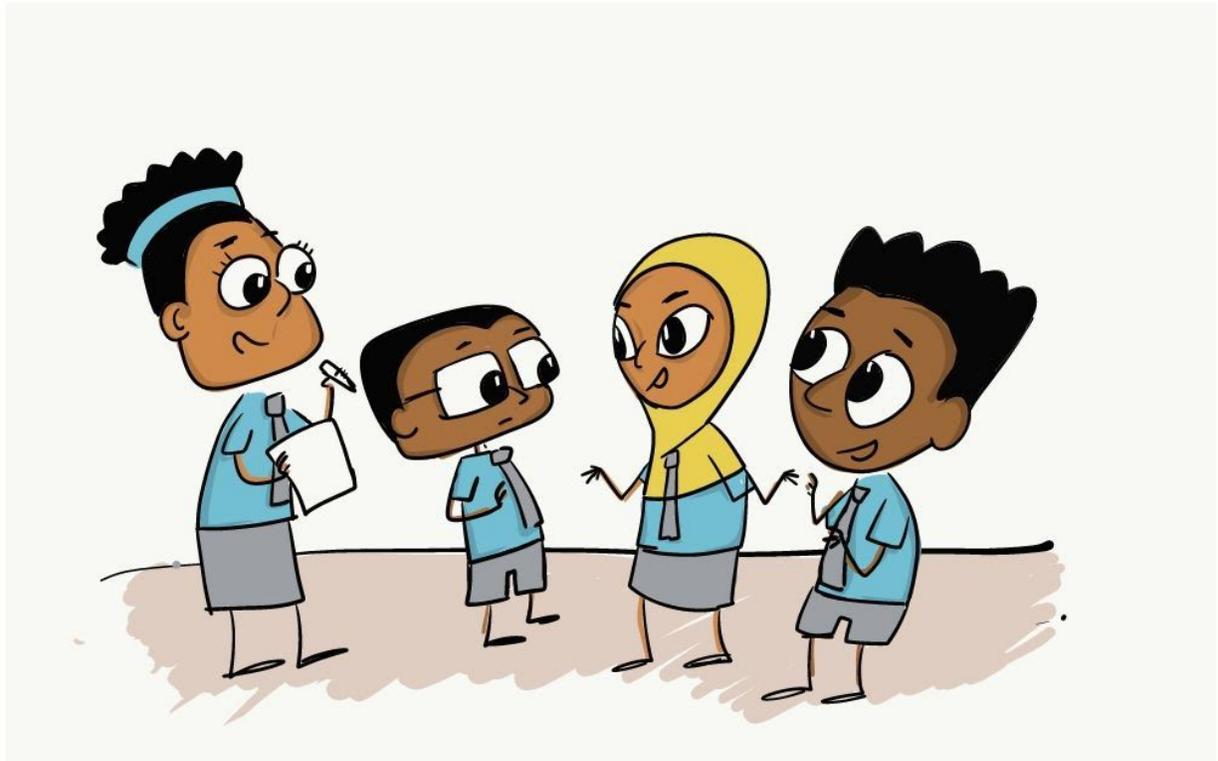


# WAKAYIMA JOINS THE SCHOOL CHOIR

By Ernest Bazanye

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The gang was sitting around the swings having a very lively discussion about football. Rukia was arguing very strongly. She waved her hands so much while she talked that it seemed like just a matter of time before they flew off.

Rukia's point was that nobody could say that Uganda Cranes could not beat Manchester United because nobody had ever put the two teams together to play.

"No, no, no, no! You look, eh? You see, eh? You first look. Look first, you. Look. You Understand, eh?" she was saying, waving her hands up and down and all around as she spoke.

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“Rukzi, we are all waiting to understand, but you are not saying what we have to understand. Get to the point!” Roger pleaded, wearily.

“I’m getting to the point. Eh! Be patient. Can you give me a minute to get to the point so that I can get to the point? Like kwegamba, just give me a minute!”

“We have all given you minutes. We have given you five whole minutes and you still have not got to the point!” Roger said. “I have been timing.”

Wakayima, who had been pretending to pay attention, but was actually just picking at everybody’s lunch and munching away while acting as if he was very interested in the conversation, took this moment to say, “Mmmmmm” with his mouth full. It gave the impression that he was involved in the conversation.

