

# Sample Reading / Leseprobe

## 1 Khiras Traum / Jungle Habits

### Deutsch

Im Bus meinte Khira mit zitternder Stimme: "Bis zu diesem Tag habe ich mich mit nichts komplizierteres als auf meinen nackten Füßen fortbewegt."

Das erstaunte Joyce. "Warst du denn noch nie in der Stadt, Khira?"

Die *Stadt* konnte nur Nairobi bedeuten. Khira hatte davon gehört und manchmal davon geträumt, dorthin zu kommen, aber sie war bis zum heutigen Nachmittag noch nicht mal in Kisumu gewesen. Doch Cousin Maurice – kurz Rees genannt –, der Sohn von Gideon, hatte ihr viel über Kisumu erzählt.

"Nein", erwiderte Khira. "Und du?"

"Selbstverständlich! Dutzende Male!", rief Joyce nachdrücklich. Jeder, der noch nie in der Stadt gewesen war, galt als *Mwafrika asili* – echter Afrikaner –, und diese echten Afrikaner waren "rückständig", nicht "modern und zivilisiert". Es gab nur wenige afrikanischen Kenianer, denen es nichts ausmachte, "echte Afrikaner" zu sein, und Joyce gehörte nicht dazu. Um zu zeigen, dass sie Welten entfernt war von echten Afrikanern, setzte sie hinzu: "Meine Eltern leben in Nairobi. Mein Vater ist Gewerkschafter. Die Gewerkschaften werden von Luos beherrscht. Weil Luos Denker sind, keine Bauern und Händler wie Kikuyus und Asiaten."

Was auch immer ein "Gewerkschafter" ist, dachte Khira. Muss einer dieser „Großen Männer“ sein, wie Großvater sie nennt.

Die Ältere erzählten ihr von St. Marys. Es gab zwölf Häuser in drei langen Blöcken. Der Block mit den Klassenzimmern, dem Labor, der Bibliothek, dem Nähzimmer, dem Speisesaal, der Küche und den Vorratsräumen lag südlich der Schlafräume. Der Speisesaal diente als Kapelle für die Morgenandacht und den Sonntagsgottesdienst. Dann gab es noch zwei riesige Baderäume aus Zement ohne Dach, den Block mit den Büros, sechs Lehrerhäuser und Miss Churchills Bungalow. Miss Churchill war die Direktorin. Zu sportlichen Betätigung standen zwei Tennisplätze, zwei Korbballplätze, zwei Volleyballplätze und ein Fußballplatz zur Verfügung.

"Ein Fußballplatz in einer Mädchenschule?", fragte Khira.

"Ja! Während des Sportunterrichts spielen wir manchmal aus Spaß Fußball. Sonst nützen wir den Platz zum Baseballspielen mit Miss Hite, die uns das Spiel beigebracht hat. Sie ist ein Kennedy Girl – vom Peace Corps, heißt das. Und wenn wir zwei Jungsschulen zu einem Spiel einladen, wird der Platz richtig genutzt. Oft dürfen wir hinterher mit den Jungs tanzen oder mit ihnen debattieren, während Miss Churchill und die anderen Lehrer uns im Auge behalten, damit wir nichts Ungebührliches tun, weißt du."

"Was ist was Ungebührliches, Joyce?" Khira stammte von echten Afrikanern ab.

Joyce beugte sich zu Khira, legte ihr die Hand um das Ohr und flüsterte heiser: "Zu eng zusammenzutanzeln und zu küssen und sich auf ungehörige Weise zu berühren." Joyce erklärte, dass Miss Churchill, die ihren Verlobten im Krieg verloren und sich danach der Missionstätigkeit in Afrika verschrieben hatte, die Mädchen ständig vor diesen "Ungebührlichkeiten" warnte.

Khira dachte an die Schläge, die Rebecca und Großmutter Salome erhalten hatte, und konnte sich dieses Ungebührliche jetzt ziemlich gut vorstellen. Sie nickte kurz.

Joyce fragte: "Hast du schon mal einen Jungen geküsst?"

Entsetzt rief Khira: "Große Ahnen, nein!" Vor ihrem inneren Auge sah sie all das Blut und die Wunden und Großvater, der noch wochenlang danach alles Weibliche auf seiner Farm wie ein wütender Löwe angeknurrt hatte.

"Ich schon", verkündete Joyce mit selbstgefälliger, überlegener Miene. "Sehr oft sogar."

"Große Ahnen, nein!", rief Khira erneut und zuckte erschrocken vor Joyce zurück. Am Ende war es vielleicht genau so schlimm, mit einem Mädchen zu reden, das einen Jungen

oder *gar* Jungs geküsst hatte, als ob man es selbst getan hätte? Und wenn Großvater das herausfand ...

Joyce amüsierte sich sowohl über Khiras Reaktion als auch über ihre Art zu sprechen. Die ist wirklich aus dem Dschungel, dachte sie bei sich. Sie, Joyce, war ein modernes Stadtmädchen, dessen Vater mit so prominenten Kenianer wie Ramogi Achieng' Oneko, Oginga Odinga, Thomas Joseph Mboya, Daniel arap Moi und Jomo Kenyatta verkehrte.

### English

On a Sunday afternoon in January, the brilliant sunshine made the ripples of Lake Victoria shimmer like jewels.

