

# **Fireplace Folktales from Ankole**

## **Volume 1**

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Cover illustration by Christopher Busingye

## **DEDICATION**

To my dear husband, Charles Tumwesigye, and our children, Sherie, Arnold, Allan, Sheena and Sheevan who assiduously supported me in this academic venture.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Folktale is an oral literary genre which can be described as ‘an ancient short story’. It is set in an antique world where trees, animals and people, all talk and understand one another. The olden world of the folktale is very strange and it is filled with weird and wonderful happenings. It was a form of informal education which took place in the days before the introduction of formal education. In those days, young children would gather around the fireplace and listen to the elders who would narrate folktales and fables, taking their audiences through riddling sessions, all aimed at inculcating morals in the minds of the youths.

The folktales in this book are primarily meant for enjoyment and for the moral uplifting of young children. Teachers of Language and Literature can also use them for aural comprehension and as a stepping stone to the introduction of literature at the lower secondary school level and of course scholars of Literature and Oral Literature in particular can utilise these folktales in their analyses of the narrative form of the genre. The book is a manifestation of the author’s effort towards cultural preservation.

*Fireplace Folktales from Ankole* were collected, transcribed and translated by the author. The transcriber tried as much as possible to retain the original form; that is why the reader will hear a version of English that is more localised than globalised. This is done in order to enhance the originality of the genre.

Remember the fireplace tales you may once have heard and aim to tell them to your own children.

## **The Cowrie Shell**

A long time ago in the village of Rushenyi, there lived an old woman called Nyamishagi. She was very poor and she didn't seem to have any relatives to help her. She used to go around the village begging for food to sustain her.

One day, Nyamishagi went to her only garden, which was just two mounds of sweet potatoes, to get at least a sweet potato for supper. She dug up one mound but did not get any sweet potato. What would she do now? She knew she could not survive long without any thing to eat in her home.

So Nyamishagi moved to the second mound. She dug and dug until the mound was no more, but still there wasn't a single potato. She then cleaned her hoe, but as she was about to move away, she saw a cowrie shell in the soil. What could one do with a cowrie shell, she asked herself? Nevertheless, she picked it up thoughtlessly, threw it in her empty basket and headed home.

When Nyamishagi reached home, she sat outside her grass thatched hut and cried like a baby because the pangs of hunger in her stomach were unbearable. She cried for a long time. Then as she was still crying, she heard a voice from the basket she had gone with to the potato garden.

“Old woman, old woman, why are you crying? What do you want?”

Nyamishagi was so startled that she looked around to see who was talking. The voice came again, saying the same words in a clear and plaintive voice.

“Old woman, old woman. Why are you crying? What do you want?”

Nyamishagi realized that the voice was coming from the basket. She looked and there was nothing in the basket but the cowrie shell. She was greatly surprised and even a little frightened, for it was actually the cowrie shell that was talking.

“Old woman, old woman. Why are you crying? What do you want?”

“I am so poor,” Nyamishagi replied reluctantly, for she felt silly talking to an empty basket with only a cowrie shell in it. “I cannot afford to feed myself. I don’t even have any children to care for me. Oh, what a miserable life I have to live!”

“Crush me now; you will get a son and lots of riches,” the cowrie shell directed the old woman.

Halfheartedly, the old woman did as she was told. Immediately, her grass thatched hut became a beautiful brick mansion. She saw servants moving about and she heard cows mowing, goats and sheep bleating as well as cocks crowing.

Nyamishagi saw that she was no longer in a quiet, lonely, poor, grass thatched little hut, for she was surrounded by riches beyond her imagination. The whole place was buzzing with activity and the servant girls came to her for instructions.

She could not believe her eyes! To crown it all, before her stood a handsome boy of about eighteen

whose bearing spoke of noble birth. The boy looked up to her face with great respect and affection that touched her heart.

“Mother, what more do you want me to do?” he asked politely. “I have just brought home the cows from grazing.”

The old woman knew that all her wishes had suddenly come true. All the things she ever wanted or dreamed about were now hers.

“Nothing, Nduhura, my son,” she replied, smiling contentedly. “Just go in and rest now.”

From that day on, Nduhura, for that was the name Nyamishagi gave her foundling, meaning God’s gift, became a son to the old woman and cared for her in every way that a son cares for a mother. He would take the animals to graze, and then supervise the other domestic chores to make sure that everything was alright. The only thing that was unusual about the relationship between mother and son was that Nduhura implored the old woman never under any circumstance to tell anyone how she had found him.

One day when Nduhura had gone to graze the cows, the old woman got an unexpected visitor. No one had ever called on her before when she was poor and miserable. The visitor was her youngest sister, Kenyonyozi, who was looking more like her daughter than her sibling.

Kenyonyozi gazed at her eldest sister’s totally transformed home in wonder and hardly disguised envy.



“Nyamishagi, where did you get all this property?” she asked several times. “You used to be very poor, how come you are now so rich?”

Nyamishagi did not answer her but she did not stop pestering her.

“Where did all these riches come from all of a sudden?” Kenyonyozi kept probing.

“Nyabiingi heard my lament,” Nyamishagi half-yielded to her sister’s ceaseless questioning.

But she did not tell Kenyonyozi her secret since Nduhura had instructed her never to tell anybody about her newfound riches or her son. Nevertheless, Kenyonyozi never stopped trying to sweet-talk Nyamishagi into yielding her ground and giving away her closely guarded secret. The old woman resisted but it soon became evident that her resistance was wearing

down. But Kenyonyozi saved her the trouble by storming out, swearing never to return for another visit.

After some time, another sister called Nkwanzi, who was Nyamishagi's favourite sister, came to visit her. They really enjoyed each other's company, and Nkwanzi asked about the riches and the son but Nyamishagi just answered that Nyabiingi had heard her cries and responded.

"Nyamishagi, I'm so disappointed with you," Nkwanzi remarked angrily. "You're answering me as though I were a total stranger. I'll never come back to visit you again if this is how you treat your favourite sister. You can keep your wealth, I'm leaving right now!"

With that, Nkwanzi picked her carry-bag and was ready to leave immediately. Nyamishagi did not want that to happen. This was no stranger. Nkwanzi was her favourite sister after all. As children, growing up in Rushenyi, they had never kept any secrets from each other. What was wrong with sharing a little secret with Nkwanzi, anyway? How was Nduhura to know that she had broken her promise to him?

Nyamishagi did not know that Nduhura had a spy watching over her. The spy was the bird Kanyonza, which understood the Runyankore language and could speak it fluently. This bird was always listening to the old woman's conversations lest she spills the beans.

So Nyamishagi narrated the story of how she got all her riches from a cowrie shell which she picked from her sweet potato garden. Nkwanzi listened enthralled. She was greatly overwhelmed by the wonder of it.

“Did you say you even got a son from the cowrie shell?” she asked, awestruck.

“Yes, Nduhura and all my wealth came to me when I crushed that cowrie shell,” Nyamishagi answered, looking around in sudden alarm.

No sooner had she uttered those words than the bird Kanyonza, which always perched in a nearby tree, burst into song:

*Nduhura, Nduhura,  
Hurira Nyoko yagamba!  
Nduhura, Nduhura,  
Hurira Nyoko yagamba!*

*Yagira ngu tarakuzeire  
Ngu akakwiha omu kashushu kensimbi*

*Nduhura Nduhura  
Hear! Your mother has spoken!  
Nduhura Nduhura  
Hear! Your mother has spoken!  
She has said she never produced you  
That she got you from a cowrie shell.*

The women heard the song but paid no heed.

“What’s wrong with this bird?” asked Nkwanzi.

But Nyamishagi later realized she had made a big mistake to reveal her secret. By then it was too late. She was afraid what the consequences would be. Nduhura had made her swear that under no circumstance was she to reveal to any living person how she had come by her wealth and her son.

Kanyonza the bird flew off and headed towards the wetland where Nduhura had led the cattle. All the while it was singing and calling out.