“I’m saying that it is like when the P.E. teachers saw me and said just because I am a girl and that I am wearing a hijab, that means I can’t beat anyone in sports. And yet, as you all know, I ended up becoming the track champion. You have all eaten my dust, haven’t you? I have zoomed past each and every one of you down the track and I have made you all eat my dust! So you see my point? You look at someone and make assumptions but until you give them a chance you don’t know! I mean, girl in hijab here, fastest runner in the school! Now you understand?”

Roger shrugged, “I see the point. Now that you have finally made it. But, umm... You are not the fastest runner in the school. I beat you last P.E.”

Wakayima smiled at this part because this was due to him being such a brilliant coach.

“Yeah, but you won’t beat me next P.E.,” said Rukia.

Just then the conversation was interrupted.

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“Hey, my friends, my best friends, my biggest guys in the whole wide school!” said a cheerful voice, and everyone looked up to see Akello saunter up with a piece of paper and a pen in her hands. “The coolest kids in Tropical Hills Academy. Clap for yourselves. Each one of you,” she said.

“Wamma, Akzi, if Manchester United and Uganda Cranes were to play a match, who would win?” Kwezi asked.

“What do you want, Akello?” Natalia asked.

“What have you got to eat Akello?” Wakayima asked.

“Simsim for you, Wakzi. I know that is your favourite, and Natti, I can’t believe you just said that. Like I can’t just come over and say hi to my best friends unless I want something? You think I am not your friend and I only come over because I want something from you?”

“I am not saying you are not our friend,” said Natalia. “But you do want something from us. What is it?”

Akello gave up and handed her the paper. “You guys, I need you to sign up for the school choir.”

Roger looked at Wakayima and then looked at Akello. “Wakzi is going to ask what a choir is,” he said.

Wakayima took a bite of simsim ball. “Actually I was going to ask what a Manchester United was, but I got distracted by how delicious these simsim balls are. Akzi, your dad is getting really good at making these.”

“I know, right?” said Akello, handing him the paper. “Just write your name here, and your class,” she said. After he was done she passed the paper to Kwezi. “I would support whichever team you want me to support if you sign this paper.”

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“I want to support Uganda Cranes because I am a Ugandan, but I don’t want to lose an argument to Rukia,” Kwezi said, twisting his face.

“Then let’s make it a draw. Nil-Nil. So, sign. Name and class.”

As he signed, Natalia asked, “But why do you want us to sign this paper so badly? There must be something going on. This isn’t just about wanting us to join the school choir. What is going on?”

Akello replied, “I promise, that right after you sign it, I will take you and show you.”

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Akello led the way up the corridor, followed by her new choir members, each of whom had signed her paper. On the way she would look up and notice a stray student here and there and abandon the group, saying, “Just a minute,” so she could go and see if they would sign the paper.

The gang wondered why she was so keen to get so many people to sign up for the choir. Akello was not even a member of the choir as far as they remembered. But she had promised to show them the reason.

Soon they were at the door of a room that was called Class Zero by everybody, including the teachers. It was a proper classroom, with chairs and blackboard and chalk, but it was not assigned to anybody. Any time the school needed an extra classroom, for whatever purpose, this is the one they would use. It was used for detention, it was used for class parties and it was used when Teacher Murungi wanted to show everyone Tom and Jerry cartoons.

Akello stopped at the door. “Okay, guys, this is it. You are going to meet my cousin Sheba. Be nice, okay?” she said. Then she opened the door.

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In the middle of the room, there was a girl standing alone, facing the windows. She was alone. And she was singing.

“Ooooooh, our mothers! Ooooooh, our fathers! Ooooooh our guardians! Ooooh our parents! We thank yoooooo!” she sang.

Then Akello shut the door very quickly and looked at everybody.

“She sings so badly that bad singing itself is singing badly about how badly she is singing,” gasped Natalia.



“She was singing?” Kwezi was shocked.

“That was singing?”

“So you see why I need as many people to join the choir as possible?” she asked.

“I totally get your point,” sighed Natalia. “I wish I could sign up twice.”

“Give me a form,” said Kwezi. “Let me also go out and find as many people to sign up as possible.”

