

THE JACKSON CHILDREN MYSTERY

SERIES 1

THE MYSTERY OF KGWAKGWE HILLS

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ADVANCE PRAISE FOR *THE MYSTERY OF*
KGWAKGWE HILLS

*“I recommend it most to young readers who enjoy
fearless child detectives, caves, codes, hidden passages,
dramatic rescue and mysteries in which ordinary people work
together against crime.”* Literary Titan, USA.

*“The mix of eerie, gothic settings with the fast pace of a thriller
pulled me in.”* Hudda Maarij, proofreader. Pakistan.

*“I know Kgwakgwe Hills and caves because I was born and
raised in Kanye. Reading the mystery of Kgwakgwe Hills is like
visiting them in its pages. By adding imaginary caves, tunnels
and mystery elements, he makes it mind-blowing.”* Tefo

Montshiti, Editor and Journalist. Botswana.

CHAPTER 1

"The storm seems to be coming this way!" Jane shouted above the howling wind.

Sly, Nathan and Musa looked up. Murky clouds rolled over Kgwakgwe Hills. Lightning erupted and thunder followed, rocking the earth.

Rain drenched the black ribbon of road flashing beneath their bicycle tyres.

"There is an old bungalow at the foot of Kgwakgwe Hill. Let's go there!" Musa shouted.

They turned right onto the paved road. Reaching its end, they jolted onto a slippery gravel road. Behind Morula Junior Secondary School, an abandoned house emerged through the rain. A weather-beaten gate appeared. They braked hard, and skidded against it. They dismounted their

bikes. Nathan gave it a push and budged. They rushed inside and leaned their bikes against the wall. The four children dashed under the verandah to escape the raging storm.

Since there was no lights, they assumed that there was nobody inside.

"Hello?" they said in unison. Just to confirm their assumption. There was no answer.

As the rain hit the roof madly, dust erupted. It swirled into their nostril. They sneezed and coughed.

"Let's go inside," Sly suggested as he gave the door a push, but it did not budge.

A few seconds later, much to their disappointment, the roof of the verandah could not keep the water out anymore. Rainwater poured inside.

Desperate, Sly took a few steps backwards and launched forward like a rocket. He crashed into the door,

shoulder first, and it creaked open. Splinters flew in the air. He staggered on the inside, but he regained his balance.

“Good boy,” others cheered.

“I am good at it,” Sly proudly replied. After a while, his sight adjusted to the dimness in the living room.

A streak of lightning cut across the sky outside, temporarily revealing the interior of the house. Broken glass from the windows littered the floor.

Sly fumbled through the pocket of his trouser beneath the raincoat and take out the flashlight. He flipped it on, and its beam revealed the interior of the room further. Up in the corner, spider webs hugged the dilapidated ceiling.

“Musa, how did you know this house?” Nathan asked.

“I have been staying in Kanye for over ten years, hard to miss,” Musa responded faintly.

Jane moved towards Musa, with softened gaze and empathetic voice and asked him “Are you okay, Musy?”

“I am starving,” Musa responded in a whisper.

They sneaked through the hallway and entered a room full of dirty blankets. It seemed as if nobody lived there. They searched the first room, and found nothing. They retraced their tracks. Reaching the living room, they waited in silence for the rain to ease, but it intensified its attacks.

Musa was silent, his eyes glittering.

“Why are you so silent?” Nathan asked.

"My uncle stays around here as a beggar. His name is Fulani. My mother's twin brother," Musa whispered.

“Why did he leave your home?” Jane asked him.

“I really do not know,” Musa responded with sadness in his voice.

“Who is he?” Sly inquired.

” It is Fulani,” he replied. "I do not know where he is in this raging storm.” Musa said, wiping a tear with the back of his hand.

“Fulani,” they chorused.

“It can’t be,” said Nathan.

“He is my mother’s twin. According to my mother, one day a rift occurred at our home. He packed his things, and left the house.”

"He is known as the Watcher around here," Sly said quietly.

Nathan looked on the floor and picked up something, which he brought to the other children’s attention.

Sly picked up used matchsticks from the floor.
"Someone was here recently."

“Maybe someone is staying in this house,” Nathan responded.

“In a dilapidated house?” Jane gasped

“The question is what is happening here? It seems like they were used recently,” Nathan replied as he investigated the used matchstick under the beam of the flashlight.

After fifteen minutes, the rain eased.