*Nduhura Nduhura*  
*Hurira Nyoko yagamba!*  
*Nduhura Nduhura*  
*Hurira Nyoko yagamba!*

*Yagira ngu tarakuzeire*  
*Ngu akakwiha omu kashushu kensimbi*

The bird flew on until it perched on a tree under which Nduhura was resting from the heat of the sun. It went on singing:



*Nduhura, Nduhura*  
*Hurira Nyoko yagamba!*  
*Nduhura, Nduhura*  
*Hurira Nyoko yagamba!*

*Yagira ngu tarakuzeire*  
*Ngu akakwiha omu kashushu kensimbi*

Nduhura heard Kanyonza's song but could not believe it. So he listened more attentively as the bird sang the song over and over again:

*Nduhura, Nduhura*  
*Hurira Nyoko yagamba!*  
*Nduhura, Nduhura*  
*Hurira Nyoko yagamba!*  
*Yagira ngu tarakuzeire*  
*Ngu akakwiha omu kashushu kensimbi*

So it was true! His mother had spoken to someone. She had betrayed their secret. She had spilled the beans! Nduhura was deeply disappointed. He was angry with his mother. He did not know how he was going to confront her about this.

"We're going home!" he called out to the herdsboys. "Now! Drive the cattle as fast as you can."

With that he strolled off angrily, leaving them to follow him. This had never happened before, for he followed after the cattle and everyone had gone ahead of him.

On turning a corner approaching his home up the hill, Nduhura saw Nyamishaigi waiting outside by the gate.

“My Son! My Son!” cried Nyamishagi when she saw her son striding in from a distance. “What’s the matter? Your face is a cloud and your eyes are red. Why, what’s the matter, my son?”

Nduhura stopped in front of her and could not find the words to accuse her of betrayal. Instead, he cried tears of regret. His vision of her was blurred by the tears that streamed from his eyes.

“Mother, you said I was not your son!” he said at long last. “You said you got me from a broken cowrie shell. Okay! To the broken cowrie shell I return!”

At that very moment, Nduhura, and all the property that he had come with suddenly vanished! The old woman looked around only to see a grass thatched hut and a hoe lying by an empty basket. She cried and cried but nothing changed. She had lost everything! Her property was gone and so was her beloved son!

When I saw Nyamishagi distraught after losing all her property, I quickly walked away. I passed through my maternal uncle’s pumpkin patch and the pumpkins became poisonous. I passed through my stepmother’s millet garden and the millet turned to grass. So I came to tell you that this is not the end of me, the storyteller, but only the end of the tale.

## **The Unstoppable Suitor**

There once lived a man in Buyanja village whose wife bore him only sons. When she delivered her sixth male child, her husband prayed to the gods of his fathers that if he should be graced with a daughter, he would be the best father ever. Their seventh child was a beautiful baby girl and they named her Nshemere, which means, “Let me be nice.” She was called Nsheme in short. Nsheme was a beauty to behold right from her childhood and her beauty only increased with the years as she grew up.

Although her father doted on her, Nsheme never shied away from doing household chores like fetching water from the well which she frequently did. The well was a good distance away from their home but that did not discourage her. Fetching water was one of the tasks girls her age enjoyed because it gave them a chance to enjoy each other’s company and exchange stories. It was also the time to splash around, pretending to bathe when it was all play. Nsheme often went to the well with her younger sister, Kirabo, who otherwise much preferred working around the house to walking all those miles with a pot of water on her head.

Men began to court Nsheme when she was hardly into her teenage years. It became evident that she was set for an early marriage if only her father or herself would consent. However, it seemed that deferring marriage for as long as was possible was the one thing on which father and daughter agreed wholeheartedly. Many aspiring husbands were therefore disappointed when they came, they proposed and they went away empty-

handed. But that never discouraged others from trying their hand.

One day, a very determined young man arrived at Nsheme's home when she had gone out to fetch water out at the well.

"I am called Ishaza," he introduced himself. "Tell me if you are the father of the most beautiful girl in our land."

Nsheme's father, who had been summoned to welcome the important-looking guest, was impressed by the young man's confidence. He bore himself like a prince and commanded respect with little effort.

"There are many beautiful girls in our land," Nsheme's father replied dismissively.

"I'm talking of the incomparable Nshemere," Ishaza answered, undaunted. "Where is she?"

"Talk to me," said Nsheme's father.

"Not until after I have quenched my thirst with the sight of that beauty," replied the man. "I have come a very long way to be denied my heart's desire."

Nsheme's father was more and more impressed by the man's demeanour. His daughter had never met her match but maybe this time he would get a chance to see if she was as resolute as she professed to be. What would it be like if someone as immovable as she was met another who was as irresistible as this suitor?

"Go and fetch your sister," he ordered Kirabo.

"Tell her that Ishaza, her husband-to-be, is here waiting for her," added the young man. "Say she should not keep me waiting and that I will not go away until I see her."



Kirabo was used to this. She never went all the way to the well to bring back Nsheme when sent. Instead, she used to stand on top of the hill overlooking the well where she would sing to her sister the song they knew so well that went thus:

*Nsheme! Nsheme!*  
*Nsheme maama Nsheme*  
*Akanyonyi Ai*  
*Omuka nibakweta*  
*Akanyonyi Ai*

*Nsheme! Nsheme!*  
*Nsheme maama Nsheme*  
*The little bird Ai!*

*At home they are calling you  
Nsheme  
The little bird Ai!*

Nsheme heard Kirabo calling and replied with the same song. This was a game they enjoyed playing at the expense of Nshame's many suitors.

*Noha arikunyeta, Nsheme,  
Akanyonyi Ai*

*Who is calling me, Nsheme  
The little bird Ai!*

Kirabo replied:

*Nomushaija nkabandi, Nsheme,  
Akanyonyi Ai!*

*It's a man like others, Nsheme  
The little bird Ai!*

Nshemere, answered:

*Ogyende omugambire  
Akanyonyi Ai!  
Akashozi k'ahakweitu  
Akanyonyi Ai!  
Ku arikakura  
Akanyonyi Ai!  
Nibwo arinshwera*

*Akanyonyi Ai!*  
*Go and tell him,*  
*Little bird Ai!*  
*That hill by our home,*  
*Little bird ai!*  
*By whom it gets uprooted,*  
*Little bird Ai!*  
*That's when I'll get married*  
*Little bird Ai!*

Kirabo then went down and told Ishaza that Nsheme had refused to come home and that she would never be married until the hill by their home disappeared.

“You’ve heard what my daughter says,” Nsheme’s father said, relishing the challenge.

“I will not take no for an answer!” Ishaza swore.

“I have nothing further to say to you,” Nsheme’s father said dismissively.

“You haven’t seen the last of me yet!” Ishaza as he turned to leave.

Having set her suitor the daunting task of making a hill disappear, Nsheme herself went into hiding, saying she would not be seen in public until either the hill or the suitor disappeared.

Ishaza was not a man who was easily discouraged. He went and got his friends and they started excavating the hill near Nsheme’s home. This they did for months on end but finally they accomplished the task. The man then went back and told Nsheme’s father that the hill his daughter wanted gone had disappeared.

Nsheme's father, who had watched the excavation of the hill with awe over the months, was in a frenzy of excitement when Ishaza finally showed up.

"You heard what the young man said," he told his daughter, Kirabo. "Go at once and summon your sister."

Kirabo at once rushed to her vantage point and started to sing the message to her sister.

*Nsheme! Nsheme!  
Nsheme maama, Nsheme,  
Akanyonyi Ai,  
Omuka nibakweta,  
Akanyonyi Ai.*

Nsheme answered as before:

*Who is calling me, Nsheme  
The little bird Ai!*

Kirabo:

*It's a man like others Nsheme  
The little bird Ai!*

Nsheme:

*Go and tell him Nsheme  
The little bird Ai!  
Until when the hill is uprooted.  
That is when Nsheme will get married.*

Kirabo went and reported that Nsheme had refused to go home and that she insisted that not until the hill by their home had disappeared would she get married.

"Go and tell Nshemere that the hill is no more!" Ishaza insisted "Anyone who has eyes can see that there's nothing where there was a hill before. I have

come for my wife! Where's the girl for whose love I uprooted a hill?"

When Nsheme heard that the hill had been uprooted for her love, she could not believe it! She came home and found her suitor and the people who had escorted him waiting anxiously. Ishaza breathed a sigh of relief on seeing the object of his affections – the most beautiful girl in the land – standing before him in sweet surrender.

I, the storyteller, saw the two parties starting the marriage negotiations. I ran home, marveling at the wonders that love can accomplish. I went through my aunt's egg plant garden and they all became bitter tomatoes. I passed through my mother's pumpkin patch and the pumpkins turned into poisonous ones. Then I came to tell you that although tales end, narrators are everlasting...

## **The Magic Harp**

Let me tell you a story! Let me tell you a story! Once upon a time, there lived a man around here who married a wife. The couple had no children for a long time before they were finally blessed with two boys. The first born was named Kangaho and after a long time, they got another child whom they named Kojo.