Wakayima tugged at Roger’s elbow. “My guy, can I talk to you for a moment please?” he whispered.

Roger looked at him knowingly. “Now you want to ask what a choir is, right? Because humans are crazy?”

Wakayima did not try to deny it because, much as he understood how clever he was, he also understood that he was clever enough to know when other people

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can be cleverer than him (and you have to be really clever to understand that) and he admitted that Roger was being cleverer than him right now.

So he just nodded, “So, what is it? What is a choir?” he asked, “And is that why that girl in there screaming like a jackal that just got its tail bitten by a mongoose?”

“Well, Wakzi, my friend who for some reason doesn’t seem to know anything about school life, a choir is a group of singers. The school gets as many kids as possible together, and the teacher gets them to all sing the same song at once. That is called the school choir.”

“Oooh,” said Wakayima, getting it now. “And if Akello’s cousin Sheba is in the choir, you will need as many other voices as possible to also be in the choir so that nobody hears her really terrible singing voice.”

“That seems to be the plan,” said Roger. And Wakayima turned to Akello.

“Akzi, please give me that form again,” he asked. “The first time, when you told me to sign it, I didn’t really know what it was for, so I just wrote down a fake name. But now that I understand what is going on I need to register for real.”

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Akello and the gang had fully understood the scale of the problem so they each went to get forms to sign as many kids to the choir as possible. They did it all day.

It all seemed to be going well, and in a couple of days when Teacher Murungi had her first meeting with the new school choir, there were over 50 students crammed into Class Zero.

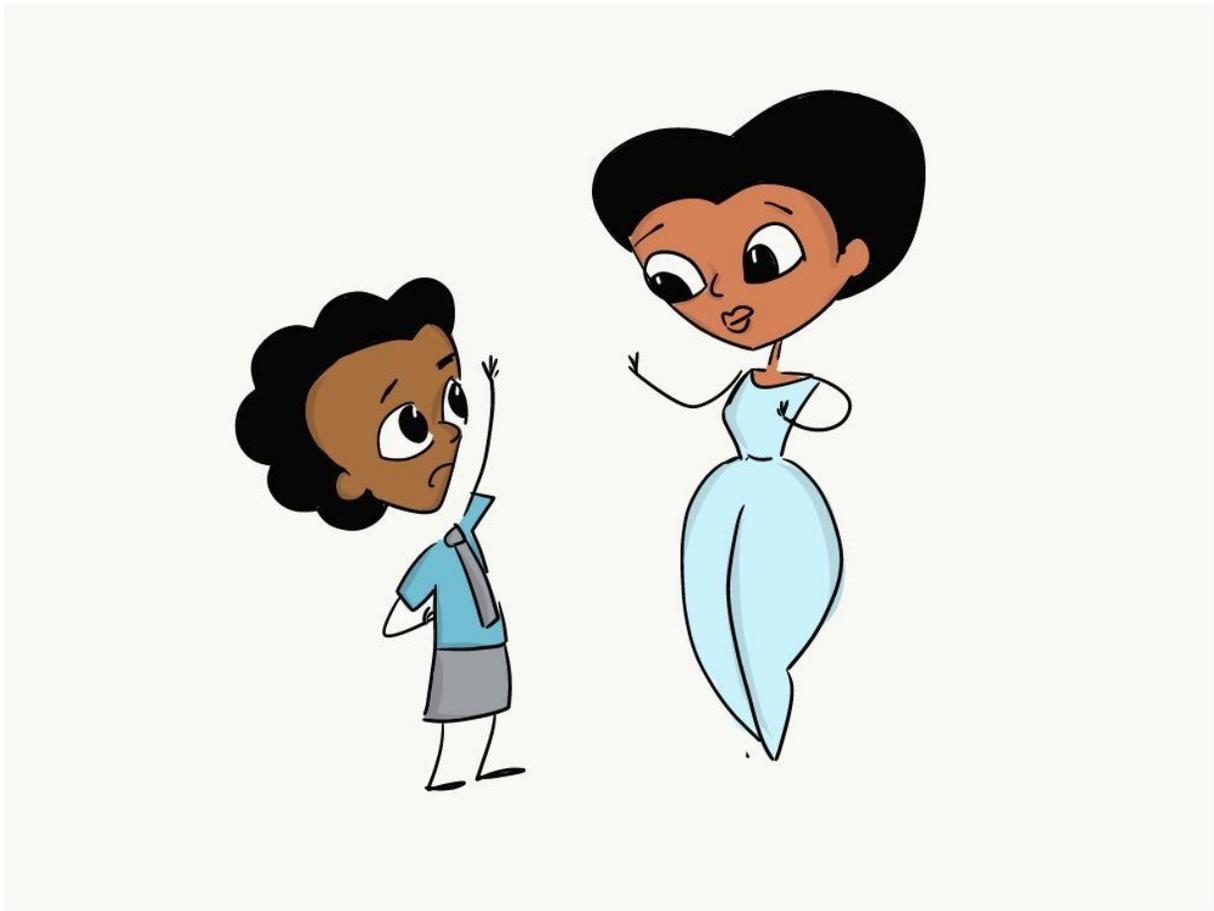
“Nga there are a lot of you who want to join the choir,” she smiled. “I didn’t know so many students were interested in singing.”

