

M.G. HIGGINS

# REBEL



MATH

GEOGRAPHY

# WHITE LIGHTNING BOOKS®

BEHIND THE MASK

BREAK AND ENTER

EMOJI OF DOOM

GRAND SLAM

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ON THE RUN

QWIK CUTTER

QWIK CUTTER 2:

AUGMENTED REALITY

REBEL

SCRATCH N' SNITCH

SUMMER CAMP

THE UNDERDOGS

UNDER THE STAIRS



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## CHAPTER 1

# TO SEE THE WORLD

Dear Patrick,

Thank you for your letter. Your family and home in America sound very nice. I would like to visit your country one day. I would especially like to see Disneyland. And I would like to meet Mickey Mouse.

You asked me to describe my home and myself. I live in a small village in Africa. It is the dry season now. It is very dusty. In a few months the rains will come. Then the

ground will turn muddy. The grass will grow. I don't like mud. But we need the grass for our cattle.

I have a mother and father. I also have three younger sisters. I have many aunts, uncles, and cousins. Two of my grandparents live in our village. Our house is round. Our roof is made of reeds. The school is square. It has a blue metal roof. It is loud when the rain falls.

My best friend is Jojo. We play soccer. Only we call it football. Do you like football? I like it. I would play it all day long if I could. But I like school too. I like learning about the world. My favorite subject is geography. I want to become a teacher one day.

I am looking forward to being your pen pal.

Sincerely,  
Koji

I set my pencil down. Most of my classmates are still writing. Including Jojo. Maybe I should write more. But I read over my letter. Decide it's enough. I hope Patrick writes back. I want to learn more about his life halfway around the world. I pick up my pencil again. Write a note at the bottom of the page.

*Please tell me more about your life in America.*

There. Now it's enough.

"Time to finish," Mr. Wek says.

Pencils hit the desks.

"Put your letters in the envelopes you addressed," he says. "Pass them to me. I will see that they get mailed."

I watch my letter. It goes hand over hand to the front of the classroom. The beginning of its long journey. I wonder how it will travel. By plane? By boat? I wish I could travel with it.

"Get out your math books," Mr. Wek says.

A few students groan. Jojo too. They don't like math. I don't mind it. I'm going to be a teacher. So I will need to know many things.

It's the end of the day. I'm restless. Want to go outside. But I try to sit still. Don't want a scolding from Mr. Wek. Finally he says, "History exam tomorrow. You may go."

Jojo and I are the first out of our seats. "Race you home," he says.

The village is a mile north. We run the whole way. I sprint at the end. But he still beats me.

"Hah! I won!" he shouts. He throws his hands in the air. Like he's a big champion.

"I'll beat you one of these days," I tell him.

"No you won't," he says. "My legs will always be longer than yours."

"Maybe. But I'm a better footballer."

He laughs. "You are not."

"Am so." I run to our hut. Grab my football. But I don't leave quickly enough.

"Koji!" my mother says. "Change out of your

uniform. And put down that ball. I need you to fetch water.”

I groan. “Why can’t Onaya do it?”

“Because she’s helping me cook. Go on.”

I quickly change out of my yellow uniform. I grab the plastic water jug. Carry it outside.

Jojo is playing football with his brothers. I sneak up behind him. Steal the ball out from under his foot. “Hey!” he shouts.

“See?” I laugh. “I told you I’m better!”

I play with them for a few minutes. I’m still holding the water jug. I’m tempted to set it down. And really play. But I need to get going or Mama will be angry.

The pump is at the other end of the village. I pass the village leader’s hut. He sits outside. A number of men sit around him. My father’s there. I’m surprised to see Papa here. He’s usually out with our cattle.

I leave the path. Step closer to them. One man points south. Another points west. They speak in

hushed and hurried voices. The one word I hear  
sends a chill through me. “Soldiers.”

Papa spies me. Shoos me away.





## CHAPTER 2

# KIDNAPPED

Dinner is quiet that evening. Lines of worry crease Papa's brow. We are all tense. Except for my one-year-old sister. We eat little. Something is wrong. We wait for him to tell us.

“What's going on?” my mother finally asks.

Papa chews slowly. Like he's deciding what to say. “Several of us have seen rebel soldiers while herding. Gamba spied a camp with thirty soldiers.”

The icy chill returns to my skin. “What do they want?” I ask.

“Nothing good,” he says.

“Tsk,” Mama scolds. “You’re frightening us.”

He nods. “Don’t worry. They are probably just passing through. On their way to someplace else.”

I try to study for my history exam before bed. But I keep thinking about my father’s news. There is a civil war in my country. Rebel soldiers fight against government soldiers. We are just a small village. Not close to any city. The war has not come to us yet. We only hear about it through relatives who live in other places. And from health workers who visit our village. The stories they tell are terrifying. Villages burned. People tortured and killed.

I pray when I go to bed. Go away, soldiers. Do not come here.



I walk with Jojo to school the next day. He also heard about the rebel camp from his father. “We have nothing here that they want,” he says. “That’s what Papa told us. He said not to worry.”

“My father said the same thing,” I say.

“Do you believe him?”

I think about it. Papa seemed worried. Even though he told us not to be. “I’m not sure.”

I’m suddenly wary of our surroundings. I think I see someone hiding behind a bush. But it is only an antelope. It walks out and runs through the brush. We get to school. Play football in the central yard, like always. But we don’t yell or laugh. We whisper about the rebels. We glance around. We slink inside the classroom before the bell rings.

Mr. Wek is the same as ever. He’s confident and no-nonsense. Is that because he hasn’t heard about the soldiers? Or because he thinks there’s no danger? Either way, his calmness helps to calm me. I pay attention to his lessons.

It’s late morning. Mr. Wek says, “Time for your history exam. Clear your desks except for a pencil.”

I hope I remember enough from his lectures. I did very little studying last night.

The door slams open. Five men burst into the classroom. Point large rifles at us. They are wearing camouflage uniforms.

A boy screams. Another whimpers.

My heart stops.

“All of you stand up!” the tallest soldier barks. He has an ugly scar. It runs across his face. From his forehead, across one eye, down to his chin.

“W-what are you doing here?” Mr. Wek stammers. “What do you want?”

Another soldier moves toward Mr. Wek. He’s just a boy. Not much older than me. The fury in his eyes takes my breath away. He bashes the butt of his rifle into our teacher’s face. Mr. Wek falls to the floor.

I gasp.

“Stand!” the scar-faced soldier shouts at us. “Now!”

We do as he says. I glance at Jojo. His eyes are wide. Terrified. He doesn’t look back at me.

“Leave the room in single file,” Scarface commands.