As time went by, however, the mother of these children fell sick. All sorts of herbs and other medication were tried. All medicine men and diviner priests were consulted but all was in vain and finally, she died.

In due course, the man married another woman and she produced three children in quick succession.

Before Kangaho's mother died, she had left him with a magic harp. She had told him to keep playing that harp so that he could be relieved of loneliness.

As time went on, Kangaho's step-mother made him suffer with all the chores in the home. He was supposed to collect firewood, fetch water from the well, sweep the compound, and he had to do anything that needed to be done in the home. He was also supposed to graze the cattle and take them to the stream to drink. Kangaho became the beast of burden in the home.

Whenever Kangaho was in the bush, he would play on his harp and feel contented. The harp took away his loneliness and sadness. It became his great companion and friend. But Kangaho would be accused by his stepmother of wasting time when he got home.

One day, Kangaho went to graze the cattle and delayed in the field. When he returned, his stepmother beat him up and threatened to throw away the harp.

Another day, Kangaho was ordered to fetch water from the well but he was so busy playing the harp that he did not hear. They called him another time but he did not respond. Instead, he went on playing his harp. His stepmother got so worked up that she wrested the harp from his hands and threw it away.

This reprisal angered Kangaho so much that he went and hid himself in a big sycamore tree that stood on a little island in a stream not very far from his home. The tree was completely surrounded by water.

That day when his father came home, he asked where Kangaho was. But Kangaho was nowhere to be found. The father ordered his wife to go and look for the boy. Kangaho's stepmother searched for him everywhere until she went down to the stream and found him in the sycamore tree in the middle of the stream. She called him but he refused to answer. Then she started singing:

*Kangaho, Kangaho  
Toora enanga yaawe  
Kangaho, Kangaho  
Toora enanga yaawe.*

*Kangaho, Kangaho  
Here, take your harp  
Kangaho, Kangaho  
Kangaaho in the sycamore tree*



Kangaho then replied in song:

*Niiwe f'okureka kungambira  
Okanaga enanga yangye  
Iwe omuti gw'omusikamori  
Tsindika tugyende!*

*Don't you bother telling me  
You threw away my harp  
You, sycamore tree move on forward  
Move on forward and we leave!*

Kangaho's stepmother went back home scared, and narrated her story to her husband. Her story attracted other members of the family who all went down to the tree to see what was happening. They saw Kangaho up

the sycamore tree which kept going further away and deeper into the water. Everybody on the shore got scared! The stepmother then told the father to call Kangaho back himself, so the father sang thus:

*Kangaho, Kangaho  
Toora enanga yaawe  
Kangaho, Kangaho  
Toora enanga yaawe.*

Kangaho replied:

*Niwe f'okureka kungambira  
Maama akanaga enanga yangye  
Iwe omuti gw'omusikamori  
Tsindika tugyende!  
Maama akanaga enanga yangye.*

The Sycamore tree went even further away and a lot deeper in the water until everybody started screaming and pleading. All the children sang to no avail until Kojo, his real brother, came and started singing:

*Kangaho, Kangaho  
Toora enanga yaawe  
Kangaho, Kangaho  
Toora enanga yaawe.*

When Kangaho heard his true brother's voice, he stopped, listened and kept his eyes on Kojo who was holding up the magic harp as he went on singing:

*Kangaho, Kangaho  
Toora enanga yaawe  
Kangaho, Kangaho  
Toora enanga yaawe.*

The tree started coming out of the water and drawing nearer to the bank! Kojo continued to sing:

*Kangaho, Kangaho  
Toora enanga yaawe  
Kangaho, Kangaho  
Toora enanga yaawe.*

Then the tree touched the bank and Kangaho descended to the ground. Kojo handed him his harp and everybody went back home jubilating. A party was held in Kangaho's honour and everybody ate and dipped their fingers in the water of the dead animal!

When I saw everybody eating, I also said that let me go and narrate this story of the boy who was saved by a magic harp.

## **The Hidden Princess**

Listen, listen, to this my tale! Once upon a time, there lived a man called Rwamayongo. He married a woman who was called Nyangoma and the couple got a beautiful girl who they named Nyamwire (this is a name from the Basingo clan of Ankole).

One day Nyamwire's mother died. The girl, Nyamwire, was then just a toddler, so the father decided to marry again. He was hoping that the new woman, Bayara, would care for Nyamwire.

However, this was not to be. When Bayara produced her own children, she did not like Nyamwire at all. Her own children were so many that the home forgot loneliness and quietness.

Meanwhile, Nyamwire was growing into a beautiful young girl. Her skin colour was just between black and brown and so very smooth. Her hips were as wide as the calabash that is used to churn milk! Her eyes were as big and as white as those of a calf, and her legs were as round as banana stems.

Nyamwire was indeed beautiful! Whenever she smiled, her small white teeth sparkled like stars on a dark night. To crown it all, she was so friendly. Whoever associated with her grew to like her as she was sociable and well mannered. She was even loved by her siblings. They never wanted to play or eat without her.

Unfortunately, the more beautiful and sociable Nyamwire became, the more hatred she attracted from her step mother.

One day, Bayara hatched a wicked plan to make sure that no one saw Nyamwire or interacted with her.

“This adorable girl who attracts everybody with her charm will be killed or kidnapped,” she told her husband. “Let us hide her where no one can find her.”

Nyamwire’s father thought the idea was out of a genuine concern for his daughter and so he agreed without question. Bayara was happy because this meant that people would no longer make unfavourable comparisons between Nyamwire and her beloved children.

Bayara got a huge basket woven in which she hid Nyamwire. A small opening was left on one side of the basket through which food was passed to the girl. The basket was then covered with yet another woven lid and Nyamwire was instructed to stay there throughout the day and come out only at night.

Whenever the parents went to work in the garden, Nyamwire’s siblings would remove the lid and play with her. They would assure her that they would never reveal this secret.

Nyamwire appreciated the younger children’s concern for her and she did everything to help them with household chores they had been left to do. On coming out of the basket, she would clean the house, do all the demanding tasks and feed her siblings. They would then play for as long as possible after which Nyamwire would go back into the basket until night time.

In that land there was a king who had a grown son who was ready for marriage. The young man was very handsome. He was tall and light skinned, with a pointed

nose and a long forehead. These were features that everyone admired in one of royal bearing.

At his home, the prince had been nicknamed “Mutuusi”, which means descendant of the beautiful Tutsi people of Rwanda.

Every morning after the rays of the sun had chased the coldness away, the prince and his father would walk about, inspecting the land and at times they would go to gaze at their cattle which were feeding in the fields.

On one such occasion, the Prince went for a walk without his father. He was alone with the slave boys. As they passed near Rwamayongo’s home, he looked through the papyrus reed enclosure and landed on a very beautiful girl.



*The Prince and slave boys peep through  
Nyamwire's fence*

“Let’s stop here for a while,” he ordered his slave-boys. “I want to find out what’s going on in this home. I believe I have seen something that can’t be true.”

The slave boys stopped and waited to see what the Prince was talking about. He walked ahead and greeted the children who were at play. They were under the care of a very beautiful girl. So his eyes hadn’t deceived him after all.

“May I know your name, lovely maiden?” he asked her.

“I’m not allowed to talk to strangers,” she replied.

“But I’m not a stranger!” he protested. “Don’t you know who I am?”

She shook her head as she looked him over with her sparkling eyes.

“I am the Prince,” he informed her. “My father is the King and I will be King some day. Will you be my Queen?”

She looked down and gave no answer. She thought he was only joking.

“You don’t believe me!” he said. “But you wait! I will prove you wrong some day. But first, tell me your name.”

“Nyamwire!” she answered boldly, staring him in the face without any trace of timidity or fear.

It was like a challenge and it was he who first took his eyes away from her. At that moment, he swore to himself that nothing would stop him from marrying this girl and proving to her that he meant everything he said that day. The Prince knew he was smitten and that he would never forget this girl. He was still looking about

when Nyamwire turned and vanished into her hiding place.

“Where’s she?” the Prince asked the children.

They just stared at him without answering.

“Who is she?” he asked.

“Our sister,” volunteered one of the younger children.

“Where did she go?” asked the Prince again, looking everywhere for Nyamwire.

The children only stared at him in silence as they leaned against the huge basket that stood in a sheltered corner.