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Actually it wasn't just singing. Instead of just telling the other students about Sheba, Akello had taken Wakayima's tips and used cunning to recruit them.

Like telling the cute boys that all the cute girls were in the choir, and then telling the cute girls that all the cute boys were in the choir so that way, they all agreed to join. This worked very smoothly, as well as telling other students that joining choir meant you get to skip preps twice a week and telling the really stubborn ones, like Ngiri, that he should not join the choir, which just made him insist that he was going to join it because he did not like being told what to do.

"Okay," smiled Teacher Murungi to the gathered kids. "Let's see what we have here. First of all, we have to divide the choir into different voices. You guys know what voices mean in a choir?"



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Sheba raised her hand. Akello saw that and knew she had to act fast. She pinched Wakayima. Wakayima stepped out in front of Sheba and said, loudly, “No, Teacher Murungi we don’t. Please tell us.”

“Someone is very keen to learn,” she smiled. “Okay, this is what we mean by voices.” And she turned to the blackboard and began to write them out. “Alto, soprano, bass and tenor. Each one of these have a different part to play in the choir. Some sing high parts, some sing low parts. Now, what we are going to start with is hearing you one by one so we can see where to put each one of you. Are you ready?”

Akello was suddenly worried. All this work was now in jeopardy. The reason she had gone through all this trouble was because she knew her cousin Sheba loved to sing. She knew how much Sheba wanted to be in the choir, but she knew that if the teacher in charge heard her sing she would not let her join, and this would break Sheba’s heart.

If everyone had to sing alone, and Sheba’s turn came and Teacher Murungi heard how horrible she sounded, she would surely be kicked out and all that hard work would come to nothing.

“Who’s first? Let’s start from this corner,” said Teacher Murungi, and she waved a tall boy named Ssuuna out of the crowd. “Ladies, and gentlemen, put your hands together for our first performance of the evening. Give it up for Ssuuna! What are you going to sing, Ssuuna?”

Ssuuna looked very excited. He had enjoyed the introduction very much. He felt like he was on a stage in a big concert, so he had to give them a big concert song.

