



THREE CHEERS

FOR THE RIVER SCHOOL

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*For every child,
mild, wild or somewhere in between
I wish you what I wish me
The freedom to be.*

Also by Sabine Adeyinka

Jummy at the River School

Time to Shine at the River School



CHAPTER ONE KICK-OFF

It was that glorious time of year when the dusty harmattan was fading and the heat was settling in. It was also our first day back at our beloved River School. Several of us from different houses were packed into the Folawiyos' living room to watch the big football match: Nigeria versus Ghana.

'Wo, Jummy, move your coconut head, I cannot see,' said Rashidat bossily. I tilted my head to the right but then another girl complained. I turned round to make faces at them both.

'This your afro is getting out of hand,' Senior Ngozi chimed in and everyone laughed because

Senior Ngozi's afro was bigger than a tropical forest.

'Ehn! Ehn!' we all shouted as the Nigerian number ten headed fiercely towards the Ghanaian goal at top speed – dribbling past one player, tapping the ball through another player's legs and finally clipping the ball into the net.

We all ran wild. There were only a few seconds left of the match so there was no coming back from this. Nigeria had won. It was just a friendly but you would have thought we'd won the World Cup, the way we were carrying on. A Ghanaian girl in my form threw her sun hat on the floor in annoyance and Mrs Folawiyo, who was also from Ghana, grinned as she ushered us out on to her back lawn.

Kwame, her son, came out to join us, swinging his shirt in the air and kicking a red football in our direction. Flanky immediately tackled him. She was very good at most sports, and her black shiny bob danced as she tried to get the ball from him. But she was no match for his dribbling skills. It was up to Rashidat, who ran up to them, put one leg in between the boy's legs and retrieved the

ball. We started cheering as both Flanky and the boy chased after her without success.

Mrs Folawiyo came out with a blue cooler. ‘Kwame!’ she called. ‘Come and open all these drinks for the girls – and put your shirt back on!’

The taste of the cold soda was just what I needed. Even though the sun was already setting, the heat had no intention of backing down.

‘Ma, when are we going to see the new principal?’ I asked Mrs Folawiyo.

Everyone started muttering about it.

Our wonderful Princey would always greet us from outside her cottage when we arrived on the coach from Lagos. But today she was a no-show and Mrs Folawiyo had explained that Princey was not well and that a temporary principal had been appointed from another school. It had made me feel that something wouldn’t be quite right about the term. I just could not imagine Princey unwell.

‘I heard the temporary principal is still in charge of another school and that means she won’t have time for us,’ someone said.

‘I heard she owns three schools!’

Mrs Folawiyo quickly intervened. ‘Mrs Fasida

is her name. She will take the first whole-school assembly on Monday. Today she had to attend an important function held by the Girls Model Trust. They own many girls' schools and have sent Mrs Fasida to us.' Mrs Folawiyo was always very gracious so I couldn't tell if she approved.

'I miss Princey already. I was planning a special wave from my seat on the coach. I remember last term when I was a new girl, I was too shy to wave. I hope Princey is not ill for very long,' blurted Shalewa, the Form One girl in my room. She always tried to say several things at once as if she was afraid someone might interrupt her, and she still sucked her thumb occasionally. I looked at her fondly. I was in Form Two now and felt very protective of the younger girls.

'You know Mrs Ayodele would be here if she could. We are expecting her to make a full recovery and be back by next term.' Mrs Folawiyo was dressed uncharacteristically in casual black slacks and a yellow Ghana sports top with a black star in the centre. When she was in the classroom, she normally wore bright-coloured boubous or long flowing skirts.

‘So you don’t know for sure?’ Senior Ngozi asked.

I caught a moment of uncertainty in Mrs Folawiyo’s eyes and that scared me. I hoped with all my heart that Princey was not as ill as all that.

‘At least it is just the middle term. It’s the most relaxed term, with no exams, and we are in the capable hands of Mrs Fasida, so I’m sure there is nothing to worry about. Now, finish up your drinks and get ready for dinner. The bell will soon go.’ She smiled at us kindly, her big black curls cascading around her face.

Everyone began to down their drinks and then returned the bottles to the empty crate by the back door.

‘Thank you, Ma!’ we all chimed as Reverend Folawiyo popped his head out to greet us. He was always in his reverend’s collar, and some girls joked that he probably wore it under his pyjamas too.

‘Thank you, Reverend!’

‘Up Nigeria!’ He grinned at his wife cheekily.

‘Up Ghana!’ she added, making us laugh and cheer.

We made our way along the tarred road that went past Princey's cottage.

'Ooh! Looks like someone's home after all,' Flanky said.

The cottage lights were on and there were a few cars outside. We could see shadows of people moving around inside.

'Mrs Folawiyo said the new principal was at an important function, but it looks like a party to me,' I said.

'This will be a very different term at the River School, I think?' Shalewa looked to us for reassurance.

'It will be very different indeed!' Senior Ngozi said. We all shot her a worried look. 'Different doesn't have to mean bad,' she added.

I didn't know what she meant, but I had come to trust this girl who we now called Senior Ngozi because she was in her final year. She already had several scholarships lined up from many universities because she was so good at sports.

As we approached our large dining hall with its flopping metal rooftop, the thunderous sound of hundreds of girls reached our ears. I clasped my

hands together in excitement.

‘Grubido!’ Rashidat shouted above the noise.

‘Yup! Let’s go and show that beans and plantain who is boss!’ I grinned and everyone laughed. Flanky put her arm around me and I felt even happier when I saw Caro and Dongo in the distance. Right then, it didn’t seem to matter whether we had a principal or not. All we needed was each other.