They stormed out of the house. They closed the door behind them and the sliding gate.

“We’d better go home. We will also be late for lunch,” Musa Khan, their newfound friend, responded. They rejected Musa’s suggestion.

Musa, a Motswana of Indian origin hopped onto his bicycle, and other children did the same.

Chains tightened. Cyclists grunted as they tackled the slope. Bicycle tires whined as they fought against the incline. They stood up on the pedals as they anxiously pedaled up the long slope to Motlhatseng. Sweat dripped down their spines even though a chilling wind blew across the area.

“Let’s take a break, guys. I am running out of breath,” Musa, a chubby boy of eleven years, stopped his bicycle midway up the slope, panting. His clothes were soaked and stuck to his skin under the yellow raincoat. The other children stopped as well.

A few minutes later, they rode their bicycles again up the slope. Jane Jackson, a black girl of ten years, was in the lead. Her oily, long hair danced in the wind. Sly Jackson, a short boy of eleven years, pedaled behind her. His twin brother Nathan Jackson, tall with a clean-shaven head, followed him. Musa paddled behind them, moving at a snail's pace.

Reaching the top of the slope, the Sly, Nathan and Jane waited for Musa. Beads of sweat gleamed on their foreheads. In no time, Musa stopped his bicycle beside them. Panting, he hopped off the bicycle and collapsed on the ground. Musa wished to sit on the ground forever. Its coldness eased the heaviness from his body.

Even though it was almost lunchtime, darkness hugged the nearby hills.

“Let’s go, Musa,” Sly pleaded.

“Wait a minute,” Musa grumbled, tugging at his yellow raincoat.

Musa sat on the ground, defiantly. The sweet air felt refreshing and damp.

“Sly, can you please give my father a call? I cannot pedal this bicycle anymore. My feet are killing me,” Musa, lamented.

“We do not have phones. Sly left his at home. Get up, Musa” Jane, answered. She offered him her hand, but he gave her a dismissive stare.

“I’m tired. I can’t....” A flash of lightning illuminated the hills nearby. The thunder that followed made him jerk to his feet.

Fear-stricken, he hopped onto his bicycle, and the other children did the same. They abandoned their journey to Motlhatseng. Four yellow raincoats rolled down the hill toward Kanye through the white rain. Riding in the storm was dangerous, but they had no choice.

. They approached a smooth curve and leaned into it, riding it smoothly. As they emerged from it, a white sheet of rain slashed across the place, making it hard to see what lay ahead of them. They bore down to the handlebars. They tore through the rain. They wished they had not plan to go to Motlhatseng to kill time this morning, a place, which supply

Kanye with portable water. As Jane's bicycle gripped onto the paved road, it threw droplets of water onto the other children behind her, reducing their views.

The rain poured in buckets, reduced their speed, a curve emerged ahead. Reaching it, instead of Kanye Village coming into view, only a white sheet of rain emerged ahead of them. A streak of lightning flashed across the sky, blinded them. Seconds later, as their eyes adjusted, Sly yelled.

“Watch out.”

CHAPTER 2

In front of them, headlights appeared. A big white truck swiftly came their way. Their hearts thumped with fear. With minds racing, an idea flashed into Jane's mind. She swayed her bicycle to the left, and other children did the same. They tumbled through the grass bordering the narrow road. Hitting a shadow trench beneath the grasses. They fell to the ground with a thud. Fortunately, they fell onto black heaps of soil without injury.

They dusted the soil off their raincoats and watched the truck driver with utter astonishment. He rolled down the window, craned his neck out and yelled.

“Stay out of the way and mind your own business,” then drove off.

The rain intensified until it was hard to see their own feet. Lumps of fear held them by the throat. It was too dark to see ahead.

“Let’s shout for help,” Jane suggested.

“Help, help!” they busted their lungs in unison, and the nearby hills answered them back. To add another layer of fear to their hearts, streaks of lightning and claps of thunder intensified, drowning their shouts. Angry rain beat their faces.

“Did you hear that?” Nathan inquired.

“Yes,” they chorused.

The roar of the car in the distance reached their ears. It sounded like it was heading their way. As it drew closer, a familiar voice cracked the atmosphere.

“Where are you?” Constable Thusi yelled.

“Hello!” they answered in unison. Claps of thunder drowned their shouts.