Khira found herself walking down the pier at Homa Bay, her suitcase in her hand and tears running down her face. She had cried throughout the entire journey by steamer since Mahma and Uncle Gideon waved her goodbye at the pier in Kisumu as the vast waters of Lake Victoria seemed to push the two beloved faces away from her while swallowing her up like a gargantuan monster into her vast expanse. It was the first time she had ever been separated from Mahma and the familiar people and surroundings at Grandfather Solomon's farm.

But Grandfather and Uncle Gideon had insisted that she be sent to the boarding school in South Nyanza, and Uncle Gideon would pay her school fees. Khira had passed her primary school examinations with flying colours and had been admitted to St Mary's Girls' High School, one of the best schools in Eastern Africa with pupils coming from as far away as the Rhodesias, Botswana, Malawi, Uganda and Tanganyika.

She had turned twelve the previous September.

Now she felt utterly miserable. Mahma had felt miserable too, yet she had had to do as her father and uncle directed and part with her only link to her Enos, she had tearfully said to Khira back at the farm. Khira now wiped her eyes with her handkerchief – a new possession and part of her school list of requirements as were the shoes she was wearing for the first time in her life. She was aware of Joyce walking in silence beside her, plus another thirty or forty chattering girl pupils from the steamer, also headed for St Mary's, walking from the pier to the bus that would drive them the six miles inland to where the school was built "on the slopes of a knoll", as Joyce had described it to Khira during the journey.

Joyce had approached Khira on the steamer and made friends. She was three years older than Khira, was going in as a Second Former and had therefore travelled back and forth on Lake Victoria a dozen times before.

In the bus, as it started moving, Khira quaked, "I've never before this day travelled by any means more sophisticated than my feet."

This surprised Joyce who asked in a voice as pretty as Joyce herself, "Haven't you ever been to the city, Khira?"

*The city* could only mean Nairobi. Khira had heard about it and sometimes she dreamed of going there, but she had never even been to Kisumu where Uncle Gideon worked in a hospital as a laboratory assistant, till this afternoon. But Cousin Maurice - Rees for short - who was Gideon's son, had told her a lot about Kisumu.

"No," replied Khira. "And you?"

"Of course! Dozens of times!" cried Joyce emphatically. Anybody who had never been to the city was categorised under *Mwafrika asili* – real African – and these real Africans were "backward", not "modern and civilised". There were very few African Kenyans who didn't mind being "real Africans" and Joyce wasn't one of them. She continued, to prove how many worlds apart she was from real Africans, "My parents live in Nairobi. My Dad is a Trade Unionist. The Trade Unions are dominated by Luos. Because Luos are thinkers, not farmers and salesmen like Kikuyus and Asians."

Whatever a "Trade Unionist" was, thought Khira. Must be one of those Big Men, as Grandfather calls them. Not knowing what to say, she smiled with a nod at Joyce.

The older girl embarked on telling her about St Mary's. There were twelve Houses in three long Blocks, one of the Houses in Block Two serving as the sanatorium. Then the classrooms' block, the laboratory, library, sewing-room, dining hall/ kitchen/Food Store blocks, were all situated to the south of the dormitories. The dining hall served as a chapel for morning prayers and Sunday Services when the weather did not permit these services being conducted in the Greek-modelled Amphitheatre under the eucalyptus trees. Then there were two enormous concrete bathrooms with no roofs, to the west of the dormitories, an office block a little removed from the school to the east, as were the six teachers' houses and Miss Churchill's bungalow which was perched on top of the knoll to the north-east. Miss Churchill was Headmistress. For games there were two tennis courts, two netball pitches, two volley-ball pitches and a football pitch.

"A football pitch in a girls' school?" asked Khira.

"Yes! At games' times we sometimes play football for a laugh – after all there are a hundred and twenty girls altogether. Other times we use it to play baseball with Miss Hite who taught us the game. She's a Kennedy Girl – a Peace Corps, that is. And when we invite two Boys' Schools for a match to entertain the girls, the pitch is put to proper use. Often we're also allowed to dance with the boys afterwards or have a debate, while Miss Churchill and the other teachers keep an eye on us in case we do something naughty, you know?"

"What something naughty, Joyce?" Khira came from real Africans.

Joyce leaned towards Khira, cupped her hands around an ear and whispered hoarsely, "Like dancing too closely together and kissing and touching each other up in an improper manner. We're told it bothers the boys and the girls may lose their heads and get into trouble and be discharged from school." Joyce explained that Miss Churchill, who had lost her affianced in The War and had thereafter devoted herself to missionary work in Africa, was the one who constantly warned the girls about this "naughtiness".

Khira, remembering the beating of Rebecca and Grandmother Salome, now had a pretty good idea of the something naughty. Again she nodded briefly.

Joyce asked, "Have you ever kissed a boy?"

Khira cried out horrified, "Great ancestors, no!" She saw in her mind all the blood and the wounds and Grandfather growling like an angry lion for weeks afterwards to anything female in his compound.

"I have," from Joyce in a smug, superior manner. "Many times, actually."

"Great ancestors, no!" Khira cried out again, shrinking away from Joyce with horror. Who knows whether talking to a girl who had kissed a boy or boys was as bad as doing it yourself? And if Grandfather found out...

Joyce was amused by both Khira's reactions and manner of speech. She thought to herself, This one is from the jungle indeed. She, Joyce, was a modern city girl whose father rubbed shoulders with such prominent Kenyans as Ramogi Achieng' Oneko, Oginga Odinga, Thomas Joseph Mboya, Daniel arap Moi and Jomo Kenyatta.