

# The UglyBeautiful Tale of a Stupid, Stupid Heart

When Mother Hen Eats her Grownup Chicks

"All bad precedents begin as justifiable measures."  
— *Julius Caesar*

**By**

**Levi Cheruo Cheptora**

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## Note from the Writer

As any other typical Creative Non-Fiction piece of literature, this book may be set in known places in contemporary Kenya, betrays times, seasons perhaps already well known to the reader (s), and even does portray persons baring familiar names, yet it will be worthwhile to note that it is inherently a byproduct of a carefully weaved work of creativity.

Therefore, it is understandable that a majority of characters depicted herein are Homo-Fictus (Fictus from fiction), and not necessarily Homo sapiens! It is unavoidable to mention names such as those of political figureheads like Fred Chesebe Kapondi, John Bomet Serut, Wilberforce Kisiero, Joseph Kimkung, Daniel Moss, Kibaki, Kenyatta, Moi, Raila etc. as part of the history and existing government institutions. The underlying challenges faced by the characters herein are disturbingly real, serious and in need of urgent solutions from the powers that be.

*Levi Cheruo Cheptora*  
*Nairobi, Kenya, 2016*

## Dedication

For all the victims of the 2007/2008 Post Election Violence, the Sabaot Land Defense Force, and the Moorland Defense Force (2004-2008) purge.... consider this a lifetime amplifier for your suppressed voices, deferred dreams of embracing justice, and a rejuvenation of your unending hopes of a brighter day for your children!

For the undying shadow of the Late Isabel Kiminyei Nang'uni; once a true friend, a soul mate, a source of my happiness, who despite my folly, sheer ignorance and tainted name, gave her all and loved me unconditionally beyond her grave...May her soul rest in eternal peace!

For the late David Naibei Silas Cheruo; a Father I will never know!

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Mzee Moses Kaptunwo Cheptora, Rael Chemosong Cheptora Silas Naibei Cheruo...for teaching me about our community's history, its rich culture, customs and beliefs.

## Prologue

The UglyBeautiful Tale of a Stupid, Stupid Heart is a riveting tale of a blind, carefree, yet kindest of the hearts that will amuse and anger, tickle, and unfortunately make you shed a tear! Set in Mount Elgon, Western Kenya, the book tells a story of two neighboring families (that of Joram and that of Sikowo) hailing from the Bok, who happens to be the majority, and the Ndorobo, apparently a persecuted minority, respectively. At the core of their perennially paradoxical relationship, is the ever- emotive issue in our modern-day Kenya: land.

This is not a love story; neither is it a story about love... The UglyBeautiful Tale of a Stupid, Stupid Heart is a story, fictitious and real yet imaginatively recounted and recreated anew, about living a lie, a day at a time until death suddenly, fiercely shuts its dark door of mercy, and tramples one upon the vast emptiness. This is especially the case when David and Wairimu, apparently engaged in a forbidden passion, unfortunately finds themselves in the unforgivable, cruel and menacing jaws of death in Runyenjes thanks to a bloodthirsty mob that is on a killing spree and eager to avenge the deaths of their fellow tribesmen butchered earlier in Rift Valley, Kisumu and the Coast.

David is a dynamic character whose emotions, attitudes, and temperaments are unfathomable. After betraying his childhood sweetheart, Chebet, and subsequently abandoning her in her most needy hour to face an accusing world after an unexpected pregnancy all by herself, he discreetly falls in love with Wairimu. Wairimu is an exceedingly beautiful, gorgeous, exquisite, marvelous and amazing young woman whose irresistible charms, wit and affection takes his life to places unknown...and finally, to his grave!

The book explains how successive regimes helped plant a seed of animosity between the two Sabaot sub tribes, watered it, and pruned its branches until its fruition stage. After decades of blatant indecisiveness, Sabaot Land Defense Force was born. The bloodthirsty militia will eventually set up a parallel government and

fronted a leader of its choosing who won the Mount Elgon constituency parliamentary seat with a landslide in the contested

2007 Kenyan General Elections. The book also wittingly revisits the 2007/2008 Post Election Violence, why it all had to happen, why it might happen yet again and implicitly offers a pathway that might save Kenyans from an imminent recurrence. Most important, in detail, it explains the recipes that often give birth to militias in modern-day Kenya whose illegitimate tact of trying to solve a legitimate issue is rarely refreshing (as was the case with Sabaot Land Defense Force).

More so, the book gives you an ideal picture of how it was living through those turbulent moments when Kenyans maimed, beheaded, evicted, forcibly circumcised, robbed, raped, and shattered lives of fellow Kenyans. It is a necessary retreat to ‘that’ ugly past that we would have loved to forget as soon as last year...that past that is indeed a dark chapter in our history as a country that we must draw meaningful lessons from. We must thus make it our default duty reminding our seemingly ever-self-centered, crafty, and unpredictable leaders that never again should they take us back there. The UglyBeautiful Tale of a Stupid, Stupid Heart is a unique, nostalgic, and candid manifestation of our everyday struggles, challenges, and hurdles in life with self and others. Many a time, such hurdles are direct consequences of personal decisions resulting from the usual interactions and the seemingly never-ending complex relationships with our friends, relatives, neighbors and the ruling elite in our society. To a great extent, it is an exhibition of our societal failures, its collective reprimands against Mother Nature that are yet to yield anything meaningful; its vague disenchantments and many a disillusion that characterizes every heartbroken man or woman, each and every single miserable home, every poor neighborhood and every hopeless family in our beloved country, Kenya.

## Yes! I Shall Try

As we shall be taking the oath, we shall wear no rings,  
We will say not, "That yes we do!" Rather, "We shall try!"

There will be no priest, no clergyman, neither Best-maid, nor  
Best-man...it would be behind closed doors,  
Witnessed by the gay smile of the empty house,  
Cheered on by the euphoric chairs, merry tables....

We will not drink to it, we will wear not white robes,  
And after someday, we will move away from here,  
To a safer zone in the dystopia: Where free-thinking is  
prohibited, where virtue is vilified, vice exalted,  
Where thieves get elected, honest men are hanged;  
I am ready...are you, sweetheart?

## Chapter 1

“When suffering knocks at your door and you say there is no seat for him, he tells you not to worry because he has brought his own stool!”

—*Chinua Achebe*

Joram watched her small eyes closely. Spaced evenly apart, her dark and small eyes sat below trim eyebrows. They had been the indisputable hallmark of her once skin-deep beauty. He saw beyond their agony...and for the very first time, he realized the warmth in there had died down considerably. They were beautiful eyes, kind with an unassuming smile that had given him hope and peace all their married years. The laughter that had resided there for years on end had gone...for good, or so it seemed.

She had been his lifetime companion; his partner in the many secret crimes they had obligingly committed together. He was a miserly man without enough valuables who relied heavily on a tiny piece of land for their ultimate survival. Their marriage had not been that much contentious. Occasionally, she would attack him if she detested what he had done yet he would always ignore her persecuting venom, and do nothing in return.

Orphaned at his prime age, he hardly had any major plans for his life and was seemingly ever prepared to take what fate brought his way. She had overtaken him gradually to be the man in their humble home. She had always stepped in whenever his indecisiveness threatened to choke their lives. He had loved her and no matter what she did to awake the demons within his troubled soul, he never gathered enough courage to hit her back. He knew always that if you cannot resolve your problems in peace, you could not solve them with war.

That she was this much crippled and on the brink of her inevitably gruesome and painful death, was too much to bear. Teng'an knew that sticks in a bundle are unbreakable. Living like two ants, they never failed to pull a grasshopper! She also knew that a single bracelet does not jingle; that a single stick may smoke but could never burn.... she knew that if she ever wanted to go quickly, she will set off alone, but if she ever wanted to go far, it had to be with him.

Unlike him, many a times, her wife proved that unshared joy is unlighted candle. She understood that rules must never substitute character. She knew too well that the best place to find a helping hand is at the end of your own arm. Like Horace Greely, the 19th century American Journalist and Educator, her wife understood that fame is a vapor, popularity an accident, riches take wing, and only character endures. She was everything a man needs in a woman!

Why now? Could it not wait a little bit longer?

Repeatedly, under his breath, he cursed whoever was behind his wife's strange illness. Nevertheless, he was always aware that anger, no matter how hot it is, could never cook yam! He had lived an honest life. He had labored and refrained from reaping from where he never sowed. His long dead parents had never troubled him in his sleep. He had given them a proper sent off. He had even named his son after Ndiema, his late father. Why could they abandon him at such an hour of need? Why were they so indifferent to his suffering?

His tiny hut that overlooked others in Sasuri had since graduated into a crucial source of wild rumors to exceedingly curious villagers. With exaggerated haste and annoying stubbornness, the rumor travelled everywhere. As days staggered away without her condition showing any tangible signs of improvement, he feared his two young children might have heard the horrific and intentionally contorted contents of that lone traveler.

Fourteen days and nights, he had been alternating between the fireplace and the black and white spotted animal skin that acted as her bed. Using his trademark walking stick, he would every now and then pork the fire sandwiched among three buried stones to rekindle the dying embers. Fourteen days and nights, he too had not eaten a thing. He had stayed wide-awake throughout like a mad person, and such eccentric vigil had worried many.

The deep wound in her left breast had eaten its way to her bare back and an army of flies had pitched a permanent tent on either side of her bed. Joram had struggled relentlessly to frighten them away yet they persisted and kept buzzing arrogantly. The unmistakable stench from the fresh wound was unbearable for the visitors who made impromptu stops to say their sorry and wished the two good luck.

After a few hasty minutes of greetings, they would hurriedly make for the ever wide opened door and waddle away while being pursued by a hungry army of huge flies. He could tell from the creases in their foreheads that they were overawed. He understood their feelings and tried hard to ignore each one of them.

The tiny lump on her left breast had not raised her eyebrows. However, when it had started rapidly increasing in size, her worries had mounted. Then she had started experiencing intense shortness of breath. Three months down the line, her condition had worsened.

The coughing would last for hours on end and the bloating had been persistent. After relieving herself on the thick bushes, she always felt as if she had not emptied her bowels fully. She noticed blood strains on both her stool and urine. When she started losing weight and the ugly lump had started eating the adjacent flesh on her breast, Joram decided to act.

Teng'an had been sleeping on that bed for two whole weeks: without turning, without eating and her eyes were almost popping out. He watched her as the mysterious illness reduced her literally into a bag of bones...without helping, without the power of doing anything. His enemies had struck again, and the witchdoctor had sounded the bells. He watched with horror as the witchdoctor struggled with abating effort to cure her wife of many years.

“It must have been someone with stronger powers than mine...there is always someone much better; we must now leave her to fight for her own life”, he said, his voice shaking, for his great name was now literally on line. After a long pause, he continued, “If I were you, I will consider leaving this place...Advice is a stranger; if he’s welcome he stays for the night; if not, he leaves the same day!”

“No matter how far an eagle flies up the sky, it will definitely come down to look for food!” He bluntly retorted.

Joram was no fool. He knew too well that however much the buttocks are in a hurry, they will always remain behind...He also knew that however hard he tried; he would never get another lip to cover the long tooth the medicine man wanted him to grow!

Medicine men and witchdoctors were still powerful, and their services constantly sought, though their powers had been diminishing at an alarming rate. Truth was he had not seen such thing before throughout his career that had been quite a success.

People had come all the way from Toroso in Uganda to seek his services, and they had left contented, happy and with promises to come back again.

“You mean there is nothing you can do to save her life?” Joram could not bear it. Tears were welling in his eyes, but he reminded himself he was a man, and real men do not wail like women! The witchdoctor shook his head up and down slowly like a lizard to imply it was just impossible and left.

For fourteen nights and days, they had been inseparable, engulfed together in a mysterious cloud that promised a great deal of nothing! The unfriendly and ominous silence held them firmly.

Inside, he cursed and hoped. In silence, friends, relatives, and neighbors came and went. In silence, he sobbed, prayed, and hoped. Every minute, every hour it was a fight to assemble valour. Horror could not just elude his whole being.

You need not to worry. Everything will be all right! However long the night, dawn will break! After a storm...

He was tired with the chorus. He knew too well that if anything can go wrong, it will.... Such words were an apple-pie without some cheese which is no better than a kiss without a squeeze! Nothing was all right, and he doubted if anything was ever going to be all right. He was tired with the waiting...waiting for her wife to die, waiting for a miracle to cure her strange illness.

He turned her body for the first time to the left side of their matrimonial bed. The frail body creaked uncomfortably, and for a moment, he made himself forget the truth that hanged menacingly and loosely in every corner of their round mud-house. Inside, he pitied her. He also pitied himself. It felt horrible to anticipate the raging wrath of death that was so sure to descend upon his beloved wife any minute. It was scary and traumatizing. No matter how beautiful and well-crafted a coffin might look, it will not make anyone wish for death!

He saw her struggle to open her eyes and for the first time, her tiny, dry and shrunk lips parted...she opened her mouth and turned to her original position to Joram's horror. He stood motionless and watched...waited...hoped...prayed and waited quietly, sadly, frantically...

“J-o-r-a-m!” The stammer pierced his heart...he wanted to cry but again, decided against it.

She lifted her right hand and held his firmly. He saw her struggle to open her eyes.

“Yes, Teng’an, I am here...” Their eyes met.

He knew he had no power over what was not his anymore... She gave up stammering and held out her feeble forearms. A white froth started forming on the edges of her mouth and he closely watched her struggle with her legs until the kicks gave way. The kicks slowly died away.

He lurched over and grabbed the pale skin of her outstretched forearm with his shaking and sweaty right hand. He fidgeted over the bed with his other free hand looking for a rug that had been long soaked with her sweat. It was nowhere... He smelled her sweat that was heavily punctuated by the stench of her wound and heard her labored breathing juxtaposed with the mournful creaking of her worn-out ribs.

The mournful whispers became distant until her soul parted with her body. Silently, she set out. Slowly, she fell into his outstretched arms. He closed her eyes...finally.

Inside, he knew that there will never be another tomorrow with her! He swallowed hard and wondered aloud: Why her of all people? True, for the few years his ancestors had allowed him to live, he had come to know that life was such a long, winding, and unpredictable journey. There will be moments of bliss and ecstasy, then sorrow and misery. Sometimes you will be so down, so hopeless...other times will be full of triumphs and jubilations.

One thing he never dreamt of doing was losing hope...death was inevitable and has always been part of this life. Other than, remain confined on its cruel tentacles, he knew he had to walk away from that shell and venture out with optimism. He had two children: a son and a daughter all aged less than ten years. He was still the bearer of the roots and the wings the society expected him to bequeath them. They might not fathom the depth of their loss at least for the time being, yes, yet in years to come, the going will never be easy for them.

He had lived all his years assuaging the insatiable appetite for laughter and scorn routinely exhibited by a life that seemed eager to torture and jeer at him in return! He was an imperfect son of a mixed world, and despite having been through thick and thin, he still felt the need to keep trudging ahead.

Joram was a dreamer. Not the typical dreamer you have read about or heard of from those boring folktales, myths, folklores, fables...his dreams were many, complex, beautiful and ugly too. They came in all manner of shape, taste, size, and color.

He was a self-taught graduate from the hard school of life. Like his predecessors and would-be successors, philosophizing was fast becoming his full-time preoccupation. Someone had told him a giant; round and fat lie that his presence here on earth was to serve some purpose. He had thus been waiting like many others who had fallen prey to such a hoax for that purpose to materialize mysteriously all these miserable years and water down those nasty dots in his troubled life.

As others before him like poor Teng'an, he had no doubt in his mind that the cruel fangs of death will soon encircle his dreams, choke life out of them and prove his point right...there is no such a thing as a carefully designed program which magically guides our unpredictable lives towards some clearly defined destiny. Here and now is all we have. Now and here is our purpose, our ultimate dream, our cherished goals, our secret ambitions, our hidden desires, our jealously guarded hatred reserved for our sworn enemies, the beginning, and the end of the road, period!

We are a simple creation ever eager to complicate ourselves. We are a loving animal, capable of showing so much love, who even though does not walk on all-four, is also capable, many a time, of nefarious, savage, demeaning, degrading and unfathomable acts against fellow humans. We want to preserve humanity when we are ever busy devising means and ways of annihilating fellow humans in the tunes of billions!

We empathize with those starving and wallowing in abject poverty when at the same time we litter our alleys, mansions, palatial bungalows and streets with half-eaten food. We look forward to downing expensive wine served by an army of overpaid servicepersons in golden cutlery then afterwards hysterically laugh and sardonically joke about the delicacies over conventions aimed at nibbling such social evils at the bud, and go home somehow convinced our powerful speeches will make the world a better place to live in.

Some voice within him kept urging him on: you need not be worried about what tomorrow holds for you. It was during that

period when Joram came face to face with the untold pain and sorrow that normally supersedes the demise of someone you loved. After hurriedly burying her dearly beloved wife, he left for Chewangoi to join his peers for fear of losing his children.

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Life in Chebyuk was not that much difficult, as he had feared it would. He met some relatives who had been wise enough to take off earlier. Sasuri had become a hotbed for notorious sorcerers who overtly waged a fierce battle between evil and good, destroying or preserving lives. The ferocity with which the evil ones took away lives of innocent villagers, either after having been contracted by both real and imagined self-seeking saboteurs, or as a way of simply flexing their magical powers, baffled, angered and awed many by equal measures.

The independence had come and gone without anyone noticing. The Freedom at Last-Kenya is free chants in a faraway city called Nairobi had meant nothing to Joram and his community. They were not free, not just yet. Instead, they vented their anger and frustrations upon their neighbors. Both the young and the old had armed themselves with bows, arrows, spears, machetes... and then waited impatiently to slaughter, maim, torture, and murder.

For years, the Bukusu had been encroaching on their land. In many cases, their parents leased out parcels of their land or even sold them for good. However, the Bukusu acquired huge chunks of such land through Land Buying Schemes from white settlers who had inkling about Her Majesty's Rifles Holders premeditated departure. As they gradually ascend the western Rift Valley escapement, some daring ones married Sabaot daughters. It was just a matter of time before a number of vulnerable Sabaot clans started literally disappearing. Wholesome assimilation followed suit and such lost clans became known as Luhya sub tribes.

Having lost the former White Highlands settler farms to Bukusu-related Land Buying Schemes, many felt they were justified to retaliate. However, the premeditated clashes lacked political support from a wide section of their own political elite and it soon lost its momentum. More so, they lacked the numbers, sophisticated weaponry and unity among the widely spread sub-clans.

Authorities thwarted the hopes of the masses who had wished that perhaps the new black administration would help them

eventually return to their former lands; KANU's unyielding resolve to embrace a central government system, which was against any plans of freely handing over stolen land to its aboriginal inhabitants, further aggravated the people's woes. In the end, they counted their losses with ear-splitting silence and waited.

Life went back to normal soon after independence and the Bukusu returned to their charred and burnt homes to start afresh. Armed with genuine papers, there was no way one could stop them. Joram and his neighbors watched silently and bit their lips. Inside, they hoped for a miracle to happen. Again, they counted their losses and resigned to fate.

That agile, ravishing, unlettered, yet crafty lone traveler called rumor kept going and coming, walking and moving. However, he had been quick to brush away the wild rumors, which asserted that Nang'uni, kind and vulnerable as she had always been, had been allegedly wholly responsible for the death of her dearly beloved wife.

He had known the old woman all his life to be harmless and incapable of such savagery. She had no reason whatsoever to harm his family. He had been kind to her and her daughter, Chemos. Many a time, they had helped him with the harvesting of his crops and he had in turn given them enough to last them throughout the dry season. More so, he respected her and had always treated her as his own mother.

Ndiema and Chepkemei had always alternated from their home to Nang'uni's humble hut, especially in the evenings. It was easy to tell she had a soft spot for the playful and hyperactive duet especially Ndiema. Though then barely ten years old, Nang'uni was quick to note manly features in him. He overprotected his comely sister and always held her by her tiny hand whenever they gracefully strut back and forth along the tiny path that joined her tiny compound and theirs. Though sullen and delicate, Chepkemei had an irresistible nimble character that made her, sometimes, outwit his virile brother. Nang'uni especially disliked her over-dependence on her brother and her stubborn meekness that inevitably rendered her hapless.

To her, the duet was like a secondary source of a river that must never dry up; a river that was the very heart that pumped blood into the body of her community. They were future custodians of their

old ways of doing things and she saw it fit to prepare them early enough. Deep inside her, she was fully aware that even the most beautiful flower withers in time. She was not going to live forever and time waits for no man. More so, however far a stream flows; it never forgets its origin.

Therefore, whenever she had some spare time before the much-awaited mealtime in the evening, she would narrate to them stories. She had explained to them through her awe-inspiring myths, legends, fables, etiological narratives and trickster stories how fate had separated their people and how their brothers and sisters had ended up in Chepkitale when others had to settle in Chebyuk and beyond. She told them of the Sabiny, Mbay, and Sor in Uganda, about the Somek, Kony, Mosop, Bok, Tachoni and Bong'om, and their histories-their struggles with famines, and their rare conquests over their perennial enemies.