The Prince finally gave up and left with his entourage of slave boys. He left knowing that, for the first time in his life, he was truly in love. From that day on, not a moment passed without him thinking about Nyamwire. He could think of nothing else but the beautiful girl. He could not eat and he could not sleep all through the night. At times, he would stare into space and drift into absentmindedness. How he wished he could be near that girl!

After sometime when the Prince could not control his longing for the beautiful Nyamwire, he went back to the home and peeped through the papyrus enclosure. The children were busy playing as usual.

“Where’s your sister today?” he asked them when they came to greet him.

One of the youngest pointed at the huge basket.

“You mean she’s in there?” he asked, incredulous.

Before anyone could answer, the lid suddenly popped open and Nyamwire stepped out.

“Nyamwire!” exclaimed the Prince. “What were you doing in there?”

“That’s my playhouse,” she lied.

“So you were playing hide and seek with the children, were you?” he laughed, pleased that he had found her.

He had been half afraid that all this was only a dream and that he might wake up and find he had been in his bed all this while. But it wasn’t a dream and she was as real as he was.

“I said I would come back to ask you to marry me,” he said after they had exchanged greetings. “Well, here I am!”

Nyamwire did not know what to say.

“You don’t have to answer me now,” said the Prince, to her great relief. “Don’t worry. There are things I have to do first. Then I’ll come and do this properly, as befits a future King.”

With those words, he left reluctantly.

That day when the Prince got home, he told the King that he had found a girl to marry. The King at first refused because, among the Banyankole, he who is going to marry first asks around, and to marry into the King’s palace, one’s background has to be thoroughly investigated. The clan, the taboos and all the traditions of the would-be bride are supposed to be unearthed and thoroughly scrutinized. But eventually, the King agreed.

The Prince went back and told Nyamwire. Nyamwire accepted on condition that the whole issue

was to be kept a secret lest she be killed by her stepmother. This secret was known by the Prince's family and Nyamwire's siblings only. They all swallowed the truth and acted as if nothing was afoot.

At the King's Palace, preparations for the Prince's marriage were made. Firewood was collected, cooking stones and cooking pots were molded. Milk was churned in great quantities for the occasion would require a lot of ghee to make 'Eshabwe' (the knyankole delicacy meant for important visitors) and all the delicacies were put together for the grand occasion.

When the great day came, everybody who had been invited took a seat. Among those invited were Nyamwire's parents. The whole village gathered. Flutes and local harps were played, drums were beaten, the *kyevugo* performers recited their praise poems and the dancers raised dust.

In the evening, those who were supposed to bring the bride went to Nyamwire's home. They got her out of the basket, smeared her body with ghee. Then they tattooed her and dressed her up in the Kinyankole attire. When it was about time to leave for the palace, Nyamwire started singing the farewell song:

*Iwe Maama; eei,  
Nagyenda eei,  
Nakutsigaho eei,  
Niiwe Taata eei,  
Nagyenda eei,*

*Nakutsigaho eei,  
Kanyanyazi eei,*



*Nyamwire ready to leave her home*

*Nagyenda eei,  
Nakutsigaho eei  
Karumuna eei,  
Nagyenda eei,  
Nakutsigaho eei,  
Iwe Tatento eei,  
Nagyenda eei,  
Nakutsigaho eei,  
Iwe marumi eei,  
Nagyenda eei,  
Nakutsigaho eei,  
Tatenkazi eei,  
Nagyenda eei,*

*Nakutsigaho eei,  
Banyaruganda eei,  
Nagyenda eei,  
Nabatsigaho eei,  
Imwe mwena eei,  
Nagyenda eei,  
Nabatsigaho; eei,*

*You my mother eei,  
I have gone eei,  
I have left you eei,  
And you my father eei,  
I have gone eei,  
I have left you eei,  
You my sister eei,  
I have gone eei,  
I have left you eei,  
You my brother eei,  
I have gone eei,  
I have left you eei,  
You my maternal uncle eei,  
I have gone eei,  
I have left you eei,  
You my paternal uncle eei,  
I have gone eei,  
I have left you eei,  
You my maternal aunt eei,*

*I have gone; eei,  
I have left you eei,  
You my paternal aunt eei,*

*I have gone eei,  
I have left you eei,  
You clansmen and women eei,  
I have gone eei,  
I have left you eei,  
Everybody eei,  
I have gone eei,  
I have left you eei,*

The people who had come to collect her slung her in the traditional sheet (*eshuka*), which is used for carrying brides. Her brothers and sisters escorted her to the King's Palace. When the cows were nearing the homestead, the bride was taken inside the house. As the saying goes, "The bride cannot get to the courtyard before the cows because it's the cows that bring her." Nyamwire was taken into the interior of the Palace where she stayed until morning.

In the morning, the King summoned Nyamwire's parents.

"I have summoned you here to inform you that my son and heir, has married your daughter, Nyamwire," he said. "Don't go looking for her anywhere. She is here at the Palace."

Nyamwire's parents were astounded. Buyara didn't know whether to cry or laugh. How could the girl in the basket end up marrying the Prince? Nyamwire's father stood tall and proud! He had raised a future Queen!

The King then called the guests and showed them the bride. This was according to the Kinyankore tradition. Everybody was happy and there was a lot of

rejoicing and jubilation. He then gave Nyamwire's parents gifts of cows, goats, sheep, slave girls and slave boys and even part of his territory to rule over. He even invited them to stay at the Palace and never go back home!

When I saw everybody happy and excited, I put my spear on my shoulder and went to Rurengyero to give water to the cattle of Kakarakamba-ka-Kashagama's grand children, the one of the Basingo Clan and Babukaara the one who never mixes with the white pearls. I passed through my grandmother's vegetable garden and they wilted and turned into weeds. I went through my uncle's sugar cane plantation and it changed into papyrus reeds. Then I came here to narrate this tale.

## **The Jealous Stepmother**

Listen to my story, listen to my story: There was once a man called Katsimbura who got married to a woman named Nyakikongoro. They had a child, a beautiful girl whom they called Kabarungi. (Kabarungi means “daughter of the beautiful ones”) This name they gave her because she was as beautiful as her mother.

Kabarungi grew up but unfortunately, her mother fell sick and despite all efforts to get her treatment, she died. Katsimbura who was devastated by the wife’s death was inconsolable. Whenever he would look at Kabarungi, he would be instantly reminded of the late mother. His sorrow so consumed him that all elders got concerned and called a meeting to decide his fate. The meeting decided that he remarries. Among the Banyankole, it is in order for a bereaved husband to marry again preferably from the same family.

Katsimbura therefore married another woman who was actually the late Nyakikongoro’s sister. Lamentably for Kabarungi, Kirangwa for that was her stepmother’s name did not like her. She also gave birth to her own child, whom they called Fokwororora (which means ‘just try parenting!’) this name was a connotation of Katsimbura’s attitude towards his new life. This child, who was also a girl, was not as beautiful as Kabarungi.

Kirangwa resented this turn of events and hated Kabarungi even more than before. Consequently, whatever Kabarungi did was wrong and whatever she

said was improper. All this supposedly bad conduct was reported to Kabarungi's father.

One fine morning, Kirangwa bathed the children because she wanted to go out with them. She smeared Kabarungi with cow dung!

On her way to the place of their visit, people commented, "Why did you smear this beautiful girl with cow dung?"

Kirangwa did not answer but only frowned with increased resentment.

When they arrived back home, Kirangwa fumed with all the fury and disappointment because of the people who never commented positively about her daughter. She decided to send Fokwororora far away to her relatives while she dealt with Kabarungi.

Kirangwa got a sharp knife with which she planned to slit Kabarungi's long neck. She called Kabarungi to accompany her to the well where she intended to carry out her odious task. When they got there, she pulled out her knife in readiness.

"Let me kill her so that my child will also be called beautiful," Kirangwa muttered to herself.

In that instant, Kabarungi's father appeared from nowhere! He never ever went to the well, which was a place for women. No self-respecting man risked making an appearance there, lest he was accused of jealousy watching over his wife. But Katsimbura has been wary of his wife's motives and he had stealthily followed his wife and daughter when they set off for the well. Kirangwa usually sent Kabarungi there alone and had no reason to accompany the girl this time.



*Katsimbura in time to save Kabarungi's life*

Kabarungi was quaking with fear and she was making wild cries in her throat in dread of the sharp knife when her father stepped out of the bushes just in time to check Kirangwa's fatal plunge.

"Relax, Kabarungi," he said, taking his daughter by the shoulder.