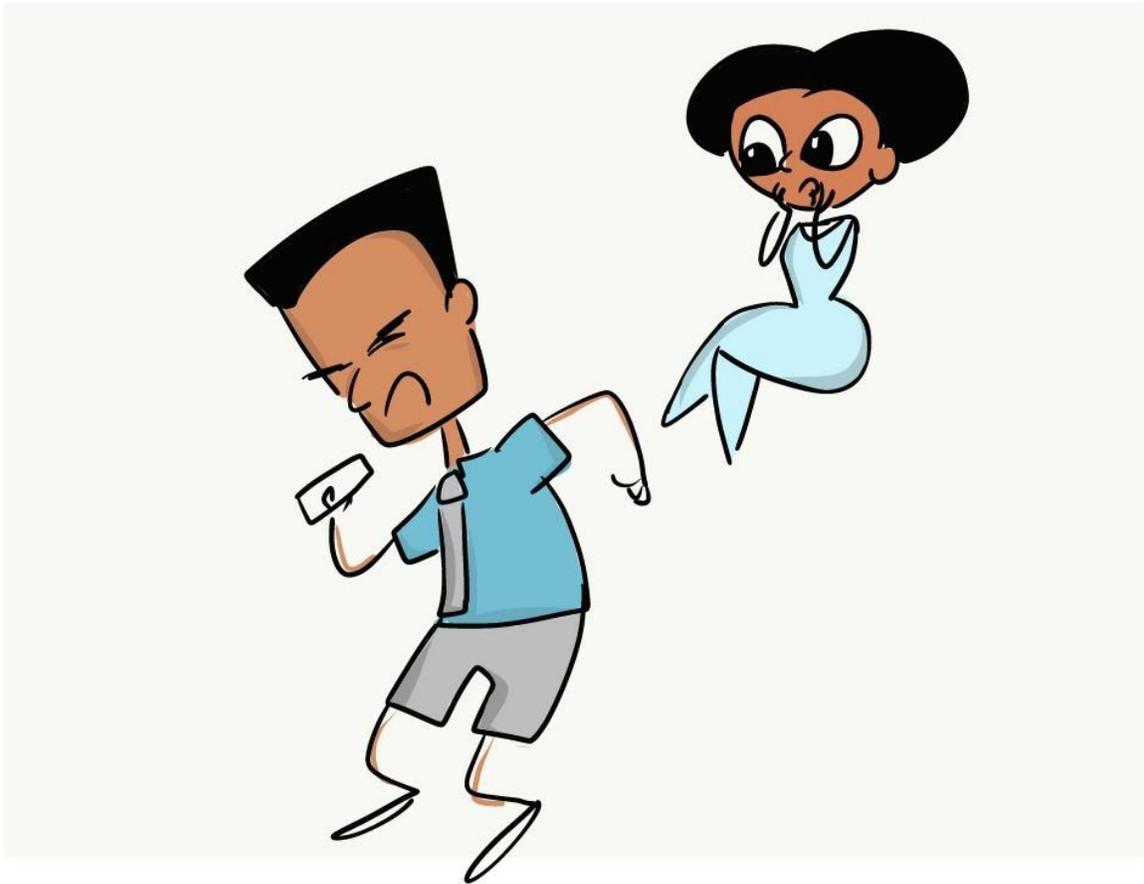
Teacher Murungi looked around and saw the blackboard cleaner. She handed it to him. “Here is your microphone,” she said.

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“I’m going to sing Bruno Mars, Uptown Anthem,” said Ssuuna. “Everybody ready for some Bruno Mars?”

The kids cheered as if it was a real concert. Some of the boys in the back even whistled.

And then Ssuuna began.



Akello dropped her head in dismay.

After five other singers had had their tries, her head had dropped five more times. “They all sound just as bad, if not worse than Sheba!” she moaned.

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Wakayima did not see why this would make her moan so sadly. He was enjoying himself. In fact, by the time Teacher Murungi had to close the choir training class and let everyone move on to their next lesson, twenty students had sung. And they had all been awful. Wakayima was sure that some of them were actually trying their best to sound as terrible as possible because they thought it was just a game.

One boy called Nuwagaba even did some kitaguro while he was singing a song by One Direction. The crowd loved it. Teacher Murungi shook her head and asked, “Nuwagaba, are you even serious?”

He said, “Teacher, you said sing. You didn’t say don’t dance while doing it.”

“Okay, then,” she said, “Dance away.”

And so he did it again. This time he mixed in some moves he saw in a rap video. Everyone was enjoying it so much that from then on, every other student who tried out also had to do a dance.

At the end of it all, it sounded like the worst choir ever.