She also told them how the British erroneously labeled their brothers as the Elgonyi or Mount Elgon Maasai, of how and why they ended up in the moorland (otherwise officially known as Chepkitale Native Reserve), and how they subsequently established themselves as hunters and gatherers (Ogiek or Ogiik: agro-pastoralists once the government had banned hunting). She spoke of their great chief, Sangulu and of others who were in charge of other Native Reserves down the Southern slopes of Mount Elgon such as Kasis, Tended, and Chemengich. She spoke about their great leadership traits, and endless struggles to engage the oppressive colonial masters in meaningful discussions as far as their miserable and dilapidated conditions in their new homes were concerned.

She spoke of the horrors, of the incessant brutalities, the prejudice, and stereotypes that characterized the British colonial rule. Of how Sir-Major General Edward Northey and the newly appointed Paramount Chiefs would heavily rely on such misguided prejudices to formulate policies that to date continue haunting modern-day Kenya.

During those days, the British believed all Kikuyus (then the majority native tribe dreaded equally by fellow natives thanks to their pre-exposure to Missionary Goodies and Niceties, unmatched literacy levels and awe-inspiring political connections), had a formidable forest mentality. As for the Akamba, the all-knowing Mzungu labeled them a lazy lot whose drunkenness called for

Kiboko, more Kiboko and even more Kiboko to awaken them from their stupor. The Kalenjins were deemed fit for military conscription thanks to their war-like nature. As for the Luos (otherwise referred to as the Kavirondo), Mzungu believed that each and every, single one of them was inherently stupid, and thus only fit to receive literacy, preferably in their dialects, enough only to labor in the settler farms and plantations spread across the colony.

She also spoke of the infamous sabotage that demoted Sangulu to a mere Assistant Chief as the others maintained their status quo, of how the Ogiek were consequently marginalized and the government's resolve to recognize them as a distinct community in Mount Elgon. She recounted ugly encounters, and fights between their people, and the Bagisu alongside the Kitosh from Uganda, of how their warriors fought with exceptional bravery, and drove away the encroaching enemies.

She recounted the sad tales of their brothers (Tachoni and Bong'om), and how the Bukusu were seemingly eager to absorb, and assimilate them into their own cultural practices, beliefs and customs; she spoke of their unabated quest of encroaching on their lands, and how many of her relatives had retreated beyond the forest. She spoke of how their Luhya neighbors had blindly embraced the white man's economy, and their helpless eagerness to take over administrative positions in the new administration.

True, the capitalist economy was fast springing forth tyrannical bourgeoisies, who despite their inferior numbers, were fast replacing their former colonial masters in almost every respect. A majority of natives still worked in the farms inherited by the chosen few. In Central Province, the Kamatimu, or the loyalists, were now the new Lords and Masters who were seemingly too eager to pay endless lip service to the woes of the Mau Mau widows and orphans.

She told them of their lost farms, cattle, and homes in Trans-Nzoia when the British appropriated their lands in the early 1920s and 1930s for settler farms. She lamented of how the in-coming Bantu, and European settlers had acquired more, and more of their native lands thus subjecting their community into peripheral life, and about their people's struggle to seek justice through the then colonial Land Commission, which acknowledged their grievances, but never implemented a compensation package it had agreed to.

She narrated to them stories about their origin and how their ancestors migrated from their aboriginal home in Eastern Uganda at a hill called Tororo to Misiri or Egypt where they stayed for thousands of years before being forced out (reportedly by a mysterious white people called Kipyayamungeen). Some of their ancestors stayed behind while others moved down further to as far as Tanzania.

She narrated to them stories about the beautiful hills of the motherland, and the numerous streams, and spectacular waterfalls that crisscross it. She narrated how their elders gradually lost their grip on power, how their old ways of doing things was fast waning, and how chang'aa and busaa consumption had consequently grown to destructive levels. She spoke of how their elders used to sing, often with sadness in their voices, using their six-stringed lyre, Pukandiit, about the lost glory of their free life as warriors and cattle people.

She narrated to them a story about the people of a chiefdom called Lanuda and its first Chief known as Membe. Membe was a great chief who led a bloody rebellion that toppled the colonial administration imposed on the people of Lanuda by the imperialist Beji Kingdom. To the eyes of the world, he was a savage terrorist but to his people, he was a revered hero.

Everything, however, changed when the North of Lanuda, inhabited by the Lembe tribe discovered massive oil deposits. Until the discovery, the people of Lembe tribe were nomadic pastoralists incessantly marginalized and disfranchised by Membe's tyrannical, oppressive, and corrupt regime. Furthermore, the North was an unproductive semi-desert. On the other hand, the South, inhabited by the Mengo tribe, enjoyed a balanced climate and a favorable weather ideal for food crops.

Chief Membe had discovered secret documents outlying the possibility of existence of oil deposits at the North at one of the ruins that once served as the capital of Beji administrators. With the help of Leo's capitalist regime companies, he succeeded in setting up expansive oil extraction sites in the North, cordoned them with armed guards to keep off the straying nomads and other undesirable enemies, both real and imagined.

Having suffered under the brutal, exploitative, and ungrateful heavy hand of the communist Beji, embracing Leo was inevitable.

Occasionally, he would snub emissaries from Beji Kingdom as a way of registering his indignation. The two giant kingdoms had been battling for supremacy over the years and there was no sign in sight of their deeply enshrined animosities abating.

Exactly a year after the oil discovery and the very first successful shipping of crude oil to Leo, Chief Membe won dozens of awards ranging from the Peace Prize Award, the Hero of the Year Award, and the Man of the Century Award and so on and so forth.

Grada, the capital of Leo, honored him by altering some of its Highways' names and replacing them with that of Chief Membe the Great.

When he mysteriously died last year, allegedly of an unknown highly radioactive poisonous element whose traces reportedly discovered in his blood by the Chiefdom's High Pathologist, a huge, gold and bronze monument was set up at the Freedom Corner in the heart of Grada to commemorate his death. His eldest son, now the de facto chief, was the one who engineered the sudden and unexpected death of his father.

Acting on the irrevocable orders of the ever demented, sometimes fatuous, often iniquitous in nature, incorrigible, yet notoriously tactful eldest son of the chief, Amadi poisoned the favorite imported red wine of the chief!

Amadi was a product of a rape case involving Banuda. His mother, Maria, was eighteen years of age, with a full chest ornamented with two blossoming mangoes, slightly light skinned, thick-lipped, with short, black and straight hair, five feet tall, full-bottomed, and to the standards of Lanuda kingdom, she was a perfect embodiment of a beautiful woman when Banuda raped her many seasons earlier. He had led an army of warriors in a killing spree that tormented her village, killed her neighbors and walk away with their cattle.

She had just won a scholarship from an Oil Exploration Company to pursue her studies in Beji at one of the most prestigious institutions of higher learning there. As the first ever-educated girl from the Lembe tribe, we could rightly say she was famous and this explains why the courtroom was full to its capacity on that particular day. Members of her tribe were angry and protested for months on end on the streets demanding for justice. Dozens were wounded and

hundreds killed, her both parents unfortunately included, by the anti-riot Beji soldiers.

However, as more distraught Lembe men and women trooped to the streets of Kabwere and other regional centers in the North, the communist administration decided to give in to their demands.

Banuda and three of his younger brothers ended up in the gallows to the dismay of Membe who had been secretly negotiating for a ceasefire with the government.

Membe's murderous campaign took a new surprising and unexpected twist. Sabotage, impromptu attacks, kidnappings, and summary execution of ambushed government's soldiers became widespread. To cool things down, the increasingly cornered Beji administration sent emissaries to assure him that the arrests and subsequent court hearings would culminate into a mock trial only. In the end, Maria received thirty years in jail for defamation!

Chief Membe was the first of an endless series of fatal assignments that Amadi submissively, blindly, and unthinkingly carried out for Banuda. He hardly slept peacefully after that fateful day. He kept seeing his sweaty face with a pair of gleaming eyes beckoning at him in the midst of his sleep. He sought the help of witchdoctors but their attempts to save him from his nightmares proved futile.

Then as fate would have it, he learnt of his mother who was still serving an undeserved jail term. It was that moment that he decided to do what he knew best how to do...kill again!

He had been blind for too long a time and now it was time to let go of the blindfold. The people of Lanuda chiefdom deserved liberation from the despicable tentacles of mistreatment, marginalization, oppression, and years of suppression of their voices. For too long a time, Chief Banuda and his acrimonious, waspish, ill bred, petulant, and sycophantic army of meek followers like himself had taken the people of Lanuda for granted. Now it was the time to separated men from boys. Now it was the time to say enough is enough!

Therefore, one chilly night, Amadi silently tiptoed towards the golden bed of Chief Banuda from his hideout armed with a razor-sharp machete. He was oblivious of his confused and visibly worried eyes. He could not help biting his red lower lip with indignation as he struggled to ignore the silent and mournful groan coming from the

peacefully sleeping chief. He controlled his heavy breathing, swallowed hard, and held firmly the machete in his slightly shaking hands with excessively sweaty palms. He could hear the echoes of his heavily pounding heart bouncing back and forth from the thick walls of the bedroom and the disturbingly vivid sound of labored breathing emanating from under the sheets in front of him.

He had rehearsed what he was just about to do for nights and days on end. He raised his machete higher and lowered it with all his left might. He watched with indifference as the giant body writhe in anguish like a wounded python. He closed his eyes and ears and allowed himself to sail freely in his brand new lease of life exemplified by a perfect utopia he had created beforehand. He did not hear the commotions outside the bronze door of the chief's bedroom. He did not feel the thrusts and jabs from the arrows...he did not hear the curses and the angry shouts.

As he slowly edged out of his comfort zone, what he could only see was a people overtly mourning the fall of their mighty son and covertly celebrating his 'good riddance'. He saw his mother walking to her long-delayed freedom and joining others in the streets and alleys as they jubilantly sing songs of freedom.

They had listened with awe and amazement. They had laughed and cried. Fear of the unknown had crept into their beings for no apparent reason. Their ears and eyes, young and inexperienced as they were, had gained a new wave of comprehension. Chepkemei, and Ndiema had benefited a great deal, in ways that could not be quantified, from the wealth of experience, and indispensable knowledge exuded in this old, frail yet amiable, kind and loving old woman.

Teng'an had been just like her daughter. She had revered and adored her for her exemplary kindness despite her living in abject poverty. Therefore, to imagine that she was the one behind her painful and untimely death was not even conceivable. Rumor, that lone and great sojourner, was yet to convince him otherwise.

It had been hard for his two semi-orphaned kids to cope without their recently departed mother. The weariness in their gloomy faces was a constant reminder for Joram that nothing was ever going to be the same again. It was not easy to assuage the massive loses of his children singlehandedly and as time went by, it

became increasingly clear to Joram that he will have to look for a second wife.

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Contrary to the wild rumors he had heard about the Ndorobo (Ogiek), he soon realized they were so friendly and with the exception of a few words, they had a lot in common including names. Their gorgeous women and teenage girls with rich-black skins, hefty strings of beads on their rather tiny and long necks, ruffled jungle attire, thick and full lips, massive bottoms, dripping with sweat and some with dirty faces were a constant sight with their beautiful weavings of bamboo handicraft, which they often traded for maize, beans, potatoes, millets or sorghum.

Their men, dark-skinned too, heavily built, tall, handsome, with curly, unkempt and uncared for hair and frightening moustache and seemingly fast with their long legs would occasionally drive down huge bulls and hefty cows which they would trade for similar food crops.

One man in Particular, his name Meto Sikowo, had come to prove most of Joram's stereotypes against the Ndorobo utterly wrong. Through their numerous chats while arguing about how much maize his bull or cow was worth, Joram had come to realize that he was not a typical hunter and gatherer like many of his compatriots. Most shocking, he had married from Chepkube to the consternation of his kindred. Thanks to the ever-increasing strife and enmity between the Ogiek and the Bok, such undesirable arrangements were unforeseeable.

The Ogiek had since lost the prestigious full-chieftainship status and were technically under a Bok Member of Parliament, Daniel Chepnoi Naibei Moss. More so, there were rumors that following the government's resolve to ban hunting, the government could soon declare Chepkitale Native Reserve Land a game reserve. Additionally, their wide differences in socio-economic activities made intermarriages a hard nut to crack.

"How do you cope with a Bok girl?"

"Why?"

"Just asking...some can be difficult to manage, Mmh. You and I know a rat is a rat! And besides, you cannot convince a monkey that honey is sweeter than banana!"

“I was told that before we got married unofficially... If there is character, ugliness becomes beauty; if there is none, beauty becomes ugliness....”

“Also remember the most beautiful fig may contain a worm, and getting only a beautiful woman is like planting a vine on the roadside everyone feeds on it!”

“Where there is love there is no darkness.... Love is a despot who spares no one, brother. A happy man marries the girl he loves, but a happier man loves the girl he marries”.

“Meaning everything is cool?”

“Not exactly everything...there is no perfect marriage. I believe in striking compromises and condoning a few ugly dots here and there.”

“That sounds strange...really strange, brother.”

“Patience, brother...they call it patience; at the bottom of patience one finds heaven; patience attracts happiness; it brings near that which is far, is it the key which solves all problems, and a patient man will eat ripe fruit...!”

David had all his life known them to be quarrelsome. Yes, they were beautiful on the outside but it was their inner beauty that he always nursed doubts about...it was questionable! As a child, they had had a neighbor whose wife used to batter him routinely. His late mother had been trouble and the fights in their home had always to do with her sharp tongue famed for its venomous spit. His wife had not been an exception either. Had it not been for his kindly treating her, she would have made life harder for him too.

“Cherop is a rare seed; calm, respectful, submissive and above all a quick learner. The forest life has not been that much difficult for her to adapt to either.” Meto said after a long and thoughtful pause.

Joram could not help wondering how the two were able to survive despite the acute cultural differences.

“What about her daily chores? Sure it must be a challenge for her...” He prodded a little further.

“You might not believe it but truth is, she has since outsmarted some of our own women as far as weaving using the bamboos is concerned... and the few seeds of millet and sorghum she sneaked there are almost ready for harvesting on our small garden.” He explained, his voice beaming with overt excitement.

He was proud of his wife and had never regretted having defied his own parents and taking her in as her first wife. He had no doubt they would built a formidable family together.

“Then you must be a very lucky man, brother.” David remarked with a tinge of hidden envy in his rather reassuring voice.

“Well, one can say so, brother.” Meto said proudly with a broad smile on his face.

Luck had never shown its kind face to him. It had seemingly been keen on avoiding his life that had endured a series of nauseating dramas. He had had a difficult life as far as he could remember. Sometimes, he was tempted to believe his deceased parents had cursed him.

The unexpected move to Cheptais then Sasuri had been overwhelming to them. The settlers had chased them away like stray dogs. It was a shameful, painful and an unforgettable experience in their lives. Having literally lost everything, their expansive land, huge herd of cattle, crops that were almost ready and a hope for a better life, they had waited for one last thing: death!

It was not long before the torturous nights and days of mourning became too much for his parents to bear. One after the other, they soon succumbed to the raging wrath of fate. His Pa’ had been the first. In less than a year later, his Ma’ had followed. Having been a mere clueless teenager, incapacitation as far as seeing his parents through had been inevitable. He had lacked the means and ingenuity of stabilizing their lives anew. Just like her wife, he had watched them suffer without the power of doing anything meaningful to save them.

“Have you ever thought of moving? There is free land still, provided you have the energy...” Joram once proposed to him.

“Well, if you say so, why not. In fact, it will be the greatest gift to my nagging wife. Sometimes, during rainy season, she usually complains of the overwhelming cold.”

“I will see about that. You just leave it to me... However little food we have, we’ll share it even if it’s only one locust, brother!”

“That is very kind of you, brother... To be without a friend is to be poor indeed!”

“Between true friends, even water drunk together is sweet enough!”

“Sure...even a small house can hold a hundred friends!”

Joram had grown fond of this strange yet interesting Ogiek man, as of how, why and when, it was hard to tell. For once in his life, he felt he had the power of lighting a smile on a sad face. The gods had been a little kinder to him or so it seemed. He expanded his freely acquired land to the right by clearing more trees and bushes, sliced off a sizable chunk to the left, and set it apart for his new friend. That is how they became immediate neighbors with Meto.

Once he would move in, he proved to be an exceptionally hardworking man and together with his newly married wife, they quickly outsmarted some respectable veteran farmers famed for their extensive proceeds and yields, which floored weak stores. The duet was soon on the lips of both the old and the young. Their herd of cattle increased faster in size and so did the yield of crops in their virgin land.

With the exception of his two children, no one else constantly reminded Joram of his wife. As such, it became much easier to heal and gradually let of go the past. However, it was he alone who occasionally and effortlessly propped up the subject. Every now and then, he would remind himself how things would have been with Teng'an around. Perhaps she would have given birth to their third child by now. Maybe he would have expanded his land further to the west and their wealth would have undeniably quadrupled.

The endless chores at their new farm in Chewangoi had kept Ndiema and Chepkemei so busy, they rarely asked about Nang'uni and her stories that he knew they dearly missed. For long, he had intentionally made them believe that their late mother had gone on a safari to a faraway place and that she will be back anytime soon.

They were just like a forest; when you are outside it is dense, when you are inside you see that each tree has its place...only that one key tree was painfully absent. Joram was so much worried about this absence. So were the little kids who fondly missed their mother, too.

“It has been too long, Pa’.” Ndiema protested when he had cunningly dished out one of his usual true lies.

“Doesn't she miss us, Pa'?” Chepkemei excitedly chipped in. “Well, not exactly too long, son...and she do miss you, me, Chemos and Nang'uni...in fact so much, okay?”

Ndiema was no longer a small boy. He had grown so fast it had not occurred to him that he was now capable of telling when he

was lying to them as he had always done. Soon they will be ripe enough to face the knife and thereafter become parents.

However, most disturbing were their constant naggings about a grandmother they never shared blood.

“I want to go and see her.” Ndiema would occasionally beg with tears welling up in his small eyes.

“Me too, Pa’.” Chepkemei will chip in, her small and harmless face beaming with curiosity.

“You will go very soon...” This was his reply always.

“How soon?” The two would protest in a chorus.

His soon had always stretched into months then years. They waited. He too waited.

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Joram was six feet tall, handsome, heavily built, strong, with a pair of long legs, a flat nose and two big ears. He had a slightly light skin, a pair of red eyes, a slightly wide mouth, and a bad temper cunningly hidden behind an ever-smiling face. His hair was kinky and ever unkempt. He had a hefty neck matched with a very large, ugly moustache, broad shoulders, and two very strong hands. More so, he had a big heart that had withstood storm after storm and made it possible to share the little he had with those who had none.

The exceedingly cold weather up here had made it almost impossible to give his level best. His mornings were awful with the persistent sneezing and a running nose that annoyed him more than anything else did. Nevertheless, he had worked hard on the farm and ensured his small family did not lack.

Incessant encroachment was gradually, and literally eating away huge tracts of forested land and there was hardly any government presence to tame their activities (often carried out with runaway impunity). It was hard to see their Member of Parliament around and his home was ironically dozens of miles away in Trans-Nzoia, Saboti. As a result, it was easy to acquire land, often freely, get a few coins here and there from the wandering Bukusu charcoal traders, though they were ever cautious not to venture too deep into the heartland of the Sabaots, and cut-down the giant Elgon Teaks any time of the day without being stopped.

However, that was to change soon. Joram had heard of the commission reportedly under the headship of an Indian called Mr. Pranal Sheth. The commission had been touring the larger Bungoma

District, and wild rumors had flown forth and back that Kenyatta himself might follow soon. He never did of course but unfounded news, which later turned out to be true, started streaming in about convoys of GK Lorries ferrying massive boxes of cooking fats, bags of raw maize, beans, rice and Agikuyu-speaking men, women and children that had made a surprising stop at Chesito center.

Meto, who had a relative in Chesito and another one at Kaptama, had heard the news from one of them who had visited him. The visitor had spoken of some strangely speaking ‘light-skinned’ people who were busy erecting Mabati houses at the newly established Gitwamba Village.

“Are they as white as the strange horse-riding *Wazungu* Joram usually talks about?”

They had heard stories from Joram of white-skinned men in their former homes in Trans-Nzoia. As a child, while being forcefully evicted from their farm in Kitale, Joram had seen a number of white-skinned men riding on black and white horses. They often wore ugly green huts, heavy black leather jackets, black boots that extended to almost their knees and always carried leather strips meant for thrashing anyone who strayed to their fenced farms or ever guarded homes. They always carried a magical stick, which spits fire that travels with the lightning speed and takes away life instantly upon impact!

They used to roughly shove, kick, and thrash his parents while angrily yelling at them. His father had repeatedly begged them to kill him, but they could not understand a word he was uttering.

Instead, they had only kicked, shoved and thrashed even harder! As a result, Meto had lived fearful of these strangers.

