

WAKAYIMA MEETS THE RAT

By Ernest Bazanye



Now, The kids were hanging around the lockers this afternoon, just chatting. Kwezi was telling everybody that his big brother was the champion at playing matatu in their neighbourhood. Natalia was saying that she was the champion at playing Candy Crush in her neighbourhood. Roger was asking how you become a champion at Candy Crush, because as far as he knew, it was a game you only played on your own. Wakayima was wondering what any of these things were.

He wasn't really interested in what matatu was, but Candy Crush sounded like it involved food, so he was very interested in that.

“So, what happens? You just sit alone with some candy and crush it and crush it and crush it until you win? What is Candy Crush?” he asked.

“Wakzi, you are so daft,” cooed Natalia. “It’s a game you play on your phone. It’s not real candy.”

“Don’t call him daft,” defended Kwezi. “You know some of us are not even going to be allowed to have phones until we are eighteen. And that is sooo far away, I am not even sure phones will still exist by that time. People will have some other technology and we will have missed Candy Crush.”

“What’s the point then?” Wakayima asked. “Why don’t you just get real candy and crush it? I would rather play that way. In fact, I bet if it was about crushing real candy, with teeth, I would be the champion.”

“Yeah, but you would be champion for maybe a couple of weeks,” said Roger. “Before your teeth rot and fall out of your mouth. That’s what happens when you eat too much candy. My Jajja told me that.”

“Really?” Wakayima sounded worried.

“And I think she knows what she is talking about. Because she eats a lot of sweets and she has no teeth left.”

Roger was just in the middle of explaining how his jajja was always eating sweets, and when he called them candy she would scold him and say he was being rude, because she preferred to call them sweets, and in fact she called them “shweechs” because she did not have the teeth to say the letter “s” properly, then there was a sudden scream.

And Rukia zoomed across the corridor.

“Aaaaaaaayi maaaama! Munyambe! Aaaaaayiii bambe! Maaaaaaaama!”

I don’t know what happens in your school, but at Tropical Hills Academy, when you are in a group and someone runs past you screaming, you all immediately run after them and scream along with them.

So all of them ran after her, all screaming “Aaaayi Maaama!” until she suddenly stopped running and turned around to face them.

“You dwanzies! Stop playing! This isn’t a game. There is a rat! I am in danger!” she snapped.

“A rat? Really?” said Wakayima. “So, why are you in danger?”

“There is a rat, Wakzi! A rat is chasing me!” she was screeching in anger as well as fear now.

Wakayima, though, was quite calm. He looked at her, then looked behind her, then looked the whole length of the corridor at the route she had ran through and said, “Rukzi, there is nothing chasing you, much less a rat.”

“Also, rats don’t chase people,” added Kwezi. “It’s people who chase rats.”

“Heh heh! You should have seen yourself running! ‘Ayi bambe! Ayi Bambe!’ Running away from nothing! No wonder you are the fastest runner in the school. Do you always imagine rats when we are out doing sports?” laughed Natalia.

“This is not funny!” Rukia was getting very worked up.

Roger came closer to Rukia and held her shoulders. She was shaking and trembling and was out of breath. She was close to tears.

“Calm down, calm down,” he said, “Rukzi. Calm down. The rat is gone. It is just us.”

Rukia sat down on the floor and leaned against the wall. She was soon able to calm down and tell everyone what happened. Once Natalia had stopped teasing her it was easier for her to tell the story.

“I was just walking past the staff room, minding my own business, just walking along,” she said.

“Then you saw a rat?” asked Kwezi.

“No, then I walked past the staff room,” Rukia said. “That is when Mr Pampers opened the staff room door...”