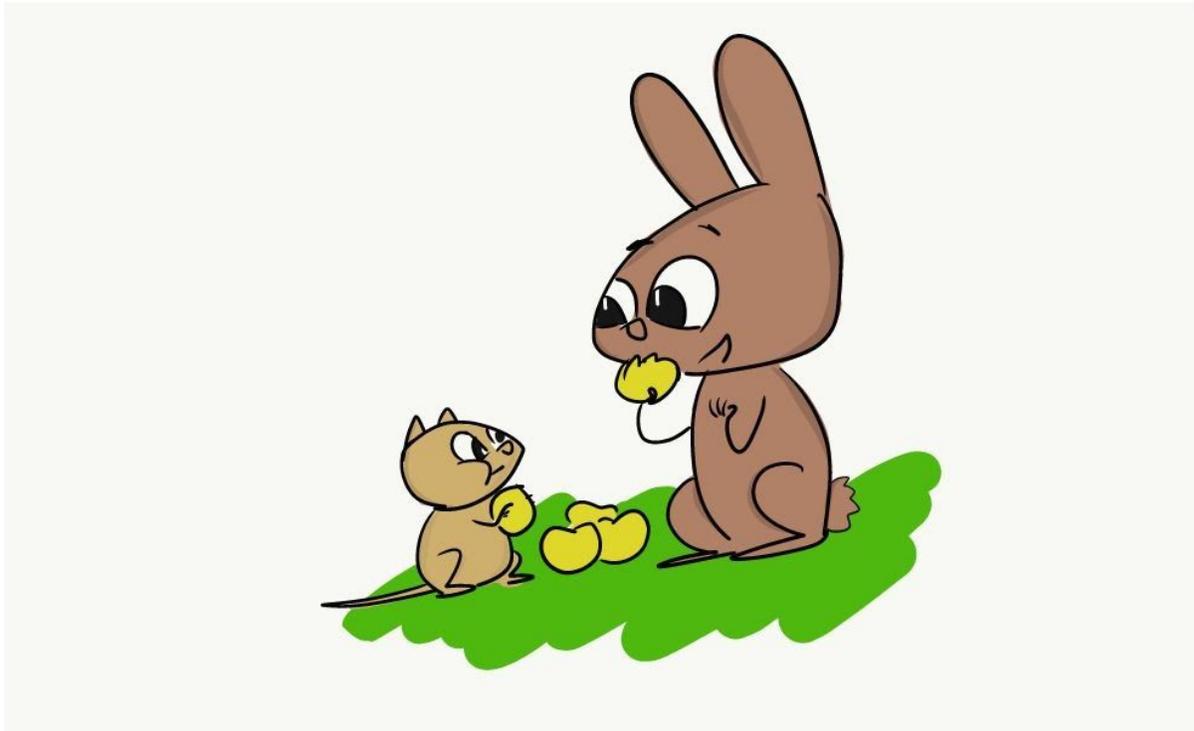
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In the evening Wakayima and his new friend Kamese were sitting on the school fence snacking on the bits of food Kamese had snuck out of the store. Now that he had taken Wakayima’s advice it was all much easier. The points were very simple: Don’t live *in* the store. Just go there when you want food. Eagles don’t live on the ground, they just swoop down when they want food. Secondly, don’t ever go there during the day time. Go after school hours. Unless you want to be seen and poisoned by crazy exterminators, be patient.

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Thirdly, of course, Kamese was to share part of his loot. In exchange for the good advice.



“So, they have this thing called a choir. It is when they all get together in a group and shout the same thing in different voices,” Wakayima was saying.

“You mean like dogs?” Kamese said.

“Dogs shout around in the town?” Wakayima asked. “In the forest, wild dogs are hunters, so they move around quietly so their prey doesn’t hear them.”

“Well, not the dogs in the town. Round here, those guys can’t shut up. They bark and howl all night long. And it’s not like they are saying anything sensible. Just, ‘Hey guys!’ ‘What?’ ‘What’s up!’ ‘Nothing here. What’s up there?’ ‘Nothing. Let’s ask Magujja. Hey, Magujja!’ ‘What?’ ‘What’s up?’ And they do this all night long like idiots.”

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Wakayima took a bite of the bun Kamese had brought from the store. “You see? That’s what happens when animals stop being wild. They become crazy like humans,” he said.

“So the humans shout like dogs?” asked Kamese. “Are they as good as dogs?”

“Honestly, if this is human music, then, I am going to have to say I would rather hear the dogs,” Wakayima said.

“You have never heard human music before? You wild animals!” said the mouse. “Come with me. I’m going to show you something.”

The mouse dropped off the fence and scurried up a darkening path, beckoning the hare to follow him. Just as I am going to beckon you to follow this story to the next part, when we find out where Kamese was taking Wakayima.

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*Would you like to find out where Kamese was taking his friend? It’s in the next episode. Don’t miss it!*

*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!*