“Eh, not exactly...I saw a few who were just as black as you. Their skins are a little lighter though but they do not speak our language.” The visitor clarified.

Meto eyed him quizzically. He seemed a little offended by the doubtful gaze of his host.

“You will see them by yourself the next time you strayed beyond your horizon”, he chided.

Meto seldom visited them and they were increasingly worried why.

“Hehehe, sure I will”, he laughed and brushed away the criticism.

What they never knew then was the fact that Mzee had been busy resettling some of his tribesmen from the heart of Central Kenya, where he was now the de' facto largest landowner, immediately after independence. Later, their MP had told them about the affected areas, which included the former White Highlands in Rift Valley, Taita Taveta, and Miji-Kenda Lands at the Coastal strip, and the Maasai Lands at Laikipia, Naivasha, Ngong and Karen.

He further, rather bluntly, told a section of the elders who had paid him a visit seeking answers about the advent of these strangers that the vicious cycle will continue for years on end. What had angered many was the indifference Mr. Daniel Chepnoi Moss Naibei openly exhibited regarding this thorny matter. Truth of the matter was nobody had the guts of questioning Mzee (those who dared to would always pay heavily afterwards).

Mr. Moss was fully aware of the dirty machinations. He had silently, subserviently and helplessly watched his party favoring a governance system that will restrict land transfer to those born in the area formerly designated as White Highlands or occupied by European Farmers. He was aware of the existence of the Settlement Transfer Fund Schemes, about their sponsors and the cutthroat jostling in the Rift Valley Land Buying Market. He was privy to the devious plans of hijacking the land transfer program originally intended to benefit the natives yes yet he had no power to change the tide. He was from an insignificant minority tribe that urgently needed help. Just like a hapless beggar, he had no choices to make at his disposal.

White settlers had been leaving for their imperial motherland in haste giving Kenyatta and his associates a perfect pretext to salvage a loan from their immediate colonial master in exchange of protecting the precious necks of some of its stayees who hadn't had enough of the loot, cheap labor and freebies. It was this loan, according to historians, which Kenyatta and his cronies used to establish the infamous Settlement Transfer Fund Schemes.

Consequently, KANU insiders and proxies would use such schemes to buy off land from white settlers leaving the country to the utter shock and disbelief of many. Having genuinely bought such huge tracts of land, Kenyatta would later re-sell them at cheap prices to cronies, friends, and register the rest under his own name and

those of his extended family members. That is how Gitwamba and other Rift Valley mushrooming Agikuyu villages came into being.

As a child, Joram had lived with his parents in present day central Kitale before their unceremonious move to Sasuri village. His relatives and a few neighbors used to live in present day Saboti, Endebes and Kiminini. With time, the native settlers displaced the Sabaot from their ancestral lands by the white settler farmers.

Therefore, many aboriginal inhabitants ended up in the fringes of Mount Elgon when others had to cross over to Jinja, Kapchorwa, and Toroso in Western Uganda.

Without unity, without substantial financial means, and without political connections, the Sabaot had lost their ancestral land in Trans-Nzoia to the Bukusu, and now the Agikuyu were right under their doorsteps. With the exception of 1963 first ever tribal clashes in the North Rift pitying the Sabaot and the Bukusu, all seemed to be going on well yet inside, Joram feared such unrepentant incursions might one-day land them into a very deep ditch!

Joram had lived oblivious of the limits. It was their duty to share in their merry and grief as well. Indeed, a tall order that was all the same, inevitable. Someone had reminded him that it was a wise thing to keep your friends closer, but your sworn enemies closest!

Reuben Chesire, then a District Officer for Kajiado and a member of the commission supposedly meant to address their grievances, had on one occasion addressed a number of Cheptais residents and Joram had attended. The energetic and enthusiastic DO promised that should everything sail through successfully, the Mzee's government would allocate the Sabaot an alternative land.

Meanwhile, unknown forces were secretly muting a parallel move by the government to assist the Ogiek with farmland for cultivation. Meto and a few of his friends who had since benefited from the free land at Chebyuk, had attended secret meet ups in Chepkitale. After heated and emotional debates, the elders had agreed that in case the government offered them more land elsewhere in the near future, they would retain their trust land in Chepkitale.

Many, specifically the Ndorobo, had been keen to avoid a repeat of 1956. Then, their elders, who doubled as their de facto representatives, failed to agree on where the government could

resettle them. In the end, they had found themselves in Laboot, or the Chepkitale Native Reserve. The rumor had had it that the government was planning to resettle them at Teldet, Kiboroa, Romromwet and other adjacent lands in the East of Mount Elgon (a move which the Ogiek Elders welcomed wholeheartedly). However, the rumor further asserted that a number of disgruntled elements around Mr. Moss and some Bok Elders were not in favor of such a move. Now it was a matter of time to tell. Meto and his anxious compatriots waited.

Throughout his impromptu and spontaneous stops at villages across Mount Elgon, Reuben Chesire had repeatedly reminded the Sabaot that Mzee was never going to let them down.

“As a caring mother and father of this young nation, Mzee will live up to his solemn promise”, he said matter-of-factly during a stop in Kopsiro.

Joram knew what that meant, at least on their part. Indeed, they now had to exude Job’s patience!

Kenyatta’s government was keen to avoid a repeat of 1963 as clearly evidenced by the energy and enthusiasm with which the commission was carrying out its mandate. The clashes had left many dead. People had suffered irredeemable losses, families torn apart and the once shaky trust between the Sabaot and the Bukusu further dealt a severe body blow. Everyone agreed that the intervention was timely and much needed. In the months and days that followed, exhaustive dialogues were conducted and extensive consultations made throughout the region between Bukusu Elders and Sabaot Elders. The following were the recommendations agreed upon by Mr. Sheth’s commission:

- 1) Extra land should be set aside for the landless Sabaot.
- 2) A separate district should be created, renamed Mount Elgon and a District Officer deployed at either Kapsokwony or Cheptais.
- 3) Afterwards, the government should move the newly created Mount Elgon District to the Rift Valley Province.
- 4) Communication and transportation systems be improved and upgraded in the would-be newly created district.

The parliament, then a mere Kenyatta’s rubber-stamp, was expected to unanimously adopt the recommendations and people

now waited to see if they will ever be implemented. Joram knew it will take time, but they had no other choice other than to wait.

Inside, he hoped for the best. Ironically, in less than five years later, Chepkitale was designated a game reserve notwithstanding the ever-growing population of its inhabitants! This in effect meant the Ogiek, including many of Meto's relatives, had to leave their homes. The unceremonious and unexpected exodus featured inevitable move to the surrounding area, apparently, a designated forest reserve also. Meto had to move his large herd of cattle closer to the fringes of the forest and house his own mother and father for a while in one of his extra huts. Many of his siblings headed further East in places such as Kaboywo, Kongit, Kaberwa, Chorlim, Kokwo and some ended up in as faraway places as present day Cherang'any Hills.

Other separate meetings followed featuring Ogiek Elders and Bok Elders, the latter weary of their now endangered prospects of fully occupying Chebyuk, with the government over the issue.

Delegations from either side headed to Nairobi where they petitioned the government. After numerous visits, exhaustive persuasions, which Meto was fortunate to be privy to its tiny, winy, little details, the government initiated a resettlement program at Chebyuk, and not Teldet, Kiboroa, or even Romromwet as many of his compatriots would have wished.

## Chapter 2

"A generous and noble spirit cannot be expected to dwell in the breasts of men who are struggling for their daily bread." — *Dioysius of Halicarnassus*

Every river emanating from the heart of the gigantic, elegant, and awe-inspiring source of spellbinding beauty mountain; is impassable most of the time for it usually rains heavily especially during the rainy season. The dry spell of between January and April usually comes with dust, strange animal diseases, and famine.

The mouth-watering and eye catchy hills gradually rise from an elevation of five thousand to fourteen thousand feet. Countless of amazing waterfalls and streams does crisscross the slopes in the area. At the very peak of the gigantic mountain is an extinct volcano about fifty- miles in diameter.

The Kenya-Uganda border goes straight through the mountaintop, cutting the Sabaot motherland into two proportionate halves: one to the east and one to the west. The Mountain gently slopes through the area with a terrain that rises from one thousand, eight hundred meters above sea level to about four thousand, three hundred and ten meters above sea level. The mountain greatly influences rainfall and temperatures. There is fair distribution of rainfall received in the region and it ranges from one thousand, four hundred millimeters to over one thousand, eight hundred millimeters per annum. The temperature varies between fourteen and twenty-four degrees centigrade.

A natural forest covers a large section of the mountain slopes. Elgon Teaks are a common sight and a favorite choice for many when it comes to building materials. The thick bushes dotting the towering trees are crucial sources of herbal medicines and firewood for many households. Lions, leopards, elephants, giraffes and numerous wild animals roam freely. Occasionally, terrifying herds of elephants would stray to their farms and destroy crops.

Leopards often show up in villages to prey on vulnerable goats and sheep in the dead of the night. In retaliation, young men

armed with bows, razor-sharp poisoned arrows, and machetes would track and hunt them down deep in the jungle.

The Sabaot have had to change their lifestyle in recent years from mainly cattle herding to planting maize and vegetables because of the scarcity of land. Traditionally the Sabaot have always believed in a Creator God or Yeyindet. He is good, provides sunshine, rain and life. It is also believed that this Yeyindet lives very far away beyond human reach. The ancestral spirits control the daily life of the people and bring them fortune or, more often, misfortune. To appease the angry ancestor who sent the sickness as a way of avenging some wrongdoings, Sabaot offers sacrifices.

Having suffered years of persecution and marginalization under a predominantly Bukusu administration in Bungoma, the Sabaot had been among the last to witness any tangible symptoms of government's independence immortalized resolve of waging an all-out war against ignorance, poverty and disease. It had taken the Kenyatta's government close to fifteen years to consider setting up infrastructural systems beyond Bungoma in line with the 1964 Pranal Sheth Commission's Recommendations.

Nevertheless, the marram rough road had been a blessing. It had made it possible to bring in the badly needed corrugated iron sheets for the Government Funded School, building blocks for a Cattle Dip at Kopsiro and hundreds of the Great Britain Funded Books for the humble library at Masaek Primary School. Most important, it had made it possible for the DC Officers to scout the slopes that stretches beyond Trans-Nzoia to the east and Chebwek to the west.

Meto, Joram and their neighbors had heard of the good news through their chiefs and the readily available grapevine. The government had accepted to give the Sabaot more land. Having lost their land in Chepkitale, the whole resettlement plan was thus, naturally meant for the Ogiek, or the Mosop otherwise referred to as the Ndorobo. Problem was, by 1971, the Bok had illegally occupied Chebyuk, and moving them out to pave way for their brothers from Chepkitale would certainly spark inter-clan strife and enmity that might undeniably culminate into clashes.

Again, Meto and his friends headed deep into the jungle for their usual meet ups. Here they were—finally on the brink of being rewarded for their enormous patience but unsure how to address the

major obstacle standing on their way. They had wanted elsewhere but the Bok Leadership was seemingly keen on ensuring they were going to end up in Chebyuk (its designation as forest reserve now reversed yet still illegally under the occupation of the majority Bok).

Meto and his descendants had gone up after the original displacement by the colonial government whereas Joram and his descendants had gone down. Hunting and gathering was the only possible preoccupation up the slopes whereas farming and animal keeping was the most viable means of surviving down the slopes. With time, the geographical differences and Imperial Government constant interferences had succeeded in creating deep fissures between the two.

Fate was now merging the two once again yet thanks to overwhelming land pressure on the shoulders of either party, it was now God for all, and everyone for himself! Everyone was laying claim on the entire newly established Chebyuk Settlement Scheme Phase I thus forcing the government to intervene. In the end, they shared the spoils though disproportionately. The Mosop would now get sixty-five percent of the available plots whereas the Bok will get the rest.

Meto had felt let down by his compatriots. He was secretly against any sharing. Had they not lost their rightful share of land up the slopes? Was it mandatory to share what was out rightly theirs? He felt betrayed. The extra plot that he had been awarded was not enough. He was grateful now his mother and father had a farm yes but it could have been more had it not been for the cheap cowardice his compatriots had exuded. Nevertheless, he was careful not to betray his dissatisfaction. He knew Bok men like Joram deserved a token of appreciation and how else will they appreciate their generosity and kindness if not by sharing the little the government had given them.

He owed him a great deal...sometimes he lacked words of expressing his sincere gratitude. Men with such big hearts were rare to find and as far as he could remember, they hardly lived for long. The jealous lots were seemingly quick to confine them to the periphery as soon as their good deeds started receiving favorable comments on the lips of villagers. The few he had ever come across had been bewitched and died of some mysterious fatal illnesses.

Joram had been exceedingly kind to him and had treated him more of a brother than a mere friend. Not only did he surrender a huge chunk of his land but also helped set up his home. They had prepared the needed posts, the mud, and the needed grass together. Joram had also accompanied him to Chepkitale by foot to collect a few of his belongings and had never complained about the flu he had caught or even the severe coughing and sneezing that had nearly killed him.

It had hardly occurred to either one of them that they were from different sub-tribes until the government stepped in. As far as Joram was concerned, life had been considerably comfortable. They had enough to eat and with the exception of constant destruction of crops by naughty elephants, life went on smoothly. The dreaded Bagisu rustlers from across the border were afraid to stray too close to their homes making it convenient to rare a huge herd of cattle apart from farming.

However, Meto and his community had been suffering. The hunting had since been abolished meaning young men and boys had to stray deeper into the jungle to fend for food and had to be cautious while killing an antelope or when lucky, a huge buffalo for fear of being caught by the Game Rangers who had been deployed at Laboot to take good care of the game reserve. Their animals were ever in danger of falling prey to the Bagisu professional cattle rustlers who could easily sneak in and disappear unnoticed.

The Bok men and women were jittery. They were overwhelmed. Many were disappointed. They too, felt betrayed. Betrayed by their leaders especially so the chief and the area Member of Parliament. Where will their children go? After their displacement from Trans-Nzoia, Chebyuk had been their timely savior. This was their Canaan. Many had lost their freely acquired land to the Ndorobo. The unexpected exodus back to Soy: Cheptais,

Chepkube, Chebwek, and Sasuri was dreadful. It was like heading back to Egypt, the land of slavery!

The impromptu advent of the Ndorobo was widely viewed as an unnecessary incursion. Some saw it as an insult...an ugly, fat, and round insult...an insult that nobody was ready to take. Brothers they might have once been yes but their love for the fertile soils at Chebyuk had since become thicker.

A few like Joram had been lucky. Although he had lost a sizable piece of his freely acquired land, whatever remained was still enough to feed his ever-growing family. Either knowingly or unknowingly, and perhaps for political reasons, their area leaders, and elders had not used their numerous meet ups to remind the Bok that Chebyuk had all that time been a forest reserve. Through a friend, apparently related with the area chief, Joram had come to be aware of this fact.

“Are you aware this free land we are living on is a forest reserve?” He once shared the secret with Meto.

“Yeah, you did not know?” Meto shot back, visibly shocked.

“I was never told...” Joram replied quietly, almost sadly.

“That is very sad...”

“You can say that again!”

“That is very sad indeed!” Meto repeated with a wry smile, almost wistfully.

“Anyway, let us hope no one will take it away from us”, Joram echoed back thoughtfully, “Because if they do, that will certainly mean the end of us!”

“Well, it is the only thing we can really do...hope, I mean, Mmh!”

Therefore, they hoped and waited until the area MP and an army of timid elders finally disclosed the bad news. The bombshell had been too overwhelming for the weak in spirit to bear. Whispers of dejected pessimists had travelled everywhere. Now that it was said and all done, life had to move on.

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Mzee Kenyatta’s name was forever floating in the air. Songs of praise were composed across the land as a tribute for his kindness.

It was easy to hear of expectant women arguing over which name they should choose to name their would-be children. Kenyatta featured prominently and to date, there are old men baring such a name in Chebyuk and its environs.

The virgin land had fertile soils. It needed no manure. The first harvest over a half a year later, had wrestled down hurriedly erected sticks and mud stores of many households. Joram feared it could be a premonition. His worries mounted when one of his giant stores too, went tumbling down. The sweet potatoes were the size of Joram’s head and the onions his fists!

With time, as years staggered by, it became harder and harder for some Ndorobo to cope with the endless clearing of bushes, tree cutting, torturous cultivation and planting of new crops. Back at Chepkitale, they had been hunters and gatherers. The new lifestyle was undeniably overwhelming. Soon, it was evident they could not rival their counterparts who excelled greatly in farming.

Surprisingly, and to the horror of many, one after the other started selling their lands and heading back to Chepkitale. Those who were wise enough, hired out their portions; and they too, headed back deep into the forest. Meto, Joram's immediate neighbor, worked hard and was keen to succeed where many of his confederates had failed miserably. He won over friends and the respect of the likes of Joram who had since become his staunchest confidant and protégé.

Bok men from Soy including Joram's kindred purchased enormous plots of land and engaged in vigorous farming. Soon, they were the wealthiest men in Chebyuk. In the evenings, they would kill the day's tiredness with chang'aa in the newly established clubs. A number of freedom hungry lazy men also enjoyed their moments in the clubs, having sold their all. Having thus squandered everything at their disposal, Joram expected some he knew well to chat to the dead of the night when actually expecting something to dispel the raging anxiety from their empty stomachs!

Joram grew rich. With the help of constant pestering from relations back at Sasuri and the endless demands of his children for stories, he remarried though his new wife was almost twenty years younger than he was. In the eyes of his peers, he was likened to a farmer who had grown corn by the roadside for he had married a very beautiful wife!

Chemos had a kind heart and treated his son and daughter as hers. She was sorry for the loss of their mother and tried her level best to fit in her shoes. Relatives flocked in from everywhere. She welcomed strangers and shared with the poor. Chepkemei and Ndiema had happily accepted her as their new mother, having long lost hope of Teng'an's soonest return. They obeyed her instructions and never questioned her intentions.

All her life, frequently characterized by tears and penury, she had known very well that the world they were living in was just but a staircase: others were going up others were coming down. Orphaned

at an early age and brought up singlehandedly by a frail yet iron-willed grandmother, Chemos had known by heart what it meant to live without a parent. When they were little, they had had it all and life had been full. Then fate struck hard and a strange illness, blamed on a jealous relation, suddenly took away both of her parents.

Looking back, hers had been a terrible life. It had been a long, long struggle... from their humble kennel in Sasuri village with her grandmother that was now fast aging, to a now expansive compound surrounded with a field of all manner of food crops and an inheritance of two grown children; she knew their ancestral spirits had to be thanked properly. Fate had seemingly finally let go its firm grip on her. Joram had been godsend and she was going to do everything in her power to make him happy.

The sight of neatly re-planted Elgon Teaks, which served as border posts, and rows of newly built mud and sticks houses with grass as their roofs; was fascinating to behold. She saw a mighty wave of love, engulfed in endurance and patience that lacks comparison in the faces of her neighbors. Then there went the bubbling waters of Emia and Teremi in the depression between Chewangoi and Kopsiro. She could only sigh with joy as the mighty waters, merged into one, coiled itself, writhing like a python, then roaring down Kumorong' waterfall.

Here and there, during daytime, men and young boys were clearing more land. She liked the sight- it was a blessing seeing the girls and their mothers heading home with hefty bundles of firewood well balanced on their heads... or when neighbors will come together and harvest the crops, all the time talking about this or that. She wished it would go on like that for years and years!

The two neighbors had been among the few luckiest beneficiaries who received the maximum five acreage of land. Five additional acres of fertile land to their previous loot that needed no input of animal manure or even the rumored miraculous fertilizers, given out at subsidized prices at a newly established mini-depot in Kapsokwony, was more than enough for the duet. They had since made it customary to plant short-season crops like potatoes, onions, cabbages, and tomatoes.

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It did not take long for Chemos to give birth to a beautiful bouncing baby-boy. After exhausting the list of all names of recently

dead relatives from either side, the stubborn, tiny yet determined boy accepted Naibei as his name. Nang'uni, the only mother and father Chemos had known almost all her life, had been present during the naming ceremony. She was happy the little boy had stopped his deafening and shrill cry at the mention of his late husband's name.

To her, that was a sign of acceptance into the new family. The late Naibei might have been stubborn yes but he was such a loving and a caring man.

Joram had agreed to allow her to stay with them. She had no one else to go back to in Sasuri and twice or thrice; some crooked neighbors had linked her to a new spate of deaths allegedly due to sorcery. Had it not been for Joram's kindred who had known her all their lives, she would have been long dead by now. Joram's grown son had hastily erected a new house for her and soon it became a favorite destination for young children who were hungry and thirsty for stories.

Ndiema had never forgotten one story in particular.

Nang'uni had told him a story of a young and beautiful girl who once upon a time, stumbled upon an orphaned dove. She felt sorry for the dove and took it home where she feeds for it and they soon became great and inseparable friends! The gentle bird grew up and was always by her side. As a result, her father too developed fondness for the bird, and so did the mother of the home who cooked her best for the bird.