Kirangwa dropped the knife and fled the scene like an animal pursued by hunters. She was swallowed by the nearby bushes!

"You viper, don't ever come back to my home!" Katsimbura shouted after her. "You have killed my love for you with this knife you've left behind as a reminder of your evil heart."

That was when I slipped away and descended into the banana plantation, which was transformed into inedible

banana plantains. On my way here to tell you the story, I passed through my aunt's cabbage garden which suffered an instant attack of oilseed rape. Never hate your step-children; you never know who will be helpful to you in future. So love all children, even those that are not your own. You will be rewarded.

## The Saviour Bird

Long, long ago, there was a man who made friendship with a bird. His name was Kateera. In those days, famine struck and the whole community was paralyzed! The path leading to the granary became bushy due to disuse. Fire divorced the cooking stones and people's teeth forgot the taste of food! People lost all hope and everything seemed to have come to a halt.

One day, Kateera got up as usual and went in search of food in vain. When he got tired, he sat under a tree. On that tree, there was a bird. The bird saw the man and felt pity. Then it started singing:

*Nyanjara yateire bakeimuka kushaka,  
Nyanjara yateire bakeimuka kushaka,  
Bakashaka amayonza; bakeimuka kushaka  
Bakashaka mirankwongyere bakeimuka kushaka,  
Bakashaka amatuutu bakeimuka kushaka,  
Bakashaka enkomamhangwa bakeimuka kushaka;*

*Hunger struck, they went searching for food.  
Hunger struck, they went searching for food.  
They searched for berries,  
Swallow and I will give you more –  
They went searching for food.  
Searched for wild berries, they went searching for  
food.  
Searched for edible roots, they went searching for  
food.*

Kateera turned and saw the bird which flew down and perched right in front of him. He kept looking at the bird until it flew off again and perched overhead. But the man kept following it.

The man and the bird went on and on. The bird led him to the place where the sun goes to rest. They went on and on and when the sun was beating down in its tired state, they got to a lonely and deserted place, and the bird began to sing again:

*Nyeihamba ryeza, tambir'abaana baawe,  
Nyeihamba ryeza, tambir'abaana baawe,  
Nyeihamba ryeza, tambir'abaana baawe,  
Nyeihamba ryeza, tambir'abaana baawe.*

*Wilderness, fertile wilderness, save your children  
Wilderness, fertile wilderness, save your children  
Wilderness, fertile wilderness, save your children  
Wilderness, fertile wilderness, save your children*

Kateera saw fruits of all sorts growing around him. He picked and gathered, filling his woven basket. The basket got so full that he failed to put it on his head unaided. But the little bird helped him carry his load.

“When you see that the moon has grown a horn, you can come back for more food but never tell any other living soul about this place,” it said.

Kateera left and the journey home was long and exhausting. He travelled the whole night and the following day by the mid-morning, when the sun had almost risen overhead, he arrived at his home.

When the members of his family saw him at a distance, fatigue showing all over his face, they ran and welcomed him happily. His wife took the food he had brought home and served her children as well as the rest of the family. The entire homestead became alive and happiness was felt all around.

When the moon had grown a horn, Kateera went back to sit under the tree where the bird appeared again and took him to the desert. He again brought food home. This time round, his wife asked him where he was getting the food from but Kateera refused to tell her because he did not want to break the promise he had made to the little bird.

The Kibwere, Kateera's wife gave away all the food, serving it extravagantly because she knew that her husband could always go back where he had got it and bring back some more. As the food was getting finished, Kateera fell sick and he was too weak to go in search of food alone. So he asked his wife to go with him.

This time the little bird saw the man with another person and it was annoyed.

"This man is not trustworthy!" it said to itself. "I will not help him again and his people can starve."

The bird, therefore, refused to go with them but stayed up the tree chirping angrily. When Kibwere heard the bird noises, she was angry.

"Do you hear that stupid a bird?" she asked her husband. "It is adding to my headache and multiplying our sorrows. I wish it would just shut up!"

The bird later relented and took the two to the desert where they gathered all kinds of fruits and took them

home. The man pleaded with his wife to keep this a secret since the bird had followed them to their home and made its home in a tree near their house.

Kibwere served the food in her usual extravagant manner. She gave it to all and sundry and forgot how difficult it had been to get it. She even refused to eat some of the food herself.

“I will not eat pumpkins like a slave girl,” she said. “What sort of husband are you? Get up and go bring us better food”.

When the man refused, Kibwere retaliated.

“You are not greater than any of us,” she shouted. “You are just proud because of the good Samaritan that has helped our children. The one you told me about.”

Kibwere then called all her friends in the neighborhood and narrated the story of how they got free food. On hearing this, the women took their woven baskets and headed for the deserted place on their own without Kateera to lead them. They were confident that Kibwere would get them there.

The little bird went back to the tree but this time round, it refused to sing. The women, however, were not discouraged. They went to the deserted place or what Kateera’s wife, Kibwere, thought was the place. There, they searched and searched for the fruits in vain. With all the fatigue and hunger, they rested as night started to gather and draw near. They started to feel apprehensive under cover of darkness, for it was then that the lion and the hyena, the tiger and the jackal and all the wild animals started howling. The animals together licked

their lips after the feast that awaited them. It was surely the end for these obstinate women!

The people at home waited and their eyes sunk into the sockets with anxiety and hunger. There was no hope. Finally, it was Kateera who agreed to go and see what had happened to the stubborn women. When the bird saw him, it sang its chorus:

*Nyanjara yateire, bakeimuka kushaka*  
*Nyanjara yateire, bakeimuka kushaka*  
*Bakashaka amayonza bakeimuka kushaka*  
*Bakashaka "mirankwongyere"*  
*Bakeimuka kushaka*  
*Bakashaka amatuutu bakeimuka kushaka*  
*Bakashaka enkomamahangwa bakeimuka kushaka.*

Then it led Kateera to the secret place. Here he found eagles rejoicing and ants clearing the place. The grass was stretching its limbs and the atmosphere was cleansing itself.

He filled his basket with fruits after the bird sung.  
*You mound, you fertile mound, save your children*  
*You mound, you fertile mound, save your children*  
*You mound, you fertile mound, save your children*  
*You mound, you fertile mound, save your children.*

Kateera then went home where firewood and water got busy and up to now, the women have never filled their baskets so as to go back home!

When I saw the man and his children busy enjoying the food that he had brought home, I rushed and passed through his neighbour's home and found them still waiting. They were gathering toddlers like rejected sweet potatoes.

I passed through my cousin, Nyang'abaributyo's millet garden and it turned into grass. Then I went through Bacura's orchard and it became shrubs then the fire said "*myai*". I cursed it with "May you become dumb". It's not me, the narrator, who has ended but the tale!

## **The Fruit Tree Princess**

Once upon a time, there lived a man called Bigambo, which means ‘words’. He married a wife and they lived and lived for so many years without ever getting a child they could call their own. They always prayed to the Sun, and to the spirits of their ancestors to give them a child in vain. They were wealthy and they owned an expensive farm with lots of gardens. In the middle of this farm was a big gigantic tree with lots of large succulent fruits on it.

One fine morning, the farmer and his wife went to dig on their farm and lo and behold! The tree was no more but instead there in its place stood a very beautiful girl! The girl walked towards their home!

The astounded farmer and his wife followed her only to see her get busy with household chores! She even called them “Taata” which means “my father” and “Maama” which means “my mother”. They also called her “daughter.” They were happy that at last, they had got a child.

The couple lived with their beautiful girl whom they named Kirabo Kya Nyamuhanga meaning gift from the creator. Two seasons later, a very handsome young man came to ask for her hand in marriage.

“Young man, how did you know we had a daughter?” asked Bigambo, amazed.

“Who told you about us?” added his wife, equally mesmerised.

“I had a vision in which I saw this girl,” replied the young man. “I was determined to marry her. I knew I

would find her once I set out to search for her. Now that I have found her, I know I cannot leave her behind. I will give you anything you ask for. I will grant your every wish provided you let me have my dream girl.”

“Please don’t take Kirabo away from us,” pleaded the old couple. “She’s all we have to look after us in our old age. We would be lost and lonely without her. We have farm workers but it is she who looks after all our needs here at home.”

“I will give you any number of servants to look after you,” promised the suitor. “I will also give you riches beyond your imagination. Just tell me when I can take my bride and that is the day when I will bring you whatever you desire.”

There was nothing the parents could say or do to dissuade him. Kirabo herself did not say anything and carried on as though she had no idea what was going on. She smiled and went about her chores as if in a dream.

