



Katherine Hope, a true lover of nature who cherished every moment outdoors. Here she is taking in a view from a mountain peak and right spending time with Santrina Kemihendo and Aisha Nakyanzi. PHOTOS/COURTESY.



# The Hope of Mirama Hills, stolen by a bullet

Why does a woman die for doing her job? Why does a man with a gun get to decide who lives and who dies over TikTok? Why do we keep holding funerals for people who should be at weddings?

BY CAROL ATANGAZA

Katherine Hope Abwooli, was shot and killed last week. She was 37 years old. She died because she asked a man with a gun to follow the rules.

That is not the kind of thing usually printed in this section. Usually we say someone passed peacefully, or after a long illness, or surrounded by family. Hope was surrounded by her family only after she was gone. When she died, she was at work, doing her job, being the person she always was.

Hope came from a place called Nyabikungu Village, in Rwampara District. It is the kind of place you see in paintings. Green hills, quiet air. A cross mounted

## UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Her friends came from everywhere, school, work and former employers who had become her friends. Aisha Nakyanzi, who met her at KIU in Ishaka, could not accept the speeches about completed missions. She stood there fighting hard not to let grief overwhelm her and said, "We should not be here to send her off. We should be here celebrating her kushingira." She was right. We should have been at a party, not a grave.

on a hill overlooking her family home where the community goes to pray. It is the kind of place where people still believe that if you do right, right will come back to you. That belief ran through her like a river.

She was raised by a single mother, Mary Rafeete Tinka. From her, Hope learnt that if you see a problem, you fix it, you do not wait or hope someone else handles it. That lesson stayed with her.

At 37, she had finally found her calling. She was two years into a job she loved. Her friend Jackie Chekwech remembers Hope calling her, excited, saying this was what she wanted to do for the rest of her life. There is something almost heartbreaking about that statement, the confidence of it, the assumption that she had more life left. Ordinarily, at 37, she should have had decades left, but fate intervened.

## Hope had plans.

Those plans included people most of us forget about. She was organising friends and family to donate money for menstrual products and underwear for female inmates. Women in prison, locked away, and Hope was thinking about their dignity. That tells you everything about her. Maybe it was her upbringing, the kind that demands a strict balance all the time. Maybe it was the Catholic strain in her. Maybe it was an inheritance of fierce convictions, from a good respectable family, good schooling, good brain or all that, but Hope had buckets of passion and restraint, in equal portions.

She had a laugh people remember. The local chairperson said you knew Hope was around because you could hear her. She listened to people. She had patience. She answered questions carefully, trying to actually help. The village lost one of its best, he said.

## He was right.

She was engaged to be married. She and her fiancé were finally ready to visit her family for the traditional ceremony.

Katherine Hope Abwooli, was shot and killed last week.

emonies (kwanjura), which never happened. At her funeral, her fiancé passed out twice. Once at night. Once while trying to speak about her. Grief like that cannot be aptly described by words.

By this point we are all aware of what happened. Reports say she found a prison officer, using his phone where he was not supposed to. She told him to stop. She insisted. She was doing her job. She was following the rules. And for that, he shot her. Once in the arm and once in the chest. The bullet tore through a vein, and blood began to flood her heart.

## She was not ready to die.

You could tell by looking at her. Santrina Kemihendo, her friend, said she looked as if she was sleeping. Her face was still beautiful, devoid of any marks or damage, just peaceful. The kind of peace that should have come from a long life, not a bullet.

At her funeral, the speakers tried to make sense of it. Rev Fr Cyril Mujuni prayed for comfort. The local Woman MP elect Anne Kansiime, said we do not choose when we come into the world, so we should not question when we leave. She said Hope had completed her mission. We say things like that to comfort ourselves. To make sense of the inexplicable. But Hope had a fiancé and had a job she finally loved. That does not sound as an ending but rather a beginning.

Her mother, Mary, stood up and thanked God for her daughter's life. She thanked everyone for their love. She forgave the man who killed her daughter. If you want to know where Hope got her strength, look there. That woman leaned on her Christian beliefs and forgave the unforgivable. I do not know if I could do that. I do not know if most of us could.

But then the Assistant Commissioner General of Prisons, ACP John Bosor Tumwebaze, stood up. He praised Hope's work. He called her a rising star. And then he looked at that forgiving mother and said something worth remembering. I said, "Your forgiveness is between you and your God. But as law enforcer, I assure you that the prison officer will be hunted down and brought to face the extent of the law. He must pay for what he did."

Finally. Someone speaking truth. Forgiveness is beautiful. But justice matters too.

## At the end, they gave her a gun salute.

Guns firing into the air above the hills. A violent sound for a violent end. And then silence. That terrible silence that means it is over. Her friends, Allison, Wilber, Sandra, Anita, Kerech, and ASP Jeremiah Etier her sisters. They would not let her rule-following friend die alone in the concrete.

Katherine Hope survived by her mother, Mary Rafeete Tinka. By her fiancé. By the way she will carry her laurels for the rest of the village that will always have an empty space where she used to be. She is also survived by a question we should not lose. Why does a woman die for her job? Why does a man with a gun get to decide who lives and who dies over TikTok? Why do we keep holding funerals for people who should be at weddings? She was 37 only years old. She followed the rules. Always.

Do not tell me it was justice. Justice will come. That left that makes any sense.