Time went by and the bird could now feed without anyone's help. Then one bright morning, it just happened...the lovely creature just disappeared into the thin air! The girl was greatly troubled and had to look for the bird in the adjacent bushes. On the first day of the unfruitful search, the girl came back home desperate and anguished. It was as if she had lost a loved one, someone so dear to her lonely heart.

With encouragement from both her father and mother, she set off early the next day. She knew deep within her, that it will not be easier, yet for some unknown reasons, she felt obliged. On the evening of the second day, she discovered the bird perched on a tiny branch of a teak and concealed by thick foliage. The darkness crept stealthily and soon, it had engulfed the whole area. She slept under a Teak that night knowing that the spirits are always everywhere and they will take good care of her.

As soon as she heard the whistling of the birds, she woke up from what had been not a very sober sleep. Her somber mood was not encouraging at all. It nearly convinced her that everything would go wrong somewhere along the way. To her amazement, Lala was still there (Lala was the bird's name). She thanked the spirits repeatedly. However, the bird took off as soon as she was commencing a shaky climb up the giant tree! She angrily cursed under her breath and had to follow the bird once again.

Lala wondered all day long, perching here and there for a little while. The girl followed. When the sun was barking hot, its wrath having dehydrated the poor girl; she rested and realized for the first time that she was hungry. The wild fruits did magic to her zooming stomach. Soon she was running again.

Thorns often pricked her limbs so badly her bare feet became sore and swollen. At times, she had to half-walk while limping and half-run while crying. She had to get hold of the bird, no matter what. A soothing voice always urged her on reminding her every now and then of the good moments they had shared together. I had better die here than go back home without Lala, she thought aloud.

The search continued for two more days. The girl was extremely exhausted. The flesh was too weak but still, the spirit was willing and yearning to get hold of Lala.

She was horrific, emaciated, and glaring aimlessly to the dark. The moon seemed harsh and merciless than she would have loved to remember. So were the bright stars. So horrendous and mean looking they seemed that she could not help the shivers they were sending down her timid spine! She had to be strong. The love for the bird kept her going. It rejuvenated her tremendous zeal and ignited her troubled soul. Lala was her strength – the only source of comfort and happiness she had in this world.

When morning of the fifth day came, she woke up to see Lala perched on a wild fruit tree some yards away from her. She took aim at the bird, not with an arm, but rather with a renewed hope and enormous love. Lala was still healthier as before. Except for its whistles, the bird was humble than ever before.

The sun was rising majestically. Its strong rays overcame the mist that engulfed the thicket. She could now see clearly. About ten meters away was something resembling an elephant mushroom. The figure came out of it; and it was darkness once again.

She woke up at midnight, surrounded by close to six people.

Then the light fell on her again. The next day her soul was full of strength and she felt well. Lala fed her with milk and honey until she recovered fully. The girl never returned to her aboriginal homeland. She found the love of her life disguised as an orphaned dove! Lala was the sole heir to the throne of the great chief Sumbeywa of Kamuneru chiefdom! They were married and lived happily thereafter.

The story of Lala had made him cry. His entire teenage years, he had always been that girl...tirelessly chasing after something unseen, unknown yet worth the tears, the struggle and the eternal waiting nevertheless. There had been times when he had felt enough was enough yet that distant whistle of Lala kept him going.

He had worked hard and Joram had been kind enough to slice two and a half acres for him. He had hurriedly erected three tiny huts on one corner that overlooked his father's extensive compound. With Nang'uni, just a few meters away from his compound, life seemed very promising. He had a secret girlfriend whom he had eyed and was waiting for the right time to strike.

Her bend back did not stop her from working on a small garden intentionally reserved for her in front of her hut. She peeled the huge potatoes harvested from Joram's farm with expertise that baffled her inherited grandchildren. Her speech was slightly slurred but she was audible enough for her listeners to hear her words that were always full of wisdom. She was easy to get along with and soon, everyone was eager to make friends with her in the compound including Rael's four-year-old firstborn, Cheptot, and his two years old brother, Kipyego.

However, exactly a year after Naibei's birth, Nang'uni passed away. She had been secretly nursing a wound that had survived all manner of traditional herbs and the expertise of respectable medicine men back at Sasuri and lands beyond Toroso. What they did not know was that she had breast cancer just like Teng'an.

Her mother had died under very similar circumstances and that strange wound had caused jitters amongst Sasuri's villagers. When she herself had started showing early signs of that fatal wound that prematurely ended the life of her dearly beloved mother, she had summoned Chemos and warned her that their old enemy had

struck...again! Anguish and sorrow engulfed Ndiema and Chepkemei. Chemos had been devastated. She cried and cried and cried. The weariness and occasional torrent of tears soon reduced her weight considerably until Joram scolded her severely.

“The baby needs the milk and I doubt if that endless sulking and tears will be of any good use to either one of you”. He said with vivid irritation in his shaking voice.

“You must stop this endless crying!”

“I just can’t help it, baba Naibei!” “You aren’t trying hard enough!”

“And what makes you so sure I am not?”

“Woman! Do not mistake a short man for a boy! No Elgon Teak ever grows taller than its owner does! I know you just like the back of my palm...!”

“B-u-t, b-u-t, I-I, I...”

“Save your butts until you manage to urinate through a window!” Chemos wept uncontrollably.

He had been silently watching her waste herself away thanks to the endless crying. He was increasingly becoming worried and he felt obliged to step in before it is too late.

“Well, I have been trying my level best but...” She said after wiping her eyes with the back of her hands.

The tears were ever near her eyes. She started crying...again! Joram liked it the least. He hated the sight of a crying woman. He hated their weak spirits. He hated their childish behavior. He hated her...then. He eyed her angrily with the corner of his left eye and called Chepkemei to take away the baby from her. Little Naibei had started crying, seemingly in protest of its father’s stance, and in support of its mother.

“There is no amount of crying which will bring her back; can’t you see that?” The sobbing worsened almost instantaneously!

Inside, he wondered why the gods had given these weaklings such fragile hearts. He left to join Ndiema who was busy mending the roof of the central food store that had started leaking. Alone, she sobbed, the sobs shaking her vehemently.

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Huge chunks of their lands were dotted with the country’s stable food, that is, maize. The mini-depot at Kapsokwony was badly in need of maize which rumor had it that huge chunks of it was later

transferred beyond Bungoma to other dry parts of the country. They never lacked and so did most of their neighbors. Walking was the sole means of transport back and forth Kapsokwony or back and forth Bungoma, dozens of miles away.

For years, the Sabaot minority had continued to suffer insistent, persistent and perennial persecution, mostly emboldened by lack of political will, at the hands of the Bukusu in Bungoma.

Getting a mandatory National Identification Card, then famously known as Kipande, was often a nightmare, and if one was lucky enough, it usually took the mean-looking clerks over a year to straighten the necessary documents.

Clerical and other honorable jobs were by default a precious reserve for the Bukusu at the District Offices whereas the dirty ones that attracted peanuts were reserved for minorities like the Iteso and the Sabaot. For the Iteso, such treatment proved to be a blessing in disguise. Those who had the means were motivated to study and were soon among the first to contribute some of the nation's respectable scholars. Some who had relations across the border in Uganda, retreated to their backyard beyond Kocholia, Chakol, and Adungosi, and were soon representing their constituents at the Ugandan Parliament.

As for the Sabaot, their warlike natural appearance made most of them suitable for military jobs. Some proved exceptionally skilled and versatile and were soon the regional commandants of their respective units. There were those who stood out and outflanked their juniors at an alarming rate to become generals.

Still, thanks to rapid population growth, the Bukusu kept pushing the Sabaot and the Iteso deep into the heartland of their motherlands and taking up some of their villages as a result. With a majority of its population having embraced the white man's economy, it had been easy for most of its population to embrace the white man's education as well.

Politically, the Bukusu were in the forefront and their sons like Elijah Mwangale had cemented good relationship with the Kenyatta's government. In effect, this meant an upper hand as far as major government infrastructural projects were concerned. The minorities in Western Province pushed to the periphery even further and with no one to voice their genuine grievances, the marginalization would continue unabated for years on end.

### Chapter 3

"Don't worry that children never listen to you. Worry that they are always watching you." — *Robert Fulghum, 20th-century American author*

They had played together when they were as young as four years old. In the eyes of their jealous peers, they were a perfect embodiment of the proverbial two jolly good fellows. Young they were, so carefree, without any blemish and so harmless in both deed and thought. So tight had they been it was unthinkable seeing them apart someday for whatever reasons that fate might decree fit.

Just like his older siblings, especially Ndiema, Naibei had an unmistakable pair of long legs and a tiny face ornamented curiously with a set of two big ears. He had a nose of his mother and a sharp brain of his father as far as Joram was concerned. His mother's light skin showed heavily on his young, innocent, and harmless face unlike his siblings who had the dark complexion of their late mother, or so everyone thought.

As a child, he was quieter, exceedingly shy and an ideal embodiment of an introvert in every aspect. Naibei had a way with his small yet creative hands, which could mold anything from the readily available clay soil in their extensive farm that was swampy at one corner. It was not surprising to see a troupe of excited kids trooping to that swampy corner of their farm to seek his expertise in constructing clay toys that ranged from hoes, bows, arrows to traditional walking sticks. Such sheer dexterity often made those around him inclined to adore him. Indeed, he had become such a darling to his peers who openly revered and envied his ingenuity, wit, and of course gifted hands by equal measure.

On the other hand, Chebet had inherited her mother's deep-skin beauty and the chocolate color of her father's skin. She was short, talkative, playful, and adventurous and had a keen eye that first superseded that of her seniors when it comes to sorting out the perennial mess in their compound. Her aptitude was unmatched by her peers and his two older brothers Cheptot and Kipyego. Her

swiftness, catalyzed by her tiny feet, was exceptional. She had the courage of her six-feet, strong and dark skinned father.

As a third born in a fast growing family, it was not arduous to notice the enthusiasm with which she was assuming her responsibility as the firstborn girl. Her industrious hands in particular awed her parents and their neighbors, which in their eyes, made her an ideal suitor in future. Meto was sure his army of laborers would soon be large enough to cultivate and handle the crop in their farm without any difficulties.

Chewangoi village was a mess of sparse dots of round, mud, and grass-thatched huts that ended with sharp sticks pointing to the skies above. In-between adjacent huts were thick bushes inhabited by harmless green snakes, geckos, rats, squirrels and hares (such an environment served as a perfect playground for the duet, and their jolly cohorts... inherently great lovers of the hide and seeks game). Life was so full, wild, and fun. Moreover, when every member of their playful gang was thirsty and worn out, Emia and Teremi Rivers, separated by less than twenty meters of thicket and Elgon Teaks, was often their inevitable solace.

During the weekends, Naibei's older brother and sister would treat him, Helen, Cheptot, Kipyego, and others to a special tour along the horrendous and menacing edges of the slopes that separated the Mount Elgon difficult terrain and the bed of the gigantic Rift Valley. Ndiema was careful to avoid the escarpment down below near the waterfall and whenever they asked why, he always passed on the old lie about ogres and other man-eaters believed to live there. The wild, adventurous, and curious kids fancied the dreadful sightseeing trots.

Two rivers separating Emia and Cheptoror villages are a spectacular phenomenon. Running almost parallel to each other for a dozens of miles through the jungle, the two giant rivers, Emia and Teremi, merge into one mighty river, thanks to the forces of nature, just a few meters away from the only bridge that makes crossing possible between Chewangoi and Cheptoror villages. It was this very same bridge and the rough road cutting through the Chebyuk Land Settlement Schemes that connected this interior core with the outside world.

As one, the now newly formed Teremi River roars down the menacing Kumorong' escarpment forming an equally horrific

waterfall that is home to a permanent rainbow. The sight of the smoothly flowing merged rivers is like that of an over-fed giant python their parents always warns them about every time they would ask for permission to stray deep into the Mount Elgon Forest.

As kids, Chebet and Naibei believed that the waterfall was a second home to a man-eating ogre. Many years later, they would learn that such non-existent myths were only used as a deterrent that helped save lives of many curious and stray kids that were ever eager and keen to get as close as possible to the feet of the waterfall.

Then there were those times when they would convince Ndiema and his peers to take them along during their frequent trips deep into the jungle. The sight of huge, towering, and domineering Elgon Teaks was fascinating to behold. Oh yes...and those juicy wild fruits on almost every next turn in their adventurous walk.

Chebet had a way with flowers and she would pick the beautiful heads of flowery plants, run to where Naibei was, and give some to him with an innocent smile. Naibei would fake a naughty smile coated with a queer grimace in his small, round face then accept the precious gift with an unmistakable tinge of a blush.

In particular, Naibei enjoyed helping his siblings with collecting the firewood as a means of coercing them to reward him with sizable chunks of their mouth-watering collection of wild fruits. His scheme often worked and he would selflessly share the dividends with Chebet on their walk back home. However, it was Cheptot and Kipyego who often ate most of Chebet's share on the pretext that they will pay her back...of course they never paid her back!

Such was the life...they enjoyed every silly and careless game in the woods, bushes and at the banks of Emia and Teremi Rivers.

Cheptot and Kipyego were the naughtiest and occasionally, they will mislead the rest to stray beyond the escarpment. In the end, they will all endure the scolding and thrashing without betraying the cheeky duet.

One day, Kipyego nearly drowned when the raging waters became too much to handle for his tiny and feeble limbs. He tried practicing what they had been seen during their numerous tours at the banks of Emia. Ndiema and his peers would often swim on shallower spots of the river and from their occasional shouts and

laughter, Kipyego and his inexperienced team would know they were really enjoying themselves.

So on the fateful day, he decided to spoil himself on one merry spot that was slightly much deeper for his short and tiny body. At first, it felt great and with the help of the encouraging taunts from his cohorts, he had submerged his head inside the water and tried flapping his small hands in order to steer his frozen body forward.

The water tides proved stronger and the reverse was inevitable. He tried raising his head but the currents were pulling his body with unmatched strength.

His jubilant cheerers sensed danger and shouted for help at once.

“Heeeeeelp! Heeeeeelp!”

They frantically wailed in unison. Fortunately, Ndiema was guiding their herd of cattle down the river at that time. He heard the desperate shouts and rushed at the direction of its source. On seeing a tiny body desperately struggling to march the force of the overwhelming waves in vain, he hurriedly jumped into the river, and swam on that direction. After two frantic minutes, Kipyego was safe.

“What were you even thinking, ah?” He shouted at the little and helpless boy who was trembling both out of fear and cold.

He laid his frozen body down and pressed his chest down hard...a stream of water jetted out of his two tiny nostrils.

“How many times have I warned you, ah?” They could not count.

They were all too afraid to open their mouths. After coughing continuously for close to three minutes, Kipyego was back at his feet again. The sight shocked and terrified his cohorts who had learned a lifetime lesson. As for Kipyego, he counted himself very lucky and swore to be an obedient child.

“It will not happen again, I swear.”

“You better not, Mmh...”

“You have my word.”

“Get lost and do not breathe a word about a thing, okay?”

They all nodded and silently walked away.

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Many waters had run under the bridge. Years had speeded forth with an exaggerated haste that neither Naibei nor Chebet liked

that much. Ndiema had married his secret girlfriend and had two children already. Chepkemei had been married to the youngest son of Joram's childhood friend and they had since relocated to Kipsigon.

The once adorable innocence and purity of heart that had defined their childhood, was now only a part of fond memories they could only crave for and literally do nothing about it. Discreetly, unseen forces had given nuance to such virtues. It seemed such forces had also, without their slightest suspicion; carefully sweep their innocence under the feet of a seemingly fast approaching adulthood.

At an advanced stage of their lives, they would learn it was adolescence for their inner eyes and ears had inevitably been awakened and their beings had literary acquired a new sense of perceiving things around them. Now it was an open struggle to sufficiently abide by the demanding social norms or fulfill the overwhelming desires of their youth and suffer the dire consequences.

Naibei had grown to be a handsome young man though his reserved nature had withered the storms of time and change. For some mysterious reasons, he had grown fond of ogling at Chebet's two blossoming mangoes that kept threatening to tear her favorite blouse apart. The frequent wet dreams had been doing strange things to his young body in the middle of mostly severely erotic dreams.

The communal showers at the river with other boys had been full of all manner of fanciful erotic stories experienced in their dreams. His fears had been constrained thanks to the knowledge that he was not the only one experiencing things at night.

Chebet had become acutely aware of his manly stare and the things it would cause in her teen body. She had started taking good care of her body and avoiding the hungry looks of Naibei. It felt as if he was devouring her and drowning her literary deep into a pool of strange ecstasy every time his stare held for too long.

Her first period had been a nightmare though. The boys sitting on either side of their desk and behind them had noticed the red wetness on her skirt and were loudly whispering about it. She had felt nervous, angry, confused, and humiliated. She had to stay awhile longer at her classroom while her classmates hurriedly rushed outside and headed for their homes. Her cramps had not been that

much severe and she had ignored them thinking it was a temporarily stomach ache that would go away as soon as it had begun.

Once or twice, Cherop had caught her red-handed washing a bundle of clothes that were not part of her extensive family's wardrobe. The strikingly unmistakable bugged t-shirt that was once white, for it had withstood the overwhelming dirt and tough years, with red, black, green and white stripes of the National Flag had raised the alarm.

"Since when did you start doing his clothes? Have you forgotten that it is the calm and silent water that drowns a man? Looking at a king's mouth one would never think he sucked his mother's breast, isn't that so?"

"What clothes, Ma"? She remarked evasively.

"That t-shirt, you think I do not know your brothers' clothes?"

Her voice was sharp and Chebet knew she was now in big trouble.

She had not been raised a liar and the least of all things she could ever dream of doing was lying to her mother. She liked or loved her, whichever you may prefer. Her unmatched strength that countered the manly obsession espoused in her Pa's lifestyle was admirable if not adorable.

"I am just doing it as a sister...you know we could be sister and brother, Ma', or can't we? We have played together, lived together; weed the crops together, plant together, harvest together and I think it's no harm to wash one or two of his clothes", she intoned defensively to the dismay of her mother.

It was not easy to look at her Ma' in the eyes during such circumstances. She avoided her quizzical stare and continued with the washing wearing a sardonic mask on her little and beautiful face...confused, ashamed and at a loss as to how to face her Pa' should Ma' resort to taking things further down that entire stretch. They were young, perhaps too young for anyone to victimize them yet in a way; her mother felt it necessary to act before it is too late.

"Well, one can never tell my daughter...just you be careful. A lion in a distance is a beautiful animal... Ears that do not listen to advice, accompany the head when it is chopped off. The surface of the water is beautiful, but it is no good to sleep on. You know that

those little, dirty and tricky games with boys can transform you into a mother overnight, right?” She emphatically told her.

“Yes, I know Ma’.... but you said the other day that milk and honey have different colors, but they share the same house peacefully!”

“You do not teach the paths of the forest to an old gorilla...Child, instruction in youth is like engraving in stone...when you follow in the path of your mother, you begin walking like her!

The old woman looks after the child to grow its teeth and the young one in turn looks after the old woman when she loses her teeth... When the roots of a tree begin to decay, it spreads death to the branches!”

“Heard you loud and clear, Ma’...I know too well that Ears that do not listen to advice, accompany the head when it is chopped off!”

“That is my girl now talking...you know what child, sometimes, when you show the moon to a child, it sees only your finger! I want you to see the moon, is that okay?”

“Yes, Ma’!”

The Ma’ to Daughter talk had strayed beyond the usual landmark. In the end, it felt good. Cherop was pleased. Her daughter had listened and promised to behave herself.

Chebet knew a lot more than that. During her occasional visits, Chepkemei had told her a lot. She might not have gone to a classroom but she was quick to learn and had silently mastered her body’s reactions as a teenager. The two had come to be best of friends despite the huge gap of years between them. Chepkemei had a lot of respect for the young and promising little girl who had proved to be hardworking and serious with her studies. For such reasons, inside, she had always felt obliged to prepare her.

She had instructed her on what herbs to use prior to her periods and the need to watch for the telltale signs of cramps. She had also instructed her about the most appropriate wrappings she should consider using during the flow, how to manage her moods, which will change drastically as a result and the importance of remembering to take a mandatory shower daily.

The Biology lessons had further proved helpful despite the discomfort it had ushered in their mixed classroom. The shy male teacher had missed his words every now and then and occasionally

cut short by rapturous uproars whenever a naughty pupil asked an equally naughty question. It was not easy to confront a class of young, cultured, and naive kids about sex education especially about the secret parts of their body.

Even in his own Luhya tribe, where aunties were the sole sex educationists, broaching such a sensitive subject was always not a walk in the park. The syllabus demanded they teach and teach he will.

Both the old and the young used low tones or carefully guarded whispers to discuss about things such as sex in this community, which to the many of the mostly foreign teacher's discovery, were just like in other Kalenjin tribes of the Rift Valley. The Sabaot values secrecy thus overtly discussing matters sex is not only regarded as a taboo but also extremely disrespectful.