On the appointed day, the suitor came with his entire entourage and with lots of cows, goats, and sheep as well as drinks and lots of foodstuffs. A big party was held and the whole village throbbed with festivity.

“I believe that those who have faith never get disappointed,” said the old farmer.

The suitor turned out to be the son of the king. Wonder of wonders! He and Kirabo who had come from a tree lived together happily ever after. Bigambo and his wife got everything they had been promised but they still missed their loving daughter, Kirabo Kya Nyamuhanga, more than they ever missed the fruit tree.

When I left the wedding party, I passed through my uncle's sugarcane plantation and the sugarcane turned into reeds! I crossed my nephew's fruit orchard and the fruits withered and fell like hailstones.

That is the end of the tale but not the end of me!

## **The Twins who Found Each Other**

Once upon a time, there was a man called Bangi who married a wife called Mutetsi. They lived together happily and Kenyonyozi got pregnant. When this happened, the man decided to go to a faraway place to work and look for things that would make their life more comfortable. Time came and the period for Kenyonyozi to give birth drew near. The labour pains started when she was far from home, in the bush alone while gathering firewood. She gave birth to two bouncing babies, a boy and a girl.

Unfortunately, in her husband's clan, twins were taboo, whereas having a boy as a first-born was the greatest luck one could wish for. Mutetsi, in her anxiety to please her husband's clan members, abandoned the girl in the bush and took the baby boy home.

Fortunately, an old woman Mbareeba which means 'I see them' saw the whole episode and urged by maternal instincts, which she imagined had long expired, retrieved the baby girl and took her home as her own.

When Bangi came back from his long and tiring journey, he found Kenyonyozi in the laying-in period. He was elated. His wife had produced a baby boy! He made a big party for her because among the Banyankore, a boy is likened to a river that flows on endlessly and continues to strengthen the clan.

Season after season went by and the boy, who they named, named Mugisha, which means 'gift', grew up. He was given the responsibility of looking after goats and he enjoyed the outdoor life.

Meanwhile, his twin sister Bonabaana, which means ‘all are children regardless of their gender’, had also grown and the old woman Mbareeba had brought her up on goat and sheep’s milk since she had no cows. Bonabaana also was taking care of goats.

Mugisha met Bonabaana out there in the grazing fields and he fell head over heels in love with the beautiful maiden. He even proposed to her saying:-

*Iwe Nyamunyonyi  
Nyamurungi  
Oriise’mbuzi  
Oryab’omugore wangye*

*You beautiful girl  
You beautiful one  
Who grazes goats  
You’ll be my bride.*

Bonabaana replied:  
*Noyenda kushwera  
Kushwera empasha  
Kushwera empasha  
Nyoko aka’nagaho  
Omukaikuru yantoratora  
Amate ge’mbuzi, nage’ntaama  
Nigo gabeire amashereka*

*You want to marry  
To marry your twin  
Your mother threw me away*

*An old woman picked me  
Goat's milk, sheep's milk  
Were my breast milk.*

When Mugisha went home, he narrated the whole incident to his mother. The dumb-founded mother told the boy that she would go with him. She would hide in the bush as Mugisha repeated his proposal to the girl.

The following day, Mugisha went with his mother who hid herself behind a shrub. Then Mugisha repeated his proposal:

*Iwe Nyamunyonyi  
Nyamurungi  
Oriise' mbuzi  
Oryab'omugore wangye*



*Mugisha proposes to Bonabaana as mother listens in her hiding place*

Bonabaana replied:  
*Noyenda kushwera*  
*Kushwera empasha*  
*Kushwera empasha*  
*Nyoko aka'nagaho*  
*Omukaikuru yantoratora*  
*Amate g'embuzi, nage'ntaama*  
*Nigo gabeire amashereka*  
*Iwe kifamutiima we!*

The mother, who was now in tears of remorse and relief came out of her hiding place and asked Bonabaana where her home was. Bonabaana led her estranged mother to the home of her foster-mother wondering what would happen. Meanwhile she was busy narrating the story of her life to twin brother.

Mbareeba received them warmly. Mutetsi pleaded with Mbareeba for her daughter Bonabaana. Mbareeba, who was renowned for her kindness, only asked for a token for bringing up the girl. She said she had done it for love and not for gain.

When Mutetsi was preparing to take the token of appreciation to the old woman, I saw it fitting to go back home and tell the story to my people.

On my way home, I passed through my grandmother's vegetable garden and the leaves dried up instantly. I passed through my in-laws' pumpkin patch which became a jungle of wild tomatoes. Then I reached home to tell them what I had heard. It was the end of the tale but not the end of me!

## **The Roaming Beast**

Once upon a time, in a village called Rwemirokora, there lived a man. The man married and his wife produced a very stubborn little boy named Kahiigi. The little boy was always playing tricks on his parents.

One fine morning, the couple was invited to visit their friends in a neighboring village. They decided to take the boy along. They trekked the long journey and somewhere in the course of it, Kahiigi said he wanted to answer nature's call.

"Wait for me," he requested. "I'm going to ease myself behind that shrub."

The parents, not wanting to be seen as unreasonable, accepted and agreed to let the boy out of their sight. Little did they know that this was a send off for Kahiigi.

After the boy had eased himself, he looked around and saw a mango tree which was heavy with ripe berries. He climbed the tree and started picking the best berries to eat. The parents called him but it was all in vain. They called out to him to pick the berries he wanted and climb down quickly so that they could proceed with their journey. But Kahiigi would not budge. He refused to come down and just went on stuffing himself with the juicy berries.

Finally, Kahiigi's parents decided to walk on and told him to follow them when he was done gorging. Unfortunately for Kahiigi, an ugly beast appeared at that very moment when his parents had disappeared round the bend in the trail. He tried to shout so that they could

hear his screams and come back for him but they were out of earshot. They had gone quite far.

The ugly beast got hold of Kahiigi and put him in his bag.

“You must learn to obey your parents always,” it said. “You must also respect older people. You are only a boy but you are too stubborn for your own good. Someone has to teach you a lesson you will never forget.”

“What are you going to do with me?” Kahiigi asked fearfully.

“Of course I’m going to cook you and eat you for my lunch,” answered the beast.

“Please, don’t eat me!” Kahiigi begged. “I promise to be a good boy from today.”

“Too late!” the beast replied, closing the bag. “You should have thought of that before you got separated from your parents. In this world bad boys get eaten.”

Poor Kahiigi had no choice but to obey. The beast slung the bag on his back and started off on the journey to his lair. Every now and then, Kahiigi heard voices as the beast greeted his friends and stopped to chat with them.

“Ganga, what is that you are carrying on your back?”

“Nothing!” answered the beast.

“It seems heavy.”

“Aah!” replied the beast. “It’s only a snack for my lunch.”

“Is it another unfortunate boy you have grabbed?”

“Who can give me some millet flour?” asked the beast.

“Ganga wants some millet flour to eat with the boy for his lunch!”

“Is he going to eat the boy or to eat lunch with him?” a woman’s voice called out.

“I will give you some good music for your flour,” promised the beast.

“Music from your rumbling stomach, you mean!” said Kakazi.

There was a lot of laughter in which even the beast joined.

“I’m telling you, I can sing like nobody else in this village,” insisted the beast, throwing down his bag.

Kahiigi felt himself tumbling as the bag rolled.

“Then let’s hear you sing first before we can agree to give you anything!” said Kakazi.

The beast then hit his bag saying:

*Kishaho kyangye,*

*Kishaho kyangye,*

*Yeshongore akeshongoro karungi!*

*My bag,*

*My bag*

*Sing a good song!*

Kahiigi, inside the bag, tried to remember a song he could sing but his memory failed him. The beast repeated the command more gruffly:

*Kishaho kyangye*

*Kishaho kyangye*

*Yeshongore akeshongoro karungi!*

Kahiigi, knowing that he had to obey for a chance to save his life, decided to sing the story of his plight. He sang as follows:

*Niinye, neija,  
Nkaba nyine Taata na Maama  
Nshang'amayonza gayezire.  
Cwa, turye, tugyende  
Nayanga  
Nayang' okuhurira  
No'kugambirwa*

*It's me, I have come  
I was with my father and mother.  
When I found ripe berries  
Pick, let's eat and go  
I refused to listen  
I refused advice and counsel.*

The people there seemed impressed by the singing for they cheered.

“Your bag sings well!” a male voice said.

