about that. That’s the captain. He thinks he’s in charge because he was the first in the line.”

“Whoever is first in line is the captain?” Wakayima asked.

“Yup,” answered the ant on his nose.

“Oh, so that’s why you won’t get out of the way and let me see the ball,” the new sergeant slapped his head with his front leg, as if finally dawned on him. “Because you know that if I get in front, I become the captain.”

“Well, since we animals have to look out for each other, I am going to ask you to do me a favour. If I put you in front of the line, can you lead a line of ants to...”

...And you know how, in movies, the scene changes just when the star begins whispering his or her cunning plan? Well, this is the book version of that happening.

What happens next with Oblong and Wakayima? The adventures of the cheeky, cunning hare that sneaks into the human school continue with a fresh story each week. visit bazanye.com/wakayima for the latest. Stay tuned! Thanks to the Kuonyesha Art Fund for supporting this!