Sex was, and still is, in the eyes of the community, a precious gift reserved for the dully married. Under no other circumstances is it permissive outside the confines of marriage. Unwanted pregnancies during those golden days were unheard of and virginity was still a jealously guarded treasure cherished by every growing girl. In some instances, appeased bridegrooms would offer extra cows to top up the usual twelve, as a token of appreciation should the bride be found to be a virgin still.

The government had since established a Primary School near Chewangoi Centre and an encouraging number of parents had been keen to enroll their kids there. The school was fast proving to be a great relief for parents whose kids had made it their full time business loitering on the dusty and sometimes muddy streets of their village, playing, hunting down squirrels, or simply idling by. The fees were not that much. As such, it was easy to batter food crops such as beans or maize to get the money the School Headmaster demanded before taking in your child.

Life in Masaek Primary School was exciting despite the cane-wielding teachers whose hobby had since graduated into thrashing the dilapidated bottoms of errand pupils anytime they broke the rules and regulations. Many a time, failing to pronounce the strange words of the foreign languages such as English or Kiswahili or missing a simple arithmetic problem would attract a sharp slap or countless strokes of the cane.

They were reminded routinely about the value of this thing called education. They were told that earning expands great souls; to be lost is to learn the way; by crawling, a child learns to stand; You always learn a lot more when you lose than when you win; that if you close your eyes to facts, you will learn through accidents.... Back at home, they were reminded that one learns how to cut down trees by cutting them down; that money, if you use it, ends; learning, if you use it, increases. They were cautioned still that you always learn a lot more when you lose than when you win, and that by the time the fool has learned the game, the players have dispersed. Learn they had to!

According to the Headmaster, the transfer of brains from the buttocks of pupils up to their mostly empty heads was possible thanks to those generous strokes of the cane. Whether he was dead wrong or out rightly correct, was a matter of time to tell.

Those who were unable to add one plus one to get two and could instead manage to get eleven were usually in big trouble. After receiving a generous dosage of intense, well-calculated thrashing in their bottoms, one would plaster the floor of his or her entire classroom with cow dung singlehandedly after class. For overgrown boys who had delayed to enroll and were too old for their classes, such retributions were humiliating enough to make a good number desert school for good.

However, there was one renowned teacher who had been posted to handle Kiswahili at the upper classes that fast proved to be such a sweet darling to many pupils. Mr. Wanjusi was his famous name. He doubled as the Discipline Master and was never seen walking around with a cane. If you were caught flexing your naughtiness muscles and causing unnecessary trouble, he would call you to his small office and made you sit comfortably in his huge mahogany chair. For thirty or so minutes, he would talk some sense into your thick head until you regret your actions and apologize for your deeds. Many that passed through his hands in that humble office hardly repeated their sins thereafter.

His only folly was his perceived struggling as far as delivering his mandate to the hungry and thirsty students was concerned. His Swahili was terrible and heavily coated with Luhya accent. In fact, he taught some Bukusu words to his pupils as an extension of the Swahili Language and was often overheard boasting

that had it not been for Bantus to interact with Arab Traders, Kiswahili as a Language would never have been sprung forth. Most fascinating was his tiny cardboard neatly inscribed the words:

*“Mwanafunzi huwa na maswali mawili: La kwanza ni la kupoteza wakati na la pili ni la kumjaribu mwalimu wake!”*

Loosely translated into English, it means that a student has only two questions: one is all about wasting time and the other one is testing the teacher (if he or she actually has inkling about what he or she is teaching). This meant even if you did not follow what he was teaching and he had been thoroughly wrong throughout, technically, you had no other way out. You had no power to ask for asking meant either you were planning to waste his valuable time or see if he really knew what he was saying.

Nevertheless, they had to endure all manner of hardships and challenges to get an education for their parents kept insisting it was their ultimate inheritance in days to come and that their future children and their children’s lives literary dependent on it. To reinforce their presumed candid sentiments, they had insistently reminded them of the beautifully erected first ever Mabati House that belonged to their Headmaster who was fondly known as Mr. Motomoto (his whacking was especially hot or so claimed the latecomers in their school).

“If these whacking, tough questions, almost incomprehensible subjects and the endless scolding from these teachers can make one erect such a magnificent house, I will not give up, there shall be no turning back.” Naibei resolutely told Chebet one day.

She had nodded in agreement and secretly resolved to double her effort. They promised to help each other achieve their academic goals. He was enjoying the learning experience and had sworn an oath to his inner being that comes what may; he will read all books and strive to understand each one of them. There was so much to learn. His once tiny world was fast expanding and the more it expands, the more he wanted to know.

Soon, that secret pact had borne tangible results. Naibei and Chebet were a season a part and one class separated them. They were also the best performers in their respective classes. Soon they were the talk of the village and in many respects, perfect role models for

other serious jokers who had no inkling as to why they were in school in the first place.

Joram was secretly happy with his son's willingness to succeed in his academics. Openly, he would praise Naibei and rebuke Ndiema and Chepkemei who had all dropped out of school thanks to the generous canning and ceaseless shouts from the iron-fisted teachers. Truth was the enrolment had come late in their teen years. The new school had no problem taking in overgrown boys and girls but the harsh punishment often exerted in front of an expectant and jubilant crowd of jeering students was too much to bear.

Ndiema had gifted hands and the farm work had been his remedy. He needed no schooling to clear the bushes encroaching on his farm or to plant the seedlings farm. He knew when the right season to plant was around the corner and he could discern the promising clouds from the empty ones that brought no rain. He could tell with sheer certainty which winds preceded the onset of planting season and which did not. He could tell from the smell of the soils in his farm that the dry season was just at its peak. He could tell from the migrating birds that soon all shall be well yet he had not fathomed why one could get two after adding one and one and not eleven.

Although his father was disappointed for his unexpected dropping out of the school, he adored his bravery and hard work.

"You are a real man, son, not like your brother who cries like a useless woman... a real man who fathoms the sanctity of carrying two balls between his thighs!" Pa' once commended him for his extraordinary valour.

He had been nursing an ugly wound on his left foot (he had stepped on a sharp stick while preparing his farm) for close to a month and Joram had roughly rubbed it with bitter juice of herbs one morning. The red open flesh had oozed a mixture of blood and pus. The pain had been overwhelming and although he had sweated profusely, no single drop of tears had come out of his eyes.

"If it were Naibei, he would have wailed and yelled like a bereaved woman, ah...just like a whimpering dog patiently waiting for a bone from its exceedingly stingy master!"

"Well, I suppose so, Pa'..."

"I hate it when men shed their precious tears for nothing. A real man is born to withstand any slap, however much painful, from

this cruel life. We are born to suffer, suffer again and still suffer some more. In the end, fate chokes life out of our useless bodies and endlessly jeers at our relations' pain thereafter."

"You are right, Pa'."

"Look at your mother for instance. She was sinless, generous, forgiving, and kind yet he died an extremely painful death. Whoever bewitched her is undeniably wining and dining merrily, right?"

"I suppose so..."

"Anyway, that is what they call life...a fat, round joke if you ask me, son."

"You are absolutely right, Pa'."

Men, real men, he was often reminded, spoke softly and always carried a big stick on their right hand for if the cockroach wants to rule over the chicken, then it must hire the fox as a bodyguard. Men, real men, he was told, were proud owners of a hearts that lays quietly like limpid water...men with big ears, which listens as the fools speaks.

Men with awed wit capable of weaving proverbs meant for an army of subservient, ignorant and foolish ear! Men who know that Knowledge without wisdom is like water in the sand; men who understand and know too well that in the moment of crisis, the wise build bridges and the foolish build dams...His father was really a man, too, or so Ndiema thought.

Ndiema had witnessed his further suffer. He had watched him endure the heat of the unforgiving and unrepentant sun and the selfish cold that had been the source of his endless sneezing and coughing. He had watched him spending sleepless nights fighting the ugly wheezing in his chest and his futile attempts to end it with all types of herbs and roots. He had watched him sweat incessantly every morning and late in the evening in their farm. Inside, he harbored so much respect for his father. That his father was proud too for his genuine bravery was reason enough for him to follow his example, with or without an education.

On the other hand, Chepkemei had every good quality an ideal homemaker needed to get a husband and it had not taken long for shy young men to start wooing her. She was good-looking, fast with her legs, hardworking, quiet, and submissive. Her trips to the river with her favorite pot had started taking unusually longer time. Intrusive knocks at the tiny window of her hut in the dead of the

night occasionally pierced through the sullen darkness whose ear-splitting silence was audible enough to those who cared to listen.

A lucky young man long known to his parents had with time won over her inexperienced heart. The butterflies down her tummy had been unmistakable. The helpless blushing was natural and she could not help drawing bizarre lines on the ground along the path that led to the river with the big toe of her right foot every time they met and talked. The infamous *I Love You* confession was unnecessary. They just knew they loved each other.

In the end, the twenty-four cows had been too tempting for her parents to resist. What was more; his childhood friend was the one going to be his father-in-law. Joram and Chemos were soon anticipating a grandchild.

None of the duet had managed to go beyond class two and as a last born; it was comforting and reassuring to witness such vigor and enthusiasm for education in his son, Naibei. In no time, Naibei had thus eluded his siblings and ascended the ladder to become the favorite child. To the dismay of the ungrateful school dropouts, this meant special gifts, occasional treats of trips to the sparsely spread relatives, and the excellent opportunity of sharing a table with Joram during his sumptuous meal taking time.

Soon, that secret pact had borne tangible results. Naibei and Chebet were one class apart and the best performers. Soon they were the talk of the village and perfect role models for other serious jokers who had no inkling as to why they were in school in the first place.

Inside, Chebet reminded herself that one day she will give women a voice in their community so they can question some of the most undesirable decisions their fathers and grandfathers were forcing down their submissive throats. No one had the power of questioning the right of her community to subject uncircumcised girls into the 'cut', otherwise proudly referred to as the rite of passage or as their Arts and Craft teacher would jokingly label it Female Genital Beautification in reference to the acronym FGM (Female Genital Mutilation).

Her Religious Education teacher had told her class that the practice was unbiblical and an outright sign of rebellion against God Himself.

“Jesus Christ had been circumcised after eight days according to the Jewish traditions but nowhere in the Bible is it

mentioned that her sisters or other women were ever mutilated.” Madam Sarah declared during one of their afternoon Religious Education Lessons with an exaggerated emphasis on the last word.

The class was dumbfounded and a few naughty boys in the back could be heard murmuring something inaudible but obviously naughty. Later that evening, Chebet looked out for the meaning of the word mutilated in her newly acquired Oxford Pocket Dictionary.

It meant to ‘injure or damage severely, typically so as to disfigure’. Truth is she had never bothered to question her seniors who had endured the disfiguring or mutilation about the aftermath of their horrendous faceoff with the blade. Once or twice, she had planned to find out from Chepkemei who had been so open and kind to her but for some unknown reasons, decided against it.

Her time was fast drawing near. The more it did the more horrified she became. There was no escaping. There was no room whatsoever for protesting. Pa’ and other so-called Clan Elders had decided her fate and their word was irreversible and unquestionable. For years on end, their mothers had been subjected to some of the most vicious, cruel and inhuman treatment. The masculine chauvinistic nature had endlessly suppressed women and rendered them voiceless. Even though her loving Pa’ had been careful enough not to violently abuse their Ma’ in their presence, the subsequent scars had often showed in her visibly worried face. The swellings and injuries were often impossible to conceal.

Occasionally, Ma’ would secretly sent Chebet to as far as beyond Kipsigon to a relative of Chepkemei’s husband known for his prowess or to some widely known traditional herbalists down in Chwele to bring her mother special ointments for the deep and ugly wounds. Cherop would put on a brave face as if nothing ever happened and rarely would she mention such incidences to his friends and relatives for fear of condemnation. Wife beating was a hereditary custom that one had to learn living with as soon as they were ripe enough to be married.

As the eldest daughter with a whooping seven siblings behind her and two above her in close succession, some separated only by one season, Meto had gradually come to revere her daughter. She had proved her worth both in school and at home. He did not have to demand for the respect he deserved from her. She loved and

respected him as any other normal child would her academic credentials notwithstanding.

A friend had openly and repeatedly warned him of allowing her children to enroll in the newly established Learning Centre for fear that they will be spoiled, contaminated and assimilated into the White man's culture. This, he stressed, will come with painful dividends. He had waited for any telltale signs but they never showed in Chebet.

Cherop had increasingly abandoned some of her decision making to this young yet brilliant girl and she was fast fitting onto her massive shoes. She had swift feet and was quick in grasping instructions, however complex they sounded to her ever curious ears, thus the preferable de' facto messenger of the home.

Just like her mother, Chebet was serious when it came to house chores. She swept the open veranda in front of their massive hut that doubled as their bedroom, together with her siblings, cleaned their parent's expansive hut, and replaced the worn-out cow dung that acted as the floor cement with unmatched enthusiasm. Her bent shoulders could only rise while ordering one sibling to do this or that or instructing yet another one to help with the floor plastering that ate a lot of their working time.

In effect, Cherop could salvage more time to spend with her favorite friend, Chemos. They had a lot to talk about including their now grown children whose relationship had started causing jitters and unease among the grownups in the two families. As their culture prohibited openly discussing sexual affairs with and about their growing children, the two could only manage in the end to strike half-hearted unwritten consents that would see them afterwards, implicitly warning the two secret love birds against any undesirable activity that might usher in dishonor.

## Chapter 4

"Principles have no real force except when one is well fed." — *Mark Twain (Samuel Clemens), 19th-century American journalist, author and humorist*

Cheptot, in the company of Kipyego, were caught trying to sneak into a girls' hut one night and the communal thrashing they had received the next day in front of shocked villagers, had been the talk of the village for weeks on end. The duet had been secretly getting cozy with two girls in their neighborhood who shared a hut with others. The nasty escapades that their curious souls were committed to exhausting were fast getting out of hand and it was only a matter of time before someone discovers.

Meto had not been keen enough to notice the wittingly closed room that was empty almost every night. Often, and rather intentionally, the lantern in the boys' bedroom remained flickering all-night long until the kerosene fizzled out. The two cheeky pair would then discreetly sneak out.

Soon they would be old enough to get married yet their method of getting 'future wives' was not just up to the acceptable standards. They too had dropped out of the demanding school and chose instead, to concentrate on the farm work. Meto had been too grateful for he seemed keener to make exceptional farmers out of them rather than see them through a torturous system that would last for an eternity before he could enjoy the proceeds.

That fateful night, their naughty accomplices had forgotten to leave open the only window of their hut. They had no trouble with the dogs for they knew their smell from their many hunting sprees deep in the jungle. The full moon hid under a thick blanket of thick clouds that promised heavy downpours any minute. The usually shiny, tinny, and distant stars were not visible either.

It was their second straight night and they had hoped they would finally do it that night. Carefully, they had tiptoed towards their target almost without breathing. After multiple futile and desperate attempts to force open the seemingly closed window, they

heard shuffles of feet nearby and unthinkingly, Kipyego made for the entrance with the speed of an arrow.

Unfortunately, he stepped over a sleeping dog, which barked loudly and painfully. The noises attracted attention of the half-asleep brothers of their cohorts in a nearby hut who had responded to the barking promptly. The sentinel-eyed boys cornered the two hapless intruders...after countless slaps and kicks, frog matched to their would-be disappointed father-in-law at his central hut.

“What is it this time round, ah? Is it that night runner from that disgraceful family again?”

“It is not him...Just two careless intruders, Pa’.

“Can’t it wait awhile longer?”

“I am afraid it can’t, Pa’.”

A frail and visibly infuriated old man emerged from his hut carrying a rungu. He rubbed his sleepy eyes with his left hand, rather irritably, then his sweaty brow and examined the pair sitting on the dusty floor.

“Oh, who did you say these intruders are?”

“Sons of Meto...”

“Meto, Meto, Meto...you mean the one from Mosop?”

“Yeah, the only one who sold you a bull the other day, Pa’...”

“Oh, I see...and what are they doing here at such ungodly hours, Mmh?”

“They were trying to wake the girls...” The older of his sons volunteered.

It was obviously the only viable reason. He had seen them whistling at his sisters occasionally.

“Oh, I see...how disgraceful!” He eyed the duet angrily as though they were two ticks...inside, he felt like crushing them to death!

“What were you even thinking?” Silence!

“Do you want to marry at this shameful age and season of the year?”

Silence again!

“Couldn’t you wait until sunrise and waylay them on their way to the river to fetch water? Why at midnight of all times, Mmh?”

Ear splitting silence again!

He nearly used his rungu but remembered these were just two adolescent boys and boys would always be boys.

“You two useless rascals! I doubt your father will be very pleased if he gets the news, Mmh...” The old man, dressed only in a tiny animal skin around his wrinkled and wide waist adorned with strings of black and white beads, roared at the two visibly cringed and shocked pair.

“Get lost before I break those little filthy necks of yours! Shameless idiots!”

They walked away silently with their heads bowed down...ashamed, disgraced, disgusted feeling stupid, angry with themselves and afraid of what awaited them the next morning.

Meto was heavy going and an aggressive disciplinarian. They knew he would skin them alive! Once or twice, Meto had hit Kipyego very hard with his walking stick. He had forgotten to drive their herd of cattle down to the river so they could quench their thirst. The wound on his left thigh had not fully healed. It was not always, for one to look at his father’s ever persecuting eyes. He had avoided his stare and prayed: oh gracious, merciful and forgiving heavens, kindly take away this anger from my fathers’ eyes and spare my poor buttocks!

Whack! Whack! Whack! Whack!

The lashes of the stick had sounded in his weary ears for many days and nights thereafter. Here he was...again!

“How long have you been meeting? You ungrateful ingrates! How long?”

The pair had rehearsed the potential questions and possible answers. They knew the truth would only aggravate the matters.

More so, there will be no evidence to prove how far their forbidden passion had strayed. It thus felt safe to lie...for once!

“That night was to be our first ever...” Kipyego volunteered.

It was hard to detect a lie in his sure voice. Inside, he felt angry with himself and again, prayed for the heavens to see them through. The child of a rat is a rat. That is what they had called them...rats! They had forgotten that nights too have eyes, ears and legs!

Meto paraded the two naughty and cheeky boys before the shy girls and their mothers, their siblings and parents. It was a day that took ages to forget for the duet. A few neighbors had heard the

shocking development and were uncomfortably leaning on the posts that served as the fence of their compound to see first-hand what would befall these two instant heroes.

They felt dozens of accusing eyes studying them irritably and impatiently from head to toe. They waited.

“Really? You mean you had not met before, Mmh?” He shifted the direction of his angry look to the girls to seek their confirmation.

“Is that so?”

“Yes...” The chorus came from the timid and horrified girls.

They knew he would not believe them. He never believed them. They were a terrible mess. Inside, they felt useless. They could not stop wondering why their accomplices had betrayed them. Had they remembered to leave that window open, this day would not have come.

This time round, their father was keen to make the merciless thrashing public. Meto had wanted to make an example out of them. He was afraid the trend might trickle and he was obliged as a father to mend the crack before it was too late.

Whack! Whack! Whack! Whack!

The familiar lashing had filled the cold air. The spectators’ gazes went up and down with the rising and falling of the whip simultaneously.

“Uuuuuui! Uuuuuui!”

“Will you repeat again?”

Whack! Whack! Whack!

“Uuuuuui! Uuuuuui!”

“I am asking; will you EVER repeat again?”

“Uuuuuui! Uuuuuui!”

Whack! Whack! Whack!

The whacking and yelling had lasted for close to ten minutes. As for the two, it was forever. No doubt, they will live remembering that day all their miserable years. Whether the others had heeded the sharp warning or not was a matter of time now to tell.

As for Chebet, the resentment against her fierce fathers whose irrevocable commands became a norm rather than the exception increased tenfold! The booming voice was the nauseating source of the seemingly ever-increasing irrefutable law and order in

their house and nobody dared to object to Meto's demands, however uncomfortable they were.

Their dearly beloved mother, just like her, was a child. Voiceless, submissive, unwavering and yet expected to be loving, obedient and caring all the times. She had occasionally complained to Naibei during their secretly guarded meetings on their way home from school and his indifference was even more alarming.

"Is there a problem with that? Every man here beats his wife whenever he feels like... If you walk into a market; do you attend your business with the vendor available or the noise?"

"Mmh, you mean even if one has done absolutely nothing to deserve a beating?"

"Well, that is not exactly my point...I overheard Pa' saying to a friend that an occasional slap or a kick is healthy for any marriage out there to succeed. Having said that, I believe the severity of beating should be based on the nature of sin a woman has committed!"

"How about talking? Honestly, a mature talk can end most of the wrangles and iron massive differences, right?"

"Again, it depends how big-headed and loud-mouthed a woman is, Mmh."

"That is not fair..."

"You think so?" He asked why she even cared after listening to a barrage of all manner of complaints against her Pa'.