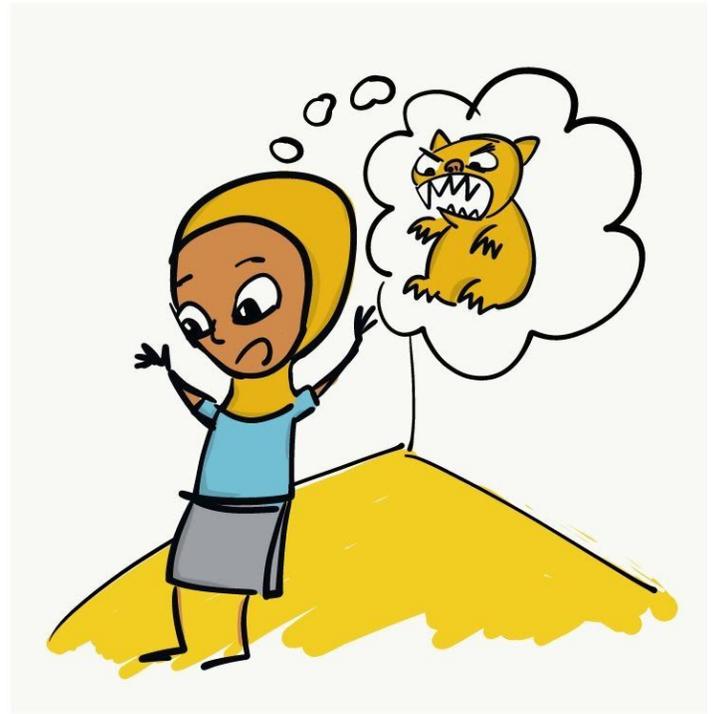
“And a rat jumped out?” asked Kwezi.

“No! Can you let me finish this story?”

“Get to the part about the rat, then,” insisted Kwezi.

“Stop interrupting her,” said Wakayima.
“Wamma, Rukzi, get to the rat part quickly-quickly.”

She sighed and continued. “Mr Pampers was holding a cup of coffee and, when he saw me he called me over and told me they needed sugar in the staff room.” She paused to look at Kwezi, just to give him a look that meant he should hold on a bit and be patient; the rat part was coming. Then she continued. “He gave me a key and told me to go to the store across the corridor and get a bag of sugar and bring it to him. I said okay. After all, what could go wrong? It was just a store and a bag of sugar. So I took the key and crossed the corridor and got to the store and turned the key and... When I turned the key and opened the door, I thought I would just walk in and find the sugar.... But when I turned the key and opened the door, you people! My guys! When I opened the door! Ayi bambe when I opened the door...”



She paused and took a deep breath, then, “There was the biggest, blackest, meanest, rattiest rat of all rats! This rat was so rat that it ratted all the rats that ever ratted! A rat, guys!!”

Kwezi gasped with shock. “A what? A rat?”

“It looked at me and I am so sure it barked at me!” I dropped Mr Pampers’ keys and ran as fast as I could!”

The rest of the group were all in awe, oohing and aahing at the story. Even Natalia who had been teasing her friend, was now trying to calm her down. The whole

group was around her except Wakayima. After hearing the story he had only one thing to say, and he said it quietly to himself. "Humans are crazy," he said.

Later in the evening, after everyone had gone back home, and Rukia had been driven off complaining loudly to her parents that she couldn't believe they put her in a school with wild animals, Wakayima crept back into the school.

He was somewhat upset about Rukia's remark about wild animals. What was so bad about being in school with wild animals? If anything, it should be him and his fellow wild animals complaining about having to be in the same country as humans. Humans were crazy.

He thought all this as he made his way down the deserted corridors to the staff room and then looked across the hall to see three doors. One was marked 4C. That was class 4C. The one at the other side was marked 4B. Obviously class 4B. And between them was an unmarked door. This, Wakayima concluded, was obviously the cupboard.

He started to knock on the door, then stopped. What was he knocking for? It wasn't as if the rat was going to open the door.

Instead he just called through the keyhole, "Rat! Gwe Rat! Is there a rat in there? Come out!"

There was a little hole in the vent above the door and a tiny head peeped out of it.

"Who is calling me? Who are you?" the little animal looked down at Wakayima.

"Hi rat!" Wakayima said.

The tiny head tilted sideways, puzzled. "Are you talking to me? How come?"



“Oh!” Wakayima understood what was going on. “I should explain. I am not really a human. I’m a hare, I am just in disguise. That’s how I can talk to you.”

Wakayima watched the other animal clamber down the door.

“You are a hare, not a human, eh?” it said.

“Yup.”

“Well, I am a mouse, not a rat. Let’s start by getting those things right before we go on. Now, why is there a hare, let alone one disguised as a human, in my school? I thought you wild animals stayed in the forests and grasslands.”

“Oh, I had forgotten that part,” Wakayima said, more to himself than to the rat—I mean, the mouse. Mice don’t consider themselves wild animals. They think they are better than wild animals in fact.

It had all started one day long, long ago. Long before Wakayima was born. In the days of Wakayima's great great grandfather, when humans had only just started living near animals.

The animals held a meeting to demand that their king, the Mighty Lion, does something about the humans.

