

Squalor to Scholar

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For Oscar Mwangi Waiyego, the smart young man in academic gown and mortar board, it has been not so much a story of rags to riches, but rather of squalor to scholar. Oscar was born twenty-nine years ago in Kayole slum in Nairobi, the first-born

of five. He was not to wait long to meet tragedy: while still in primary school, one of his brothers died, to be followed shortly by his mother. The children were then taken in by their grand-parents, who were living in even worse conditions in Mukuru Sinai where a never-ending smell of burning rubbish and the acrid tang of human waste permeate the atmosphere. His grand-father was working as a casual labourer in the city's industrial area nearby and was the family's only source of income.

When both grandparents died within months, Oscar – who was doing his first year in Galaxy Secondary School, a community school in the slum – had no option but to look for work, and suspend studies for the time being. He found work in a butchery and raised enough money to help support his younger brothers and pay his school fees. After a year, at the end of Form Two, he was on

the street again; the money he had earned had run out. Here Moses enters the scene. Thanks to the network of acquaintances, the sharing of news -both good and not so good, and the spirit of solidarity in the community, a friend of Oscar's mother approached Moses to ask if he could help.

Gitugu, some eighty miles north of Nairobi, is where Moses' mother lives. Already, on her plot of land, she was supporting five orphans and, together with Moses, helping them through the local secondary school. One more would make little difference. And here Oscar's luck changed and his life took a new direction. He entered Form Three and, by dint of hard work and determination, completed his Form Four, with an A minus in the national exams, and was admitted to Strathmore University, with a bursary covering 90 per cent of the

fees. He completed his professional accountancy exams (CPA) and received a B. Com degree in this year's graduation ceremony. At present he is working in a SACCO, a small community co-operative, on the way to fulfilling his dream of becoming an accountant and helping his younger brothers complete their education too.

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