Chebet could not believe her ears. English teacher had told her Education was meant to change people's perspectives, make them a little humane, different in a way from those who walk in all-four...perhaps make them a little receptive to other people's tastes, differences, attitudes etc.

"Are you insinuating Ma' has no right to ask? Even to object to what is openly unfair to her?" Helen implored, trying hard to brush away the shock in her eyes.

Naibei had not seen her that much serious...and different, too. Inside, he wondered why such things mattered this much to this beautiful angel.

"Look here, Chebet. That is our culture. You heard the Kiswahili teacher saying the other day that mwacha mila ni mtumwa. We will never run away from our traditions. A man must have his say and way too..."

It was helpless arguing further. She knew too well that He that beats the drum for the mad man to dance is no better than the mad man himself is! He had never won a single argument against Naibei. She complained inside...to herself mostly other than her object of resentment. She knew those wasted years in school would open the door to their freedom however bleak and misty such an eventuality seemed. She muttered something under her breath as she said her goodbyes to her sweetheart.

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In a way, Meto often treated Kipyego and Cheptot miserably. He ignored, though perhaps unknowingly and implicitly, most of their basic needs, and only fed them so they could toil on his farm. They had no proper clothes and their young feet had started developing ugly cracks. They were hard working though their input was disproportionate. Kipyego was cheeky and cunning in contrast to Cheptot who was obedient and a little straightforward.

Kipyego was a giant eater with an insatiable appetite expected in any normal teenager and ironically the laziest. His unspent calories were hardly exploited thanks to his treachery which occasionally earned him stokes of the cane. They sweated and brushed aside the harsh reproaches from their iron-fisted father.

In the sweltering heat of between February and early April, they would endure the endless chores on the farm armed with razor-sharp jembes. Often, their father would correct or reprimand Kipyego for not digging out enough soils from the hard ground.

Once they are through with the preparations and actual planting, they would wait expectantly for the harvesting season.

Drizzles of sweat and tears had characterized their lives; a heavy lid placed squarely on their heads for no good reason at all. Their master had seemingly been keen on heaving with ecstasy at the sight of the dripping sweat other than pitying these wretched rascals.

“This is meant to psyche and motivate you, my young boys...” He would say, and let loose his sharp tongue to sing them a work song in between their tedious work.

Cheptot never complained. He revered and liked his father. He had grown up knowing hard work always pay however long it takes. His brother fancied stuffing excessive niceties down his lazy throat; for him, it was hard to understand why their father had turned them into slaves. He disliked the work at the farm and preferred

wooing girls on their way either to the river or to a neighbor who owned a regorego, a manual maize grains grinder.

Cattle herding, once a fulltime preoccupation that the duo of Kipyego and Cheptot enjoyed and treasured, no longer excited the pair...fortunately, it was now a reserve for their younger brothers, most of who had shown early signs of following in their example of not going to waste their valuable time and energy in school. Their inevitable date with the cut was fast drawing near and such a turnover of events had been a welcomed reprieve. They had ample time to prepare themselves.

They waited anxiously and anticipated for the unknown. It will be their season of resting and eating, a time for ceaseless exaltations after years of unwavering meekness, a time to say goodbye to their selfishly guarded and dark childhood years, and a time to prove to everyone that they were ready to graduate into adulthood.

When the time finally came, just as they had exceeded the expectations of their vocal critiques in their final Primary Examinations, Naibei and Chebet ironically withstood the cut to the dismay of naysayers and natural pessimists. Kipyego had been remarkable. He could not afford faltering obviously for fear of losing face before a devote army of his numerous girlfriends. Cheptot had been commendable too. Well, except for a single drop or two of naughty tears that helplessly rolled down his frozen cheeks when the knife slatted his foreskin. Thank God he had endured the rest of the nightmare without faltering.

It had taken months of preparations and numerous journeys to places once unknown to them. Accompanied by a team of enthusiastic soloists led by Ndiema and Chepkemei alongside an army of merrily chanting young men and women, Naibei, Chebet, Cheptot, and Kipyego had walked all the way to Machewa (almost fifty kilometers away from Chebyuk).

Whenever and wherever they made impromptu stops, joyous relations would welcome them cordially then hand out presents that ranged from goats, sheep, and cows to bulls. Such travels were an important way of reconnecting with distant relations in faraway places. Joram and Meto had defied the vehement criticisms from the community and proceeded with the joint circumcision ceremony.

The tormenting harangue that night had not shaken them. They had danced, wiggled and expertly blew the whistle to every tune with unmatched vigor and enthusiasm. Their uniformed attire, with Naibei wearing a black and white animal skin tailored as a hut on his head, and the sweaty faces thoroughly decorated with white henna were a remarkable sight.

*“Chamatakweii, aaah, Chamatakweii...Naibei wee...aaah, Chamatakweii...”*

*“Chamatakweii, aaah, Chamatakweii...Chebet wee...aaah, Chamatakweii...”*

*“Chamatakweii, aaah, Chamatakweii...Cheptot wee...aaah, Chamatakweii...”*

*“Chamatakweii, aaah, Chamatakweii...Kipyego wee...aaah, Chamatakweii...”*

The songs psyched and urged them on. With every mention of their names, the dancing, jumping, wiggling, and whistling would climax to a heartrending crescendo and so would the wild cheers and ululations from the electrified crowd.

When the very hour came, Naibei did not even blink his eyes as the sharp knife ruthlessly took away his childhood. The red-eyed Kapiindeed equally wearing red from head to toe did not shake him. He had been looking forward to this day, had he not? He had anxiously yearned, craved, and waited for this hour, had he not? He felt the sharply piercing thick threads of pain in his head, as they hovered down towards his heart and as they culminated into a crescendo down in-between his trembling legs.

He dared not wince for such a stupid mistake meant every single villager would forever remember his entire age sate for having disgraced, and brought about disrepute to his or her family. As the knife bravely ate away his manhood, he felt pride surging in his entire being. Now there was no doubting his manly stature and exalted social status. He knew his peers would respect and revere him.

Chebet did not shudder as the old, frail yet energetic physician armed with a razor blade made her bold and calculated grand move in-between her spread thighs to mutilate her fearsomely dejected clitoris. The painstakingly engineered mutilation bathed her entire being with incomprehensible shower of pain and she felt like

dying instantly. She held her tears firmly back and remained motionless as the crowd ululated in unison.

Even more ululations cut through the cold air of that gloomy morning and she could almost hear her Ma' somewhere amidst that wild crowd sigh with relief. The disfigurement had thus baptized her into womanhood and she was now their equal. In the eyes of everyone present, withstanding the cut or mutilation for that matter, had instantaneously transfigured her into a complete woman.

Indeed, she had every right now to walk shoulders high without any fears of being persecuted or tormented. The pain and the scar will last beyond her grave yes, she might bleed to death yes, yet it felt worth the gamble nevertheless. She knew it would be impossible to enjoy sex in her marriage and that it will only be a mere endurance of a torturous ritual solely meant to crowd her compound with kids.

Many had feared they will cry and wail like wimps at the sight of the knife!

They were now full members of their community; with instant promotions and upgraded status. All the beautiful girls now belonged to Kipyego, or so everyone thought!

The gifts were extravagant and generously offered by their givers. They came in all manner of size, type, shape, and color.

Some even came from the least expected givers! Pastor Abel of all people, secretly and separately handed to the initiates expensively wrapped gifts that later turned out to be brand New Copies of the King James Bible Version! The strange gifts were obviously carefully hidden away should their parents who had openly resisted Pastor Abel's ardent persuasions that they turn away from their earthly pleasures and embrace his new all-knowing god discovered. He had preached vehemently against the cut, more so the demonic concoctions, rituals, and rites they habitually and invariably followed.

"Were you not circumcised the same way?" Joram chided him.

"Yes, of course I was...but that was then...I hadn't known the light of Yeso Kriisto."

"Young man, why waste your youth on such useless cabbage?"

“Well, I am ready to pay any price in order to inherit the heavenly kingdom...”

“Then you better not infect our people with your childish and idle talk...it’s like spitting phlegm on the face of your father and mother. I forbid it in my compound, is that clear?”

“Yes, father, I have heard you loud and clear. May peace be upon you!”

“We do not need your peace, son!” With that, he left leaving behind a dejected and frustrated man of God.

For many generations, Yeyin had provided rain for their crops at appropriate seasons and watched over their cattle and other belongings without failure. This mysterious ‘god’ had not been present all their lives yet the same sun and rain had scorched and comforted their land year in, year out respectively without failure.

Joram had heard of the young man and his small army of light-skinned men and women called missionaries. He was not pleased with the manner in which they blamed everybody for what they acrimoniously labeled Satan’s handiwork. What right did they have to judge his community? Why must they call his tribesmen names just because they did not share a belief in the same god? Why must they despise and undermine his entire generation for being true and loyal to their customs and beliefs?

Pastor Abel had been responsible for spreading the shocking news of some newfound god who he said, had the power of giving and taking away life contrary to their belief that death was caused by evil spirits belonging to aggrieved ancestors, curses or the failure by the community to abide by their ancestors’ directives. In the eyes of the hard-liners like Joram, Pastor Abel had angered their ancestors by spreading all such idle, malicious and intoxicating gossip. If their superstitious beliefs were anything to go by, his very own ancestors will not rest until he they have severely punished him! Meto on the contrary welcomed Pastor Abel warmly and promised even to allow his favorite and bright daughter, Chebet, to travel to Cheptais (where Seventh Day Adventist Missionaries had erected a Sabbath School). He had been quick to embrace the new religion, which seemed interesting to the consternation of his peers, some of whom thought he had lost his mind altogether!

Pastor Abel had had to endure constant rejection and condemnation. His determined detractors called him names, cursed

him, spat on his face, turned him away on numerous occasions, and overtly prayed for his death! However, the fact seasons passed by without something strange happening to him, in a way, helped to reinforce his resolve of waging a mighty psychological warfare against his shrewd detractors.

His very own parents whose endless reproaches and warnings had not prevailed in making Kaptunwo cease turning his back on their customs, beliefs and practices, had since disowned him. When he once openly rebuked them for their alleged stubbornness and defiance against the word of God, his Pa' had let go some vulgar words he had ever heard his all life and scolded him for being such a waste! The curse had not hold of course for he had read somewhere in the book of Proverbs that a curse which you do not deserve cannot harm you.

“God have mercy on them, for they do not know what they are doing.” He said, more to himself than to his parents.

He pitied them and wished they would open their hearts for the redemptive teachings, shun and mend their old ways of doing things, receive Jesus Christ as their personal Savior, be baptized and join his newfound family in spreading the good news. God will certainly punish them by sending them hell, where sinners will burn for an eternity!

The Mission brothers and sisters in Cheptais gave a tiny room, which doubled as a bedroom and a study at the same, to Abel. Despite his poverty, he felt so rich at heart. Even Jesus had no home and yet he never lacked. Some of his disciples paid taxes to the Caesar on his behalf and he never gave up his quest to save humankind. He was surrounded by so much kindness, boundless love and though strangers they were all to him; these men and women treated him a lot better than his very own parents had done all his sinful and perpetual years in darkness. The numerous travels to the interior of Mount Elgon were fast bearing tangible fruits and he was more than pleased with himself for giving something back to his lost community.

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One thing that became more prominent after the initiation ceremony was the unmistakable symptoms of the long-hidden love between Naibei and Chebet. As days passed by, it became increasingly obvious that destiny, chance and fate had decided the

two lovebirds were after all meant for each other. Their parents, friends, relatives, and curious neighbors were now part of an army of frantic spectators. They watched with abated breaths as the two flexed the muscles of their young love whose bud had just sprouted out. Inside, the grownups secretly and silently hoped for the best.

Chebet had continuously shined in her academics. As a reward for her outstanding performance and exemplary discipline, the Headmaster as fronted her name as his preferred choice of the head girl during her final year in school. Consequently, Meto and Rael were on the lips of every villager from near and as far away as Chepkitale and Cheptais. Their daughter was now the light that shone brightly and guarded an army of thirsty learners towards a prosperous tomorrow.

However, nearby communities such as the Bukusu of Bungoma and the Iteso of Iteso Land had seemingly long abandoned some of their long-held demeaning, archaic, corrosive and degrading traditions which unfairly undermined the girl child. Two of the ten teachers in the school in their schools were females from the Iteso and Bukusu communities respectively. For years, she had seen them as her perfect mentors. She wanted to be an exceptional pioneer so that future generations would remember her long after she is gone to her maker for having contributed to her community's fist giant leap away from some of their long-held demeaning customs and beliefs.

Such talk meant Chebet was forever under pressure to deliver her level best. She never disappointed them! As for Naibei, he continued being a source of discomfort and perennial scorn directed at his two older siblings. Their open jealousy kept him going for he felt he had a point to prove to them someday. Work hard they did and the dividends were awesome. Helen joined Pastor Abel's tiny flock of sheep. Once or twice, Naibei had offered to accompany her. The over ten miles' journey across difficult terrain back and forth the Sabbath School was exhaustive yet rewarding! The Bible Discussions were educative, informative and Naibei enjoyed every minute of them. It was only a matter of time before he too, joined the sons and daughters of God.

“He selflessly accepted to live among sinful men, endure misery and endless humiliation in the hands of Roman dictatorial and heavy handed regime, then die a painful death for your sake. Is

accepting to follow his teachers too much to ask of you?" Pastor Abel always said.

It was easy to follow the logic and understand the need of being born anew. The new members of the gradually growing flock had emphasized with the humble birth, life, and death of their default savior. Turning their backs against Him was thus regarded the most ungrateful act one can commit. With guilt and humility in their hearts, they served their savior earnestly.

Chebet was christened after a successful attendance of the mandatory baptismal class lessons, given a new name to symbolize a new beginning, introduced formerly to the flock as an acceptable child of God and given new copies of the Church Hymnal and its Swahili version Nyimbo za Kristo. In less than a month later, Naibei followed suit. He too, converted...thus, Chebet became Helen, and Naibei became David. It was now their ultimate duty as Christians to live Christ-like lifestyles: genuinely smile to their sworn enemies, love their haters, pray for their detractors, do good to all, do harm to none, and above all observe the Sabbath. It seemed a near mission impossible yet they all felt they owed to the one who died for them a lot more than the mere lip services their juniors were too willing to offer.

During one Sabbath School Church Service, David asked the head of their Bible Discussion Group why Judas Iscariot, whose betrayal role was prophesied by the Psalmist, King David of Israel, in Psalms 109:6-10, was victimized instead of being rewarded after successfully accomplishing his mission thus fulfilling God's plan of mankind salvation. Pastor Abel did not have an immediate answer and instead, he asked the group members to offer their suggestions from the Bible. The discussion was exceptional and so were the varied answers whose givers seemed even more confused than David himself did.

He had come to fall in love with English, especially so the literature section and specifically the poetry classes. His English teacher had told them that every piece of serious art should observe poetic justice. This kind of justice demands that a villain must or should at any one point in a literary piece, severely punished whereas a hero deserves to be exalted in some way. However, David would learn many years to come that in a real world, the world is more than willing to canonize perpetual evildoers and ironically,

incessantly demonize the few good men and women living among them!

From his understanding, he had likened the story of human salvation from eternal damnation to a drama...a drama that was successful partly thanks to Judas Iscariot's role. He was supposed to betray Jesus Christ and he did exactly that! Because of his role, humanity was thus bestowed upon it redemption and we were given a second chance and reconnected to God! To victimize him and demonize his action of ending his own life, in a way, as David saw fit, is in itself a contradiction! Truth was he was near both villain and protagonist.

Later that day, Pastor Abel requested to have a little chat with him. The talk was a one on one discussion about the role of Judas Iscariot in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. After a lengthy open-minded question-answer and Bible Verses Reading, he rested his case. Simply put, by ending his life, Judas Iscariot succumbed into the wrath of his own guilt and out of his own volition, violated one of the most vital commandments of God: Though Shall Not Kill (Exodus 20:13, KJV).

Even after joining Secondary Schools, Helen ended up in Alliance Girls' whereas David eventually joined Nakuru High School, the two kept going to church and remained steadfast in their faith. The education system had since changed to 7-4-2-3 (after the collapse of East Africa Community back in 1977), and there were rumors that yet another committee was in the process of being established to introduce even further changes. After their CPE (Certificate of Primary Education), they were going to spend four good years before eventually sitting for their KCE (Kenya Certificate of Education) and probably KACE (Kenya Advanced Certificate of Education).

By the time David was joining secondary school, the ministry of education had announced new changes. However, the new sweeping changes were not going to affect his group. His predecessors will now have to go through the newly established 8-4-4 system. The Kenya Science Technical College and the Kenya Institute of Education, with the help of usually inexperienced expatriates, was still experimenting with the system of education.

Sad thing was the government still placed so much trust on a white in the expense of well-educated returnees who were so much

eager to give back to their fatherland and people. For those who were lucky to proceed to university, the government, through University Students Loans Scheme, was offering them loans occasionally mistaken for grants. The future SEEMED swollen with tangible promises and it was only a matter of time before their tired feet enjoyed some proper rest.

## Chapter 5

"Expecting the world to treat you fairly because you are a good person is a little like expecting the bull not to attack you because you are a vegetarian." — *Dennis Wholey, 20th/21st-century self-help author and journalist*

Repeatedly, Helen remembered those eternal words: I will never let you down! David had meant every word. Then, his heart had known real love. He had felt loved. Helen knew it, too. She had also loved him, had given out the whole of her innocent heart, the whole of her inner self...and her body also had been entirely owned by him!

They had meant a lot to each other. Their dreams had seen them through a labyrinth of hardships and little laughter. Life had turned out to be an awesome teacher... it had disciplined and straightened them as well.

That was many years ago. Seasons had overshadowed all the bliss and ecstasy that had been enshrined in their dark memories for many a chilly night and many an awe-inspiring day indeed! Her many past mistakes had made her believe that experience is the greatest teacher of fools...and her daughter was no fool. Was she?

Cherop had grown fond of rejuvenating that very pleasant past, though with mixed feelings, many a times. She had reminded her daughter of their childhood adventures together with David and the numerous reprimands she had had to blurt out. How life can change!

Just like almost every other woman, Chemos, her long-time neighbor included, she had been through hell. Their husbands married younger wives and as such, they inevitably found themselves confined mainly to the kitchen. Their co-wives had since graduated into childbearing machines. They had not seen it coming. How could they be so blind? How could they be so naive? Without a word, they had both resigned to their fates.

Meto had been partially indifferent as far as the pregnancy was concerned. He was, however, more bothered with the fact that such an ugly scar would put a stain on his celebrity status. He was

also much more afraid that some of his sly friends would undoubtedly have enough reasons to scold and ridicule him. Had they not warned him against embracing the white man's education? Did they not warn him that there would be a hefty price to pay? The chaotic and tumultuous emotions reeling in her daughter's mind was none of his business. He cared about himself and no one else!

"Chebet, surely you couldn't wait until you were done with your High School?" He repeatedly asked with overt sarcasm in his voice.

"What will people say? A child of a rat is a rat! Is that not what they will hiss and whisper loudly for the whole mountain to know? Have I not raised you properly? Given you, all you needed? Clothed, fed and see you through your school life?"

"Yes, you have...I am sorry, Pa'."

"Sorry? You are not! Otherwise, you would not have allowed yourself to fall into such a trap, Mmh. Child, the young bird does not crow until it hears the old ones...what type of an example are you setting up for your siblings? I have always told you that if you carry the egg basket do not, dance, isn't that so?"

"It just happened..."

"Nothing ever 'just happen', child...nothing! One who bathes willingly with cold water does not feel the cold! Even the lion, the king of the forest, protects himself against flies...I expected you to do a lot much better!"

"But...but..."

"Save your butts, you ungrateful child! Did we not warn you? You promised to behave yourself and now this, Mmh."

"I promised, yes..."

She was angry, dejected, confused, and ashamed of herself. She felt hapless. She hated herself. She hated David. She hated her father. She hated the food, the angry stares from her curious siblings, and the quizzical stares of nosy neighbors. She hated the everlasting nauseas every morning. She hated the foreign thing that was rapidly growing in her womb. How could she be so stupid? How could he be so callous? How could they be so cruel?

It was hard, impossible maybe, to understand why that bastard (for a wild rumor had reached his ever-alert ear that David was an undesirable seed allegedly fathered by their area chief and not his long-time poor friend, Joram) could not hold still his venom

awhile longer. Helen had been the pride of his life. She had singlehandedly helped built his now towering name and was ironically now in the middle of tearing it apart...again, singlehandedly. Life was not being fair to him.

The cordial and warm friendship that once existed between Chemos and Cherop was unusually colder and sour than fermented Mursik. None of them was to blame yes, yet the blame had to be passed on to someone nonetheless. Joram and Meto had miraculously teamed up against the women and during their drinking sprees in the chang'aa and busaa clubs; they could loudly admonish their wives for allegedly being so 'irresponsible' occasionally.