“It tells a good tale!” another added.

“I will give you millet bread boiled beans with ghee,” said Kakazi who had spoken earlier.

“How about a little *shabwe* as well?” replied the beast. “I promise I will share it with my bag.

There was more laughter as more people seemed to gather around. When Kakazi brought the food, the beast opened his bag and took Kahiigi out. The beast gave the

boy some of the food but Kahiigi could hardly bring himself to eat, thinking he was still in danger of ending up as part of the beast's next meal.

After they had eaten, the beast pushed the boy back in the bag and closed it again. Then the long walk started. Kahiigi felt himself tossed about all afternoon. When they finally stopped, the boy could hear people who seemed to be gathering their implements to get back home after their day's work. The insatiable beast was again asking for food in return for some nice music.

"What nice music?" asked someone in the crowd.

"My bag can sing like a bird!" the beast said confidently.

"Ganga's bag can sing!" the man called out and was greeted with laughter.

"Give the bag a chance!" a female voice appealed. "What do you want?"

"Food!" answered the beast. "I am famished and my bag could do with some ripe berries too."

"Ganga's bag eats ripe berries!" a man shouted.

"I bet it is another boy he has kidnapped!" another replied.

"He says his bag can sing, let's hear it sing!" said kakazi.

The beast put the bag down, this time more gently, saying:

*Kishaho kyangye*

*Kishaho kyangye*

*Yeshongore akeshongoro karungi!*

Kahiigi, who had had time to think of how he could juice up the song with another stanza to his advantage, did not need a kick to persuade him to get started. He knew that his survival depended on his obedience. So he sang like a bird, saying:

*Okuhurira  
Nimweg'okuhirira  
Bantwmwe  
Nimwegy'okuhirira  
Omwana akanga kuhurira  
Bwanyuma yeija yakareeba!  
Orukooko  
Rukaija rwamutwara  
Muhurire*

*Ngugwe nayetongyeza  
Niinye neija  
Nkaba nyine Taata na Maama  
Nshang'amayonza gayezire  
Cwa, turye, tugyende  
Nayanga  
Nayang'okuhirira  
No'kugambirwa*

*Obedience  
Learn to obey  
People of this world  
Learn to obey  
The child refused to obey  
The child was taken away and he suffered  
He was taken by the beast*

*Now listen, he is singing  
It's me, I have come  
I was with my father and mother  
When I found a tree heavy with ripe berries*

*Please pick and eat quickly and we continue  
I refused to listen  
I refused advice and counsel.*

The people listened and applauded. Kakazi brought boiled banana fingers and fresh peas for the beast who took Kahiigi out of the bag to share the meal with him.

The beast then moved to the next village and asked for the same favour with the same promise. The people refused to oblige before hearing the music first so the beast put his bag down and commanded it to sing.

*Kishaho kyangye  
Kishaho kyangye  
Yeshongore akeshongoro karungi!*

Kahiigi was now an expert at singing for his meal. He did not need to be asked a second time. So he sung the story of his plight with relish:

*Okuhurira  
Nimweg'okuhirira  
Bantwmwe  
Nimwegy'okuhirira  
Omwana akanga kuhurira  
Bwanyuma yeija yakareeba!  
Orukooko*

*Rukaija rwamutwara*  
*Muhurire*

*Ngugwe nayetongyeza*  
*Niinye neija*  
*Nkaba nyine Taata na Maama*  
*Nshang'amayonza gayezire*  
*Cwa, turye, tugyende*  
*Nayanga*  
*Nayang' okuhurira*  
*No'kugambirwa*

The listeners were touched. They gave the beast lots of boiled sweet potatoes and cow peas. But some of them kept wondering about the voice in the bag.

The next day, the beast went to another village and repeated his routine. The response was the same when he asked the bag to sing. But this time when Kahiigi sang his new song, the people kept very quiet. A woman, whose voice sounded like that of Kahiigi's mother, requested the beast to fetch for her some water in an old basket while she made his food ready. The beast unthinkingly bounded off to the well.

The people of the village, one of whom turned out to be Kahiigi's father, opened the bag to find the boy in it. He took his son out and put a stone of the same weight in his place.

Meanwhile, the beast, on failing to fetch the water with the old basket, came back grumbling its uselessness and claiming his food, which was given to him. He went

on his way, still grumbling about the time he had wasted in this village of idiots.

Kahiigi rejoined his family, and as they were celebrating, the beast came back to demand for his singing gadget. Unfortunately for the beast but fortunately for Kahiigi, the entire village had gathered with their spears, bows and arrows. They attacked the beast and when he was about to die, he said:

*Iwe borekire kunyita!*  
*Banz'oshar'akara kahera*  
*Noija kwihamu byon'ebinariire!*

*You wait before you kill me,*  
*Wait! Split up my little finger*  
*There you will find all I've ever eaten.*

They split his little finger and out walked men women, children, cows, goats, sheep, hens and all kinds of animals!

As the people marveled at what came out of the beast's little finger, I quietly moved away to tell my listeners what I had witnessed. I passed through my brother's millet field and it all turned to grass.

This is not the end of me but my tale is told.

## The Insatiable Monster

Once upon a time, when animals and people lived together and when all living things had a common language, there lived a loving couple. The man was called Bagambe (which means ‘let them speak’) and his wife was Banura (which means ‘they’re sweet’). They had five children.

One time, famine struck their village and some people starved to death. The family decided to move out of the village in search of food. As they roamed the countryside, going from village after village, they found hungry people everywhere.

Then they arrived at a big banana plantation with very ripe bananas. They stopped and knocked at the door of the house that stood in the middle of the plantation. No one was in the place. It was completely deserted.

Bagambe and Banura assumed ownership. He cut down some bananas and she started cooking. The children helped themselves to the ripe bananas which were plentiful. When the bananas were cooked, the family ate until they had satisfied their hunger.

It was then that the owner of the plantation – a very ugly monster – came roaring:

*Nooh’ogw’ory’omunju yangye?  
Nooh’owatem’ebitookye byangye?  
Nooh’owateek’omunyungu zangye?  
Nooh’owary’ebyokurya byangye?*

*Who is in my house?*

*Who has cut down my bananas?  
Who has used my cooking pots?  
Who has eaten my food?*

Bagambe and his wife started quaking. Their children held them by their loin cloths, made out of hides and skins) and started crying. The monster saw the family cowering in a corner and called the man.

“You, come here and answer me!” he screamed.

Bagambe came out of their ‘hiding place’ and faced the Monster, trembling. The beast spoke again, saying:

*Iwe n’abaana baawe mwayereeta omwangye  
Noija kuntekyer’abaawe boona  
Reeru bwanyima  
Oyeteekye  
Wahurira?*

*You and your kids have brought yourselves to my house.*

*You’ll cook your wife and kids till they are finished.*

*Then*

*You’ll cook yourself*

*Do you hear?*

Bagambe nodded to signify that he had understood. The monster went out and rested under the shade of a big mango tree.

When Bagambe told his wife and children how they would be killed and cooked to feed the insatiable monster, they trembled with fear. Then they scratched

their heads as they tried to work out a way out of their predicament.

One of the children suggested that they move around the house to see what the monster had been eating before they came. They discovered a store full of dead bodies! They got so frightened that the youngest child even fainted. However, they had no option but to consider using the bodies to feed the beast.

Later, the beast went away after telling Bagambe that his supper should be ready by the time he came back.

Bagambe and Banura did not waste any time. They got one of the dead bodies from the store and quickly prepared a meal for the monster. The man then hid one of his children in the upper branches of one of the largest trees in the plantation.

Life went on like that for the captive family. Whenever the monster wanted 'meat', the man would get one of the bodies and prepare it and then hide one of his children in one of the many trees in the plantation. Soon he had 'prepared' all his children as well as his wife. Now it was time for Bagambe to 'prepare' himself for the insatiable monster to feed on.

Fortunately, there was still one body in the store so Bagambe cooked it and left it at the monster's eating place. He too then climbed the tree where he had hidden his wife and all his children.

That day, the monster ate the last of the captive family and went to rest under his usual tree shade. When he was there, one of the children started urinating from

the branches where their father had hidden them. Another one even had a long call! The monster asked:

*Aga namatonto g'ekinyonyi ninga?  
Kaniganuuka nk'amazi?*

*Are these bird's droppings or what?  
But how come they smell like feaces?*

He then looked up the tree and, to his greatest surprise and shock, he saw the man and the family he had 'eaten' up in the last few days! He roared in anger. Then he rushed to the store to check his provisions only to find it empty. This infuriated him even more.

