

**EXCERPT FROM THE SHORT STORY  
THE RICH PEOPLE’S SCHOOL  
BY LAURI KUBUITSILE**

**Note:**

*Sylvia lives with her grandmother because her mother is married to an American whom she followed from Africa to the USA. She sends money to pay for Sylvia’s education at an expensive school. Instead of going to school, Sylvia spends her time daydreaming by the river.*

[...] The children in Sylvia’s class were small like her, but she knew none of them. Some were black, some were brown and some were white. Sylvia had never seen white children before and spent a lot of the morning sneaking shy looks at them.

5           When teatime came, Sylvia followed the other children to the tables under the shades near the playground. She opened the tumbler that her Gran had packed in her new school bag. Inside was the left-over *paleche* and spinach from the night before. Her stomach growled when she saw it and she began eating straight away, not noticing that children were  
10 gathering around her.

          A girl with long braids from the hair salon plaited into her hair said, “Look at what she eats!”

          Children stood with their tinned sodas and chips in packets from the shops and laughed. Sylvia, not knowing enough English, understood  
15 nothing of what they were saying but became scared as they gathered around her, more and more of them. She stopped eating and looked down at the table hoping that they would leave her alone. Suddenly a boy rushed forward and grabbed her tumbler, the one her Gran had bought new for school, and ran away with it, throwing the *paleche* and spinach on  
20 the green lawn along the way. Sylvia tried to catch him but he was big and fast. She shouted, “Stop!” but he didn’t. A bell rang and the boy dropped the tumbler and stamped hart on it smiling all of the while. When he ran past Sylvia he said, “Go home Poor Girl!”

          Sylvia picked up the pieces of the tumbler and walked out of the  
25 school gate. She waited at the end of the road until her Gran arrived. She lied to her Gran, telling her that the teacher said that they mustn’t bring food any more to school, that the tumbler would stay there and the teacher would fill it with food instead. “That’s very kind of them,”

30 Sylvia's Gran said, relieved that all had gone well. Sylvia smiled up at her, agreeing.

That was Sylvia's last day at the rich people's school. Still, every morning her Gran would drop her at the end of the road and pick her up every afternoon at the same place. Sylvia would be full of stories about school and her friends there. At night around the fire where they cooked,  
35 her Gran would talk about how one day Sylvia would be clever and rich and they would fly together in an airplane to see Sylvia's mother.

"Your mother did the right thing, Sylvia. You shouldn't think she didn't. We will go and fetch her when you are rich from learning everything at the rich people's school." Her Gran would smile and take  
40 Sylvia into her soft jellied arms and hold her tight. Sylvia would be almost happy save for the part that knew lying was wrong and that now maybe because she wasn't going to the rich people's school they would never get her mother back.

Sylvia woke up from her sleepy dram, looked at the sun and realized  
45 that she was late. [...]

Sylvia panicked – how would she get home? She didn't know the way well enough through the thin winding lanes in the village. Just as tears began falling down her face, she saw her Gran coming towards her from the direction of the school. When she saw Sylvia, she began to run.

50 "Where have you been? I thought now they have taken you too and I would be an old woman all alone," she said, grabbing up Sylvia in her arms, holding her tight until Sylvia thought she wouldn't breathe another breath. Then her Gran set her firmly on the ground, holding her out and putting an angry face on hers where it didn't really belong. "Why have  
55 you not been going to the rich people's school?"

Sylvia didn't know what to say. She didn't want her Gran to cry when she found out that they might never be able to go and fetch Sylvia's mother in America just because she was frightened of the rich children. "I don't like it there," she said in a soft voice.

60 Her Gran pulled the big roll of money from her coat pocket and held it out for Sylvia to see. "Never mind. You will go to school near our house. Maybe you'll be a teacher, they are rich too, Sylvia. Do you know that?" Sylvia nodded. "We will not tell your mother. When the school money is enough we will send it back to her and she will come home to us." [...]

*Source:*

Kubuitsile, Lauri: *The Rich People's School*. In: Chris Brazier (ed). *One World*. Oxford: New Internationalist, 2009, 49-51.

**Annotations:**

- l. 6 tumbler – *here*: lunch box
- l. 7 paleche – corn meal cooked in milk or water
- l. 22 all of the while – *colloquial*: all the time
- l. 41 save for – except for
- l. 50 they have taken you too – allusion to Sylvia's mother,  
who left her home to live with her husband in the USA