"These women are ever busy gossiping and murdering their precious time over a great deal of nothing when they are supposed to be talking to our children and teaching them some robes of survival...look what shame they have now brought to our very doorsteps." Joram would thunder with a wry smile on his excited face.

"Women will always be women...tiny, whiny, little whimpering maggots!" Meto will thunder back with a sneer.

"Gossiping is a disease they are all born with!"

"Every woman is beautiful until she speaks..."

"Worse, no amount of beating can make a woman stop gossiping."

"Well, that is an ugly truth we must learn living with brother..."

Since time immemorial, it was the responsibility of a woman to bring up a child before adolescence kicks in. It was their default duty to teach their children, especially the girls, all the necessary skills and good behaviors required of them. They would teach them how to take a bath, how to handle the hoe (for the boys mostly), how to cook light meals, how to balance the water pots on their heads (for the girls), how to relate with their peers, relatives, friends, and so on and so forth.

Once they reach their puberty, girls become women's sole responsibility. As for the boys, their senior brothers, and occasionally their fathers, take over and start teaching them how to handle and prepare bows and arrows, what animals to hunt and kill, what type of wild fruits ought not be eaten and those that are okay to eat and so on and so forth.

Ironically, a man always took the credit for all the niceties characterized by a child's successful growth: his or her triumphs, uprightness, obedience, generosity, and kindness and so on and so forth. As for the dark dots here and there, their mothers naturally 'claimed' such credits.

It will take ages behind scholars and books for a few to marshal enough 'feminine muscles' to wrestle the ever unfavorable masculine decisions or so it seemed. Helen could not stop thinking.

However, time had always come to her inevitably untimely rescue; it had occasionally implanted a lesson in her life. It had opened her third eye and ear. Courtesy of time, she had realized the need to get used to nursing a second thought. She had both the scars and every adornment of fate's persistent dirt, filth, and treachery.

She had come to know that love, with its many versions of interpretations and experiences, and the fact that it was the most misunderstood human emotion, was such a long journey ornamented with thorns and roses as well. Yet sometimes, the roses came with semi-hidden thorns. Such was an institution that could not be evaded and should not be celebrated at the same time; a part of the hard school of life whose graduates are hardly enthusiastic in their thereafter lives!

After the long journey, even a straw felt heavy under Helen's might... that the love of a woman and a bottle of wine are sweet for a season and last for a time; was not debatable any more. She was embracing the naked truth! Yes, she was carrying a heart in her chest and not a stone yet that same stupid, stupid heart had been the epicenter of her ceaseless woes or so it seemed.

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It was nearing three months now. Soon it will be the talk of the whole village. They will say all sorts of nasty things and make sure she was the most uncomfortable mortal in the world. She was careful enough to avoid Pastor Abel and some of their neighbors whom she had coerced to join the long and supposedly hard journey to heaven.

Those who had liked the least her speedy ascend academically would occasionally gossip within her earshot and wonder why she had to make a fool out of herself all those years instead of getting married and raising up a family.

“So this is the hard work they were claiming she was doing, eh.” A neighbor’s daughter who had had to bare her parents’ perennial rebukes for deserting school, scoffed loudly.

“Ah, sure it seems like it...what a bright, principled, obedient and an exceptional role model indeed, Mmh...” Her cohort retorted with a shy giggle and a not-so-kind sneer.

“Or did she caught it through the freely flowing government ‘milk and honey’ I hear their school heads usually baptize them with, eh?” Yet another cohort jeered.

Their once formidable repugnance and unshakeable abhorrence was now replaced with a rejuvenated wave of blithe and dexterity. It was hard to imagine why a whole neighborhood should contemplate marshaling their hostility muscles against one harmless mortal. She did not remember harboring bad blood and strife against anyone. She had not treated them differently despite her numerous travels and exceptional academic credentials.

Why? Why? Why?

It was hard to make sense of the drama that she suddenly found herself playing a leading role as the main antagonist. To her dismay, her critiques had convicted her in the public court thus declaring her a villain. Inside, she knew the punishment was inevitable and she braced herself for a tough battle ahead.

Her two younger siblings had fought their battles well despite their numerous shortcomings and the ever-increasing public scorn. It was comforting for Helen to note that they had instead resorted to working even harder to the displeasure of their detractors. It felt good also to know that not everyone blamed her for what was practically beyond her human control.

It had been her first time ever! She had endured the sweet-pain fully aware that anything could happen. She loved him and so did he and that was the most important thing.

“Crying over spilled water won’t help, child.” Ma’ reminded her one evening after enduring a barrage of insults from Meto.

“It might be a taboo yes yet we must not make it seem a death sentence for you, Chebet...” Her motherly voice soothed and comforted her a lot. It had helped assuage the froth of anger, bitterness, and frustration that had refused to let go of her being.

“You are just like your mother, you cheap cabbage!” Pa’ shouted at her that fateful evening. It was hard to understand why her

mother's name was forever being dragged into a mess she had nothing to do with. She hated her father for this and although there were times when she felt it necessary to defend her mother, it was just impossible to stand up to Meto. She had nursed innumerable wounds he had inflicted on her mother and she feared he would not hesitate striking her should she dare.

She was like her mother in many ways. She was respectful, hardworking and knew how well to relate with both her seniors and juniors. Unlike her mother, she had been keen to get an education and had had an indispensable influence on not only her two younger siblings, but also the entire neighborhood. Girls' population at her former Primary School had substantially increased and many were now following her example.

Before her pregnancy, Mr. Wanjusi, with greyness fast encroaching on his kinky hair and visibly struggling with baldness, would occasionally invite her to address the students at the school.

"You made it against all the odds...tell them.... Wisdom is like a baobab tree; no one individual can embrace it; the one who loves an unsightly person is the one who makes him beautiful; an army of sheep led by a lion can defeat an army of lions led by a sheep...you can help them make it, right? Just like you did, my little bright daughter, Mmh!"

"Yes, Sir! Thank you for giving me this chance...I must tell them that ears that do not listen to advice, accompany the head when it is chopped off.... They must know that by crawling, a child learns to stand; I have to tell them that it is a bad child who does not take advice; they will have to remember that one cannot both feast and become rich; labor they must..."

She passionately shared her icy tales and the countless hurdles she had had to endure to make it. She reminded them how it mattered and of the great rewards that awaited those who will not give up on the way. She told them the community was badly in need of future teachers, doctors, lawyers, and engineers.

She shared stories about her numerous adventures and travels in places she had once only read about in the books. She spoke of a distant, mighty, and beautiful city with skyscrapers, lights throughout the night and many vehicles...a city that many years back, in the late 1890s before the construction of the railway station, according to her history book, was a swampy area with sprawling

papyrus and frequented by the Maasai with their herds of cattle. She spoke of the parks she had been to, of her trips to the Voice of Kenya offices and her shaking hands with Leonard Mambo Mbotela (then a popular radio presenter they were used to hearing on the wooden transistor radio Mr. Wanjusi allowed his favorite students to listen to occasionally).

They had listened with amazement. Many of the students secretly fantasized a tomorrow in line with her sweet stories. Those who were not sure why their parents were encouraging them to read, in a way, found a course for achieving a higher purpose. She had felt gratified. The hopeful young faces that now looked firmly up to her pleased her.

Then the pregnancy came and all that had literally Gone with the Wind. Mr. Wanjusi had heard and so had others in the school.

She had lost face faster than she had anticipated and she could not stop imagining what everyone was thinking.

She knew her image would be defaced completely. The fate of her studies was now hanging menacingly on the jaws of a destiny she was not privy to its secret contents. She knew very well, there was no way they would accepted her back. Her dreams to become a lawyer someday and perhaps help liberate her community, especially the women, from the unforgiving jaws of ignorance, archaic, demeaning and degrading traditions that was threatening to sink them even deeper into oblivion, was now practically halted; maybe for good.

Nothing in the world had prepared her for the premature termination. Her once amiable shadow now dangerously loomed behind a massive cloud of doubt. Her unshakeable tenets were shattered and so were her immense dreams. The hell had broken loose and things had fallen apart.

The three months in Alliance School during her first term in her third year had been rather painful. Painful because deep within her, she was sure she will miss her periods. Thanks to love, she had obligingly handed over the only dignity this male-dominated world had allowed her to keep. Thanks to love, she had allowed David to take away, for good, her innocence and purity. Thanks to love, she was soon to become a mother! Thanks to love, she was soon to become an object of scorn, ridicule, and perhaps apprehension.

Her virginity had been reason enough to walk shoulders high and lecture some of her seniors who had lost theirs, about this or that. That was no more. What will her siblings say? How will they treat her? Will God ever forgive her? Will her parents understand? Will she get back her life someday? Such not-so-kind questions had no refreshing answers either, and were enough to make her feel suicidal occasionally. In the end, she resented the thought of taking her own life and decided to withstand the raging storm wholeheartedly.

The matron was a sentinel and had proved everybody wrong by asserting that she was expectant. She knew it was true yet she wanted everybody to believe otherwise. She had tried in vain convincing herself that it was all a dream that will go away as soon as she is fully awakened from her self-induced stupor.

During her closely guarded trips to the shared bathroom, she had noticed the fullness of her breasts. For unknown reasons, they felt a lot heavier than usual. They were also increasingly tender and a little softer. It had been difficult staying fully awake during the routine morning and evening preps thanks to an unexplained and overwhelming wave of fatigue.

Her appetite was exceedingly shifty and not as sharp as before. To her astonishment, she had found herself helplessly turning up her increasingly curious nose to certain foods she once detested. Miraculously, some of her favorite meals no longer appealed to her.

The nausea had given way and the vomiting had gradually become severe. She had started adding weight and her trim figure was fast adding some meat as a result. Her cubicle mates had asserted that every single symptom they had read about from their biology book was showing in her and she did not like the sound of it a tiny, whiny, little bit.

Friends had sounded optimistic by trying to encourage her that it could be the diet or her anxiety that might have delayed her periods. When a month and a half passed on without any slightest signs of cramps, her fears for the worst became real. She had eventually resolved to write to warn David and prepare him for the worst too! The reply never came and she consoled her poor self that perhaps he had not received the letter.

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She had hoped against all odds that after Secondary School, Matuga then Makerere University or even the University of Nairobi would be her next stop. Nothing in the world had prepared her for the present discomfort – an unnecessary burden that had automatically ushered in disquiet and guilt she did not deserve. She never got any feedback for the subsequent letters that she frighteningly wrote to him. There was no way he could not have received the news of her missing periods or the imminent pregnancy.

David was sure all the while that it had happened. During that fateful night in Nakuru Town, his soul had felt the resounding confirmation that conception had occurred. There was no mistaking the strange feeling when their two needy, expectant, yearning, and curious beings shortly merged into one in their quest to quench the long overdue thirst for their love. They had waited for that glorious day for too long a time. Inside, they both knew they were wrong. It was against all the laws, rules, and regulations yet they could not just help it.

After an eternal barrage of convincing words, promises and assurances, Helen had agreed to spend a night in Nakuru. The Kenya Bus usually made a stop at its station there and it was possible to purchase yet another Bus Ticket from Nakuru to Nairobi. David had offered some of his pocket money to compensate for the unnecessary discomfort and the inevitable loss of the Bust Fare from Nakuru to Nairobi, which the Conductor declined to refund.

“Nobody will ever found out...”

“How can you be so sure, Mmh?”

“Unless you are planning on telling, how else will anyone ever know my dear?”

“I am not just ready... A bad name is like a stigma...I do not want to soil my good name!”

“No one is ever ready...there is no need to be ready either, isn't that so?”, David coerced with a wicked smile on his face. Inside, he was fully aware that wood already touched by fire is not hard to set alight.

“But what if...”

“You mean what if we did it? Is that what you are trying to say?”

“No... Stop that already!”

“That was not even on my mind...I won’t force you. I just want us to be together, Mmh.”

“That is very kind of you, dear.”

“You can say that again...”

“But I will be late for school, dear...”

“Yes, sure you will...just for one extra day.”

“It is the only chance we have; don’t you see that?”

“What if it happens? Sharing a room and perhaps a bed might be tricky.”

“What do you mean?”

“As much as you are not planning on anything fishy, anything is possible dear...”

“Not with me...I think I am different...”

“I am not sure about my periods and that’s why I am planning to disappoint you should things stray beyond...”

“Well, trust me nothing will happen!”

“Are you sure?”

“As sure as hell...” “Well, let’s hope so...”

Together, they anxiously waited for the night that would forever change their lives in some unalterable ways. A night that instantaneously transformed them into disgraceful children, a night that made them parents and a source of endless scorn for many a day and a night afterwards.

The tiny room with one bedroom and the warm bed was too tempting. When it was too much, they had snuggled closer to each other and started touching their hands. This was the prime moment they had all waited their lives, a time to be together...all alone, without the scornful glare of their peers, siblings, and stingy parents.

It had felt great yes yet some part of him could not bear the thought of becoming a father that soon. He had felt the sharp and unmistakable feeling of guilt deep within his being. He wanted to tell yet he felt unsure, unwilling perhaps to break the ice that much early. He was young and had a long way still to go and so was she. That could wait.

The subsequent confusion, anger, and overwhelming emotions had been too much to bear. Soon, it will reflect in his results and then everybody will start pestering him with questions. Inside, he felt like wanting to die as soon as last year! He was now in his final year. Secretly, he was nursing the prospects of eventually

joining the adjacent form 5 and 6 classes. His grades were desirable and he had deservedly climbed the ladder to join the prestigious contingent of the Best 20 in his class.

The End of the First Term Exams was around the corner and the thought of going home and finally meeting with Helen, her parents, his parents, Pastor Abel, and his peers was almost inconceivable, impossible even to contemplate imagining. It was nauseating, horrendous and it made him shudder with enormous fear...the fear of the unknown yet inevitable all the same.

How could he explain to her that he had wanted to reply to her letters yet had simply lacked the courage and could not even find the appropriate words in the first place? How could he explain to her that he knew the minute they did it that night that nothing again would ever be the same? Was she going to understand the basis of his awkward dilemma and the ensuing confusion?

Was she going to believe him? Will she ever forgive him? What about that formidable trust they had had for years for each other, will it be business as usual again? He could not help wondering whether his excuses were reasons enough to wade off any imminent suspicions from his childhood sweetheart.

He knew he was wrong yet he just could not know how to right all those wrongs within such a short notice and amid all that confusion. He knew he should have done better and that in spite of the weight of the news, Helen deserved to know. Inside, he felt a terrible fear and a sharp pain. The guilt occasionally brought tears in his eyes and he too, just like Helen, asked why? Why? Why? Why?

He had never, before in his life, felt certain about anything than the imminent pregnancy of the only thing that had mattered the most for all his miserable years in this world. He had been anticipating the news and had read all the frantically drafted letters Helen had sent him.

David never made it home during that April Vacation of 1985. Lucky for him, a distant relative working with Kenya Farmers Association (KFA) in Nakuru Town, then living in Bondeni Estate, had offered to take him in for the holiday. Later, he would learn that it was none other than his father who had made prior arrangements with this 'timely savoir' to postpone his nightmare back at home awhile longer. The reprieve had been God-sent and had it not been

for his now disturbingly vivid symptoms of asthma, the stay would have been thoroughly enjoyable.

The cold breeze that occasionally swept over Nakuru Town and its suburbs, Bondeni Estate included, was never good for his asthmatic condition. The sneezing was ceaseless, his nights uncomfortable and he felt sick day in day out. His host was almost growing tired of furnishing him with new handkerchiefs and coercing him every now and then, upon noticing his uneasiness at the sight of the medicine, to swallow the recommended dosage of Franols.

Apparently, David had developed an exaggerated dislike for medicine and had thus carefully avoided the Franols the School Nurse had given him. Once or twice, the whizzing in his chest had suffocated him and his classmates had rushed him to the mini-hospital for urgent treatment. His Pa' had promised him an Inhaler and had it not been for the current state of affairs, he would have been a proud owner of one by then.

Someone had told him it was the inevitable shift and the now new climate that was largely to blame for the awakening of the disease that had miraculously chosen him of all Joram's seventeen desirable seeds! As a child, he had had none of these sneezing bouts or the ugly whizzing sound in his chest. He had been wild, carefree, and healthy like his older siblings. Why it chose to surface at such a stage of his life, only God knew. Inside, he hoped for the best.

Even with the generously offered encouragements from his relative, David had to struggle to find his feet again. It was impossible to concentrate on the takeaway assignments, revision books that his new host had bought for him from the bookshop and the literature set books they were analyzing for that year. Simply put, his life had abruptly come to a standstill.

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David, the very first man in her life; had sounded very promising. The heaven he had emphatically promised her had ironically turned into a bloody hell. Moreover, it was there to stay. The more she tried to forget, the more it seemed lively and present in her life. Everyone told her it will be healthy should she learn living with the ugly reality wholeheartedly...and it seemed she had no much choice.

She had repeatedly promised herself never to mention the name David again. The repercussion had been an enormous hatred whose deep roots stretched beyond the bone marrow. Ironically, she redirected a huge proportion of this venom to none other than herself! Sometimes it felt stupid to hate an image she would have wished it never existed in her life in the first place, yet it seemed it were always present in her troubled life; his shadow freely roamed and hovered in her now permanently dark dungeon.

Then, Helen had given herself to him – body, heart, and soul.

She had ceased reasoning with her mind... it was her fragile, vulnerable and docile heart that was doing all the thinking for her. That genuine feeling, they had had for each other was all that mattered then. Their love was her new home; a permanent abode whose warm embrace and comforting hands offered incomparable solace to her anxious, curious yet vulnerable heart.

There was hardly a feeling that perhaps one day they will go separate ways. Nothing had prepared them for the impromptu foul wind that blew off their much awaited and they lived happily thereafter chorus. The sly slap of the whirlwind thrashed their hearts without much care, without warning.

He had insulted her honesty and betrayed their love. He had used her like a worthless role of a tissue paper to satisfy his humongous ego. Helen felt dumb, useless, and cheap. She fought to compose herself. There was no doubt that the very heart of her solid tenet was being severely shattered inch by inch.

She was afraid nothing would save her once strong will from imminent destruction. However, one thing was certain; despite the disdain for her actions that culminated into the present drama; it had not been easy to bring her poor self to believe that he was gone for good. It was horrible to nurse the thought of a future without David.

She could not simply believe that David, her childhood darling, no longer loved her thus his mysterious absence during that April Vacation and his ear-splitting silence. Secretly, she had cried and cried and cried until there were no more tears left in her weary eyes. The pain and bitterness had eaten a huge chunk of meat out of her body and her dearly beloved Ma' could not help noticing the rapidly emaciating figure. Once or twice, she shouted at her warning that if she will not improve her stress managerial skills, the thing she was carrying in her tummy will die prematurely then kill her as well.

The respected white Doctor at the newly established Missionary Hospital in Kopsiro had echoed Cherop's sentiments and instructed her to mind her health and that of the baby. It was during such visits to the Missionary Hospital that Helen stomach ulcers diagnosis returned positive results.

"How fast does it kill?" She asked with a slightly wry smile on her sardonic face.

"If you continue doing the thinking with that apparent wave of enthusiasm, trust me it will harm you..." A vividly perplexed Doctor patiently explained to her that it heavily relied on her power to control her volley of emotions.

The White Doctor fell short of declaring that her seemingly untenable emotions will send her to her grave should she refuse to change for the better. Instead, he had emphatically written down a long list of undesirable food, which to her horror included her favorite food! How will she survive without Mursik? Ma' had been kind enough to reserve a whole gourd of fermented milk that was supposed to last her a whole week. The fresh milk was not that bad but her stomach did not hold much of it.

About fruits containing many acids such as lemons and raw oranges, she had no trouble there. Bananas were in plenty in their garden and chewing of raw carrots, which served as a crucial source of vitamins in their diet, preceded most of their main meals.

She decided against sharing this news with anyone and silently promised herself that change she had to no matter the cost. The thorny path, just as Ma' used to say many years back when she was barely ten, had presented itself in its usual fashion, untimely and unwelcome. Its effects were very distant from any known safety. The sudden twist of events had long crushed her hopes. There was nothing more left to dream about, let alone a future shared with a shrewd and a subtle serpent like David.

Then, David had showered her with all nice words. He had called her a flower- a beautiful rose with a fresh and a sweet smell. She had believed it. Most important, she believed him.

"You are a fresh rose Helen; do you know that?" He used to say.

What a sweet liar! She never knew it would hurt one day. She had been green –naïve, inexperienced, ignorant perhaps and stupid

too. It was not easy to forgive one for being that much ignorant and exuding helpless buffoonery with such exceptionality.

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Lower back pains had been persistent and so had the abdominal pain. Her bowels were occasionally loose and once or twice, she had had to walk in the middle of the night all the way to the Mission Hospital after experiencing broken waters (the rupturing of membranes usually with a gush or a trickle of amniotic fluid). She was exceedingly restless, moody and her once deep-sleep occasionally disrupted for unknown reasons.