"You!" he screamed. "I will kill you all! You and your whole family! I will kill and eat you one by one until you are all dead and eaten!"

One of the children started crying.

"Please, don't kill us," he begged.

"You'll have to come up and eat us up here," Bagambe decided. "We're not coming down!"

"But I can't climb up the tree!" the monster protested.

"Too bad!" answered Bagambe. "We're not coming down."

"I will get an axe and cut down the tree," the monster threatened.

"A tree this size?" Bagambe replied. "It will take you at least a month to cut it down. By then you would have fainted with hunger since you also don't know how to cook."

“What shall I do!” moaned the stupid monster.

“I can pass a rope down to you,” suggested Bagambe, who had worked out a plan that he was now ready to carry out.

“A rope?” answered the monster. “What for? I want meat to eat, not a rope! I can’t eat a rope.”

“But you can tie it around your neck so that we can pull you up,” said Bagambe as he lowered the rope he had taken from the store earlier on.

“Alright,” agreed the monster, securely tying a knot round his own neck. “You can pull me up now.”

“Alright, hold on!” Bagambe called down as he and Banura pulled the heavy monster up the tree, helped by the older of their children.

It was not easy but they did not have to pull the monster all the way. He began to choke as soon as his feet were off the ground. They could have let him hang there until he died but Bagambe wanted to make sure that the monster did not escape. So they went on pulling the rope. When the monster was almost where the family was, they released the rope and let the monster fall down with such a bang that the whole village came to see what had happened!

However, the monster did not die instantly. Before he died, he asked to speak to Bagambe, who had now come down the tree and was ready to cut off the monster’s head:

*Iwe borekire kunyita!*

*Banz’oshar’akara kahera*

*Noija kwihamu byon’ebinariire!*

*You, before you kill me,  
First split my little finger  
You'll find all I have ever eaten.*

So Bagambe split open the monster's little finger and out came men, women, children, cows, goats and sheep and many other animals.

The whole village looked on in wonder and amazement.

When I saw that everybody was full of happiness, I went away. I passed through my neighbour's vegetable garden, which turned into weeds. I passed through my grandmother's bitter tomato garden and they became poisonous. Then I told my listeners that, this was not the end of me but the end of the tale.

## **Abandoned for a Second Wife**

Once upon a time, a happy couple lived in the village of Kagango. Katoroogo(which means born prematurely) and his wife Kabwera had two beloved children, a boy named Baritsigara (they will be the sole survivors) and a girl named Kahonaho (meaning survivor). Unfortunately, Kabwera died when the children were very young. Baritsigara was only seven years of age and Kahonaho had just turned five. Katoroogo tried hard to look after the children but his efforts were quite inadequate. So Katoroogo started looking for a woman to marry who would help him look after his two young children. Katoroogo's clansmen supported this since among the Banyankole, the responsibility of caring for children was relegated to women.

Eventually, Katoroogo spotted a suitable girl named Maganya. He was quite infatuated with her and said he would do anything to please her. The girl agreed to marry him on condition that he abandons his children.

In his state of obsession, Katoroogo had forgotten his initial aim of marrying again. He forgot about his children and all his thoughts were on Maganya who had stated quite bluntly that she was not willing to be a stepmother and that she did not want to find any child in Katoroogo's home. Katoroogo, now frantic, had to find a way to get rid of the obstacles.

Early one morning, Katoroogo told Baritsigara and Kahonaho to get ready for a journey. They were going to visit some relatives.

The children excitedly got ready hurriedly and with their father, set off for the long journey. They walked and walked until they got to the place where no one knew where they had come from or where they were going. The children were by then extremely tired. They asked their father to stop and take a rest. The father agreed. He said he wanted to help himself so he took cover in the bushes to heed to the call of nature.

The children rested, then played and enjoyed themselves until they lost track of time and event. Finally, remembering why they were there, the children called their father:

*Taata! Taata!  
Rahuka tugyende!*

*Father! Father!  
Hurry, let's go!*

A voice like their father's replied:  
*Kambanze nie!*

*Let me first defecate.*

The children were shocked by their father's crude response. It was not like their father to be so blunt. However, they went back to play for a while before calling their father again:

*Taata! Taata!  
Rahuka tugyende!*

The response again was:

*Kambanze nie!*

The children were now getting concerned. They looked at each other and wondered how long this call of nature was... They played a little more and again called out to their father:

*Taata! Taata!*

*Rahuka tugyende!*

A voice like their father's replied:

*Kambanze nie*

The children then decided to go and see what their father was doing. They went to the place where the voice was coming from. To their greatest consternation, there was only a heap of feces with a charm stuck right in the middle of it! All along they had been communicating with the charm!

The boy hit the charm with his stick and was disappointed that their father had abandoned them. The girl started crying and the boy, who had now assumed responsibility, consoled his distraught sister. Not knowing what else to do, they continued walking towards to an unknown destination. As they trudged on, they met and greeted Dog who was busy grazing his herd of cattle and who asked them:

*Imwe nshoberwa mwe!*

*Mbwenu nimuzah'omury'er'eihamba?*

*“You lonely children, where on earth are you going and who brought you to this deserted land.?”*

The children narrated their sad misadventure to the kind Dog who decided to take them to his home on condition that they worked for him. So they started living with Dog. Season after season went by. The girl would cook and tidy the home while the boy grazed the cattle. In that land there were many cattle rustlers but Dog used to chase them away using his charm! Hanging over the fireplace, the charm – when shaken a little – would cause the cattle to become violent and chase off the cattle rustlers.

Time went by and Dog grew old and started sensing death... He therefore called the two children by his bedside and taught them the secret of the charm that was effective in sending away thieves. He also told them that they could keep the cattle.

Shortly after, the kind Dog died. The children grieved their loss because Dog had really been like a father to them. They stayed in his home and looked after the cattle and whenever the cattle rustlers came, the children would shake the charm by the fireside which would cause the cattle to fight the rustlers off.

One day, the rustlers wanted to find out why it was impossible to capture these particular cows. So they sent a spy to the children in the form of a destitute old woman called Bishuba( which means lies).

When the old woman arrived, she begged the children to let her stay with them since she had nowhere to go and nobody to look after her.

The children, who had received the same favour from Dog, saw it fitting to “do unto others what you would have them do unto you”. They accepted and life went on as usual until the cattle rustlers came. The children did their trick and the cattle fought them off.

Meanwhile, the old woman had learnt the trick. One time, she secretly removed the charm from its place and when the rustlers came, the children shook the basket where the charm had been hidden but no miracle took place. The rustlers took away the cattle, killed Baritsigara and took Kahonaho and Bishuba.

When they reached their home, they locked Kahonaho in a room where there were bundles of harvested millet. Kahonaho was so devastated following the death of her brother that she never stopped crying! The stolen cows, sensing that something was wrong, moped endlessly.

One day, famine struck in the land of the rats. They moved from place to place in search of food until they came to the room where Kahonaho was. They found her crying and to their amazement and great joy, they saw the bundles of millet in her room. They pledged to give her whatever she wanted in return for a bundle of millet.

Kahonaho narrated her sad tale about how she lost her brother and she told the rats that she only wanted her brother back. The rats looked at each other and remembered that in their search for food, they had come across a body of a boy which they had shared! The chief rat called a meeting for all the rats and told them that they could only get millet if they produced the pieces of the dead boy they had greedily swallowed.

Each rat vomited out the piece of the boy's body it had eaten and the chief rat, which had magical hands, put the pieces together and made Baritsigara rise! Unfortunately, the smallest rat, which had eaten the heart, was not at the meeting. So he remained dead.

All the rats went looking for the little rat until finally they found him and brought him and demanded that he vomit out what he had eaten. The little rat refused at first but all the rats threatened to kill him. When he saw that he could not escape, he vomited Baritsigara's heart out!

Chief rat placed the heart in its place and the boy got up! He saw his sister and they embraced. Kahonaho's tears dried instantly, the cows stopped mooing and the rats took their millet away. The cattle rustlers who guessed that Baritsigara might have resurrected, ran away in fear of his wrath...

When I saw everybody in a festive mood, I left that place. I passed through my father's sugar cane garden and the sugar canes turned into papyrus reeds. I passed through my mother's egg plant garden and they became poisonous.

Then I came to say that this is the end of the tale but not the end of me!



*The Narrator moves away and his supernatural powers transform wherever he passes!*