"They come around with their spears and their bows and arrows and their guns and they just go around shooting gazelles and antelopes! It's terrible," said the cheetah.



"Wait a second," said the antelope. "Aren't we the ones supposed to be complaining about that?"

“We cheetahs have to complain about it as well, because the more of you antelopes are taken by the humans, the less is left for us.”

“And they cut down all the trees we were building our nests in,” complained the woodpecker. “Where do they expect us to put our eggs? On our heads?”

“And they clear all the long grass so they can dig up the soil and plant their so-called crops and stuff,” complained the green mamba. “So we have nowhere to hide and spring out to bite other animals!”

“Yeah!” said the mongoose. “And without long grass, where are we supposed to find snakes?”

Then the frog said, “You guys are all complaining, but you won’t believe what the fish are saying about the humans.”

“We really don’t like the humans, Mighty Lion,” said the snail, “Do us all a favour and eat them, please.”

The lion had a sad look. “You think I haven’t tried? I don’t like the humans either. But when I try to eat them, they shoot at me with their bows or their spears. And some of them have guns!”

The animals were loudly complaining to the lion, asking what the point of him being king of the animals was if he couldn’t even do a thing as simple as eat their enemies. The tortoise was calling for elections and suggesting that they get a new king. But then every animal wanted to be the new king. In the midst of all the noise, a single mouse, Old Jajja Kamese crept into the meeting.

He called all the other mice together and drew them aside. He had a tale to tell them.

“I just got back from the human herd, mice. You will not believe what I found. You know how we spend all day scurrying around the bush looking for food? The humans have a thing called a granary. In the granary, they have a whole huge pile of food. Maize piled up as high as a buffalo, and it is just standing there. If we lived in the granary, guys, I tell you, we would never have to look for food again.

We could just wake up and eat, then go to sleep, then wake up and eat more, then go to sleep. There is so much maize, guys, that even if we did this all year long we would never finish it all. Because they keep bringing more in. The human's world is the best. I do not see any reason to stay here with these owls and eagles and wild cats and snakes trying to eat us all day when we could just go and live in the human village."

And that is how mice left the forest and came to live in our houses.

Back in the school Wakayima and the mouse were still talking.

"What are you doing here? Aren't you supposed to be in the forest? The cities and towns and villages are for us, civilised animals," said the mouse.

"Why do you town animals think you are better than the rest of us, anyway?" sneered Wakayima.

"We are. All you wild animals do is hunt each other, chase each other around and eat each other. Such savages!" snorted the mouse.

"And what is the difference with you? You get chased around, beaten up, poisoned and kicked all over the place by the humans. You know why? Cos you are a mouse, okay. Now, I, on the other hand, am a hare. When I am in the forest, no one hunts or eats me. I'm too cunning. The last time anyone tried to hunt me, it was the cheetah. I made him eat a pile of mud shaped like me instead. Hares rule, okay?"

"Whatever. What are you doing in my school?" the mouse insisted.

But Wakayima wasn't finished. "And even when we are in the city, do we live like you mice and rats? Does anyone chase us around? Have you seen anyone try to chase me? I didn't think so. Little mouse, check your attitude now."

"Okay, okay. I get your point," said the mouse.

“And you went and scared one of the humans today. She’s gone and told her parents that there is a mouse in the school. Do you even know what that means?”

The mouse looked downcast. Mice were not as clever as hares, but they were clever enough to know. Since the first mice moved into the human granaries, it didn’t take them long to find out that it wasn’t as great as Old Jajja Kamese had made it out to be. Yes, there were huge piles of food, and no animals trying to eat them, but that didn’t mean it was paradise. They soon learned that the humans did not like having mice eat their food, and whenever a human saw a mouse, it meant only one thing.

“Oh no. So they are going to get rid of all of us? What are they going to do this time? A couple of cats? Or are they going to come in with brooms and sticks? Or poison! Are they going to poison us? Rats! I had better go tell the wife that we need to get out of here.”

“Did you just say ‘Rats?’ just then?” Wakayima had to ask.

“It’s what mice say when we are frustrated. So it’s going to be poison, right? I bet it is.”

Wakayima grinned a sly grin. “But lucky for you, there is a hare around. Me. And we are great at getting out of scrapes, so here’s the plan...”

Don’t worry. I’ll tell you what happened next in the next story.

The adventures of the cheeky, cunning hare that sneaks into the human school continue with a fresh story each week. Thanks to the Kuonyesha Art Fund for supporting this!