The vehicle drew closer to where they were, igniting a spark of hope within them. A streak of lightning flashed, illuminating the village. They could hardly believe their eyes. Reaching the last residential house at the foot of Radiphokojwe Hill, the police vehicle returned to the village. They shouted like never before but their voices were hoarse. The vehicle disappeared in the heavy rain.

Aged forty-five, Constable Thusi’s shouts from the vehicle diminished in the distance, and the hissing winds dominated the airwaves again. Musa cried and sobbed. The other children comforted him. Musa wished that he had stayed behind and enjoyed the comfort of his house with a steaming cup of tea in his hands.

“Please, Musa, stop that,” Sly shouted at him.

“I cannot because I am an only child in my family. If something bad happens to me, my parents will be heartbroken forever,” said Musa.

“Nothing is going to happen to you,” Nathan comforted him.

“Jane is supposed to cry, because she is the youngest here, not you,” Sly answered.

“It’s true,” Jane responded.

“Fear does not come only at certain age groups” A streak of lightning cut across the sky. “I hate lightning because it is dangerous,” said Musa.

“Lightning is just a natural thing. Just relax; everything will be fine,” Jane gave him a comforting hug as they crawled under the bus stop shelter.

“You do not understand.” Musa cracked a smile. He felt spark and sudden happiness

After the rain stopped, they step out of the shelter.

“What is that?” Sly pointed toward Kgwakgwe Hills.

“I do not know,” Jane and Nathan, chorused.

The metal sign, marked with the number 44, sat just below the massive water reservoir on top of the Kgwakgwe Hills. They shifted their gaze towards Musa. As a child from rural area, where his parents were teachers, they expected Musa to satisfy all their queries

As for the Jackson family, they used to come to Kanye only during school holidays. Daniel, aged sixty-three, had worked in the Botswana Police Service as a detective for thirty years and left the organization holding the rank of inspector. Their mother, Mary, aged sixty was a former office administrator in the Ministry of Finance until her retirement from public service and had established a private

investigating company with her husband called Jackson Private Investigations.

“Last summer we explored the Kgwakgwe Mine and ...” said Musa.

“Mine,” other children said in unison.

“Actually, it is not a mine as such; it is an abandoned mine. According to the elders of the village, it started operating around 1944. There is nothing interesting about it,” Musa continued.

“To me, it is interesting. Please, tell me more,” Sly’s face beamed.

“It is an old manganese mine and...” Musa paused as a white Ford Focus zipped in front of them, splashing water on the tarred road, written “Metal Ore Mining Company.” It disappeared around the smooth curve heading towards where they came from.

“Does he know that what he is doing is not right? He is supposed to slow down when approaching other road users,” Nathan clenched his teeth.

“Let’s report him to Constable Thusi,” said Jane.

“I’ve had quite enough drama just for one day. I just want to go home. I am starving,” Musa's stomach rumbled.

“Enough of the mine car. Where were we?” Sly grinned. Nobody replied. They rode their bikes to the village.

Musa did not go home. He followed the Jacksons.

In the kitchen, Mary had cooked chicken and bogobe. Steam filled the house. The four children told Mary and Daniel what had happened on the road from Motlhatseng to Kanye.

Mary served them in silence, her lips tight. Musa stared at the single piece of meat on his bogobe.

"He wants an extra piece," Jane said for him.

"Musa! You nearly died and you are asking for extra meat?" Mary said, pointing the serving spoon at him.

"It wasn't my fault! The truck -"

"The truck was on the road. You were not supposed to be on the road. You were supposed to be at home doing schoolwork!" Mary replied.

"But..." Sly started, and then cut his words short.

Jane kicked Sly under the table.

Daniel shoved a spoonful of bogobe into his mouth and gulped it down. Then he cleared his throat.

"When I was a constable in Lobatse," he started, and everyone groaned. Because they knew, a story was coming. "A truck nearly killed me. Fortunately, I jumped out of harm's way. It splashed me with dirty water from a puddle. My uniform got wet with mud. When I reached the police station, my colleagues chuckled behind my back."

"What did your uniform look like?" Nathan asked.

"It looked like a map of Kgwakgwe Hills. My boss sent me home because there was nothing he could do."

They all laughed, even Mary.

They looked out through the kitchen window. Kgwakgwe Hills stood still and dark like an ancient giant.

"Behind Kgwakgwe Hills are stories not told and mysteries not solved," Sly muttered, and everyone in the house nodded.

After dinner, Musa's parents came and picked him up.