Months were fast running away and soon; it will be her ninth.

Days and nights of loneliness and abandonment had overshadowed all the bliss and ecstasy that had been enshrined in their sweet memories for years. Funny though, today this same David was an object of apprehension...indeed, a source of excruciating pain. The future she had longed to embrace happily had all been shattered. It was now far, far away from reality. It was gone...gone for good.

Irregular painful contractions down her tummy were the order of the day. The mucus plug that blocked her cervix announced the onset of the labor pains. She announced the good news and braced for tougher days and nights again.

Once the baby's head dropped in the expected place, she was able to eat a lot more, breath even deeper though her trips to the nearby bush to wee became even more frequent. Her mood swings became even severe and so did the contractions and vaginal discharge (with more mucus than before). Occasionally, she will feel a strong urge of ushering some order in their home and would spend hours cleaning their compound or tidying up things in her tiny hut.

Every hour, every minute that the baby kicked at its every attempt to turn, she remembered the donor of that seed responsible for her present discomfort and silently cursed him. Every single receding minute was an involuntary emotional fight to try to forget him. Yet as days went by, the harder it became to fight. All the same, she was grateful ... grateful now that Ma's resolve to stand by her side had won over other hard-liners. Mother had been very loving.

She had defended her whenever Pa' breathed fire. Deep within her, she knew not all was lost. It was not over yet. It was not

ripe enough to part ways with her childhood dreams. Now she had to rely on time— the greatest healer at hand.

Her exaggerated vulnerability was to blame for her present chaotic life, or was it not? The man had made her feel as if she was literally on top of the world. She had felt the best thing since sliced bread! The lifetime poem had set the ball rolling. The sweet words had cultivated a thirst nothing could ever quench. It had rekindled the passion in her young heart and incidentally blindfolded her whole being. The precious poem was hidden somewhere no one would ever reach. It read:

*“My Sweet Helena...*

*I opened up to you, for the worse or better,*

*Poor me I could not tell, what will you really think, Will you love Helena?*

*Or hate me forever? That I could not guess*

*What I felt of you, the secret love for you,*

*I was filled with fear, no one will ever know, How much I missed you,*

*And the secret tears, That I ever shed*

*The whole of me for you, the enormous heart for you, My hopes and my dreams, to be by your side,*

*Every minute with you, So you will not cry again, For never can you tell*

*Hardly a feeling, a foul wind our way,*

*And when it comes, we will have to endure, Never ever, forget,*

*Genuine love for you, That I cannot tell.”*

Jealous friends and enemies alike treated her like a queen in their dormitory that glorious day. Her shy, cackling, giggling, and sniggering friends had clung on her as a cat would cling to her kittens. They sighed with every read syllable and held high their short breaths with exaggerated bliss.

Helen felt great. She felt adorable. It felt wonderful. It was exciting. Moreover, the treat from her jealous friends was exquisite, electrifying and above all, amazing. She condoned with the

aggressiveness of grapevine crusaders who implicitly made her name famous in the entire school. It was a good thing to attract bad eyes and occasionally, name-calling from others. It was the only way to prove she was likable and what is more, lovable too. She felt loved. Every other time she read the poem, long after prematurely ending the party with her dorm mates; the more she had loved David. Every single sigh she would silently let out was like a step beside some powerful gods.

That was during her very first week at the prestigious girls' school. Yes, they had secretly harbored feelings for each other since their hide and seek escapades many years back but that poem was the turning point. It literally shifted things a notch up higher overnight and thus transfigured the duet into a formidable pair. With all her might, she learnt how to love best.

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The first wound was nearly healing. Her pregnancy was at its critical ninth month and David, as she had feared, had not showed up for his August vacation. Instead, he had written... a fat, white envelope had miraculously materialized via Masaek Primary School Postal Address and she had been quick to recognize the handwriting. She had no energy left to pry its contents for fear of soiling her greatly improved moods and awakening the severe, sharp, and often punishing pangs of the ulcer in her stomach.

One evening, after struggling with her mixed convictions, she finally slithered the contents of the unusually fat envelop to her usual secret store and tried forgetting about its very existence for the next many days in vain.

Wilson, David's host, had married and his better half had not been that much okay with his hanging around. She effortlessly and repeatedly strived to make David aware of her ill intentions and although he noticed this with a broken heart, he patiently played dumb and ignored her sharp, wagging, and venomous tongue. His usual rightful share of Ugali reduced in size considerably for reasons not divulged to him beforehand and it seemed she was keen on starving him to death! Fried rice served with beans, Ndengu or deep fried fish, was fast displacing Ugali and his other favorite delicacies. His teen body needed enough food for the ever-multiplying cells and he found such a gesture extremely unbearable.

Occasionally, she lamented to her husband about a series of unfounded indecencies allegedly perpetrated by David in his absence. Wilson had listened and promised her he will act. He never lifted his finger for obvious reasons. Her accusations had mounted up to an ugly crescendo and David was extremely relieved when the schools reopened that September.

At almost eighteen, David was visibly bigger for his age, with strong arms and a likable face. He had noted Wakesho's alluring stare whenever he readied himself to take a shower and was always careful to ignore it. The two-bedroom house offered the least privacy possible and he was always uncomfortable using the bathroom whenever Wakesho was around. Secretly, such sheer ignorance offended Wakesho.

Once or twice, she had requested him to hand her a towel in the middle of her traditional eternal shower and each time, David had ignored and played dumb. He knew her intentions yet it just felt utterly wrong. It was not right to harbor any romantic ideas about the wife of his hospitable host and there was no way he was going to give in.

On several occasions, the newly married couple had nearly exchanged blows over David. It was clear the two-bedroom house with a third supposedly impartial party, obviously regarded an intruder by Wakesho, was an unnecessary bridge to their much-needed privacy. David was an unwanted intruder in her eyes and she wanted him out as soon as last year yet Wilson was not just willing to give in to such demands.

Yes, he too was badly in need of time to assuage the usual unending socially approved copulation appetite for the newly married. It was true they needed their privacy back as soon as last year. Where else will his cousin go?

He was the only relative around and most important, Joram had financed his studies after his parents refused to pay his school fess despite Mzee's government having intervened. The initial amount was then affordable to many parents but his father was simply unwilling to spend the proceeds of his sweat on an investment whose dividends would take years to materialize. Even the poor of the poorest were taking their kids to school to get a much-needed education.

The young nation was then hungry and thirsty for educated young men and women. The then flourishing economy was much in need of work force to steer its reeling head up the skies. The newly established Public and Harambee learning institutions needed students and instructors. The understaffed and ill-equipped hospitals needed nurses, doctors, and physicians. Poverty, disease, and ignorance had been being yet to be rooted out finally.

As a young man, Wilson had yearned for a government job given the many 'rags to riches' stories of once poverty-stricken men and women he had heard from his relations. He had an uncle who had married a Bukusu wife, to the dismay of his kindred and fellow tribesmen, and had since permanently moved to the outskirts of Bungoma town. Kwatenge was a hardworking, beautiful, kind and generous woman from a respectable family that had produced a huge chunk of educated men and women in Bungoma despite their humble backgrounds.

Wilson had been inspired by their success story and how in particular their community had singlehandedly raised them from nowhere to somewhere. Such unity was unheard of back at his academically impoverished backyard. Through thoroughly organized and enthusiastically attended, Harambees, the village mates of the Kwatenges had collected more than enough coins to finance the education of her exceptionally brilliant siblings. Such spirit was fast spreading its roots across Bungoma and doors of success were bound to yield to the outstanding flexed muscles of kindness and charity.

Upon completing his Certificate in Public Accounting, Wilson had been keen to register as a Certified Public Accountant. Later, the wife of his uncle had been instrumental in securing him a job as an Accountant at KFA offices in Nakuru Town where she herself had worked for close to four years as Head of the Human Resource Department (a position then highly revered, more so since she was only a woman).

The pay was not enough for his ever-growing needs but the kickbacks always filled the gap. Everybody was doing it and those who were aggressive enough, had bought themselves expensive things including the latest models of Volkswagen, Chevrolet, Cadillac, Austin, Fiat, Ford, and BMW. The Internal Auditor was a proud owner of a Mercedes and his juniors were motivated.

Wakesho's ever-expanding wardrobe was now full of glamorous bell-bottoms, hot pants, cloche hats, turbans, cardigans, kimonos, baby blue, mauve, peach, apple green and grey t-shirts, jumpsuits, tracksuits, tunic shirts, low rise pants, hip huggers, waist cinchers, maxi skirts, blazers and so on and so forth.

Her favorite footwear that included Mary Janes and Knee High Boots were intentionally and strategically placed at the right side of the mahogany stand in which a wooden Sanyo black and white TV was carefully placed, for anyone entering the house to see. Wakesho was a proud woman despite the pleasant modesty espoused by her parents.

On the other hand, Wilson's wardrobe was full of tie-dye shirts, bell-bottom jeans, khaki chinos, corduroy pants, pullover sweaters, zip-up cardigans, raincoats, flannels, leisure suits and so on and so forth. He had a huge collection of footwear ranging from flip-flops, oxford, earth shoes, cowboy shoes, platform shoes, and Birkenstocks.

A wide necktie and a black suit matched with black shoes were the official office attire. His type of work demanded he wear official clothes and so was the case with his beloved coasterian wife. He was aware of the prying eyes of his neighbors and the slight respect they had for him and his wife. Those that no longer fitted his feet automatically switched ownership. David proudly showed off every time he was sent to the kiosk to buy this or that in such shoes. One could say they were rich but as far as Wilson was concerned, they were not yet there.

Wakesho was the only daughter and child in her family. Together with her parents, they had lived on the outskirts of the Kenyatta's expansive sisal plantation in Taita Taveta as squatters. As a child, she had spent most of her weekends and holidays working on the plantation. Unlike her peers, she had worked hard in school and had passed her primary education with excellence. Had it not been for their modest means, she would have proceeded to a secondary school and perhaps all the way to the university.

A relative had offered to finance her certificate course in accounting and it had not been difficult securing a job afterwards. After six fulfilling and interesting months in Nairobi as an accounting officer, her boss had transferred her to Nakuru and that is how she had eventually met Wilson.

Wilson could see that his generation was pioneering a worthy course that will take their virgin country places. More than anything else, he wanted to be a part of such a grand course, and nothing could stop him. His mighty obstacle had been his arrogant, ignorant, and tight-fisted Pa'. Had it not been for the timely intervention of Joram who offered to pay for his academic expenses, he would not have been where he was today. Having said that, turning his back to David was the last thing he could do. His kind nature was simply incapable of pulling off betrayal of such disproportionate magnitude. Wakesho had to live with such bitter reality.

Their marriage had threatened repeatedly to tear apart as soon as it had been sealed by the District Commissioner courtesy of endless threats from either side of the 'divide' to place a curse on them should they proceed with their hurriedly arranged marriage. As staff mates at the KFA offices, the two had secretly planted a seed of their love that had endlessly withstood all manner of hurdles and superstitions.

As fate would have it, they could not just help...She had not been monitoring her safe days and when they realized he had gotten her pregnant, marriage was perceived as the only remedy. Got married they did!

Intermarriages had been a foreign phenomenon for ages and their communities were yet to loosen the grip that tightly, selfishly, and blindly controlled their destinies. He loved her and he felt obliged to make it work against all the odds. Wakesho was such a beauty whose expertise in matters food was unmatched. She had an extra light skin, soft, delicate, and seemingly harmless hands that baffled Wilson.

Though an exceptional braggart by equal measures, Wakesho had, a stunningly unique character that made her worth the sacrifice-she was straightforward and capable of striking a compromise. That was all Wilson needed in a woman. Faithfulness and flexibility were the most critical pillars for any marriage to work, especially so when founded under circumstances such as the ones they were facing. She was an exceptional cook and his visitors left always awed...

More so, Wakesho was open-minded and had a least likable way of being exceedingly candid in her talk, actions, and thoughts.

Nevertheless, Wilson admired such candor openly and covertly wished he had such velour of confronting life without any

hypocritical sentiments whatsoever. During their secret gossip with David, he told him why he had had to put up with so much because of Wakesho.

“Tomorrow if you are confronted with a decision of choosing who to tie knots with, do not bother so much about her outer appearance, her tribe, her clan or even her people’s background. See beyond her visible weaknesses and take time to study her inner-self. Let go those superstitious goggles and see her for whom she really is. Most important, play your cards closer to your chest and bid your time...trust me, beneath that beauty you see in Wakesho, lives another woman with impeccable antecedents. Just like an ideal coin, however, she is beautified by both commendable merits and lamentable demerits.”

David nodded in agreement. He had not heard his cousin talk so much sense during their staying together. They were both quiet and seemingly contented with their occasional self-induced ostracism. Wilson was no talker: he acted whenever it deemed necessary and so did David. And just like David, whenever he had had enough of Wakesho’s naggings, he was used to withdrawing himself to a non-existent fictitious world where he was sure that never will he be alone for loneliness was bound to be by his side at all times, providing him the much needed soothing and serenity.

“You mean even if you do not love them, it’s okay to marry them as long as their character suits you?” David implored.

He could tell his cousin was there and not there at the same time. His philosophical thoughts had undeniably carried him away.

“Not exactly, David...love is just yet another key component in any relationship. Problem is it is complicated to define it practically. It is, you will agree with me, the most overused noun yet our lives are hardly characterized by its true meaning”. Wilson replied, sounding even more philosophical and poetic than before.

“Well, you could be right...only that one can never tell.” David thoughtfully retorted.

While at school, Wilson’s words kept haunting him. Helen had every single desirable and admirable quality any sane man would cherish in a woman. She was a perfect choice and had no second thoughts that if he were to choose a lifetime partner this very minute, she will be the ultimate option. Despite the evil wind separating them, David was sure she still loved him! He was a proud

carrier of a heart in his chest and not a stone. He was human still for his imperfections and viciousness had not equaled that of those animals that walk on all fours. He too loved her!

He knew the time was near and soon he will be a father. That meant instant weight of responsibility under his unprepared shoulders. It meant, in case a marriage would-be eventually arranged, being tied to one woman for the rest of his miserable life. Moreover, just like Wilson and Wakesho, it meant they will have to dutifully serve a self-imposed life-imprisonment in that unpredictable jail they call marriage.

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The August-October rains had ceased. The maize was ripe everywhere. The tiny streams of soiled water were slowly drying up. Every seasonal river that had mysteriously emerged on either side of Teremi and Emia Rivers, thanks to the torrential rainfall, was slowly disappearing after having added unnecessary volume to the two main rivers, which were now practically impassable. The tiny bridge was not visible. Beneath and above it, the giant stream of water dangerously roared down Kumorong. For that reason, it had been impossible for Helen to make it safely to Kopsiro Missionary Hospital for safe delivery. She had hoped the labor pains would last awhile longer thus her miscalculated grace period.

The noise made by the waters every time they collided with the riverbanks was horrifying and reasons enough to scare kids away. A neighbor or two had reported their cattle missing and a day later, the unmistakable carcasses turned up almost two miles down Teremi River. It was painful to imagine how the fatal torrents and the debris along the bed of the river tormented the poor cattle as they helplessly drown to their painful and untimely deaths.

That year, it had rained heavily up the slopes. Joram and Meto had registered massive losses after the angry waters of Emia had washed away most of their maize planted near the riverbanks. Huge trunks and branches of Elgon Teaks, perhaps forcefully uprooted by the mighty waves of the vicious waters, dangerously made their way down the river alongside other debris. Such were the seasons when the two rivers vented their anger on people. Like two hungry lions, they ferociously and unrepentantly took away the lives of their prey. Everybody was praying for the rains to cease...

The kicks had been severe and so had the pain. It felt unfair to nurse such tremendous suffering for nine whole months alone while the other party was freely basking in the glory of the villager's praises for having proven his manhood. Helen could not understand why the shadow of retribution seemingly persisted in its quest to break her will yet for some reasons, she was not the only guilty party. She wondered how God could allow fate to wield its merciless thrust with such might if He really loved her unconditionally as Pastor Abel had endlessly reminded her.

Somebody had told her a great lie that a bad beginning makes a good ending. In fact, for her, the bad beginning had bred a series of nauseating dramas that had gradually grew less willing to let her go. Somewhere in the confine of his cowardice, David was nursing his guilt quietly. He too was feeling the kicks; the pain down his tummy had intensified. He was restless, anxious and had lost all the appetite for books, assignments... even the critical revisions had had to come to an abrupt end. To Helen, David was a sadist. She wished it were the other way round – her in his position. The pain – it was now unbearable.

It was about midday. The heavy and thick fog was no more. It had shifted to the upper slopes even though it was still cold. Inside, it felt cold she thought it would kill her! Her entire body was sore.

Ironically, the comfort bed she lay on offered the least comfort possible. Ma' had been watching over her...and so were her two younger sisters who were old enough to witness the would-be horror that awaited them.

She wanted to scream and shout for the heavens to witness her suffering and enormous pain. She wanted to curse David aloud but all she could do was whisper an incoherent word every now and then that was ironically inaudible even to the comforting breeze that swept across the room from the slightly opened window of their hut. She had been prepared for the grand occasion and soon, Ma' was barking orders. Her pain had reached its peak and so had her screams, shouts, insults, name-calling, and tongue wagging. She kicked, pushed, kicked, pushed, and kicked even harder. Her kicks rhymed with her insults heavily punctuated with ear-splitting curses implicitly meant for David.

The experienced hands of the midwife moved forth and back, back and forth, forth and back, until they finally emerged with a tiny,

light-skinned, and strange-looking product of their once sweet love with David. The midwife, a plumb middle-aged woman, with sweat profusely pouring down her dark-skinned face, held up a tiny, whiny, and little thing above Helen's head for everyone present to see.

Then, she carefully held it upside-downside and slapped it at the back once! Silence... At the second attempt, it let out an angry scream that alerted those waiting outside that a new member of their family had arrived; safe, sound, alive and kicking very hard! It was Tenth, October 1989.

## Chapter 6

"All problems become smaller if you don't dodge them, but confront them. Touch a thistle timidly, and it pricks you; grasp it boldly, and its spines crumble." — *William S. Halsey*

It took Helen one good year to find enough courage to read that letter.

David had narrowly made it to High School and in two years' time, God willing, he will be through, and perhaps he might eventually realize his childhood dream of joining the University of Nairobi. He had always wanted to pursue Higher Education as an English and Literature teacher and had not hid his enthusiasm from his proud father.

"Father, I want to be a teacher, just like Mr. Wanjusi, though I will teach a secondary school..."

"Nonsense!"

"But...but, I will still make enough money, Mmh..." Joram was shocked and disappointed.

His only educated son was going to be an engineer and there was no turning back!

"Who has been feeding your idle head with such nonsense, Mmh?"

"You know I have always wanted to be..."

"A teacher? So you can shout all day to an army of disinterested students and earn peanuts? No way..."

"But secondary is different, father..."

"A teacher is just a teacher, whether he teaches cows or human beings!"

"But that is not true, father..."

"That is for women, look at you!" He almost hit him with his walking stick when he showed signs of shedding a tear.

"Shame on you! You now want to cry like your mother, Mmh?"

David was angered...perhaps, disappointed even. He hated his father. He hated his attitude. He hated his reference to his weakness that had been a source of discomfort between the two for

years. He was emotional and could hardly hold back tears whenever he was saddened.

Tutoring was a noble profession and the fact that one had an opportunity of influencing the lives of others directly other than implicitly, made the profession even more appealing to him. He had been very passionate about literature and had written a number of poems that had unsurprisingly received positive criticism from his critiques, more so his English Teacher, Mr. Kagondi back in secondary school.

“That is a great poem, Naibei. I can see a second Rudyard Kipling in you...keep writing your heart out and trust me, you will go places.”

This had been his teacher’s remarks when he had shared his collection of about ten poems with him at his fourth form in Nakuru High School. Comparison with gigantic names in the literary world such as Rudyard Kipling really sounded great. He had never forgotten the feeling those inspiring and motivating words had caused in his young life. He had been exceptionally good in English Set books analysis and deep within his soul; David knew that he would one day go places and write his heart out indeed!

As such, it was his open secret that he would make such an excellent teacher and perhaps an award-winning writer someday. However, he had continuously scored higher grades in sciences than the arts thus ruining his possibilities of eventually ending up in a class as a teacher, and finally pours out his vast knowledge to an expectant class as he had always dreamed. In the end, he enrolled at the form 5 in Nakuru High School as a Science Student.

“Real men do serious things with their lives. Men are the engine of life itself; co-creators with God, or so says your Bible. A Civil Engineer, a surgeon, an architect or even an economist is huge, son. It will bring honor to this house and my entire lineage. That is why we can urinate through the window and however hard they try, they can never, Mmh. Have you even wondered why a child can play with its mother’s breasts, but not its father’s testicles in public?” Joram beamed with excitement as he tried to console his son.

Often, he would use his carefully designed statements to chide women and weaker men who espoused their insecurities, temperaments and exaggerated emotions like David. He was afraid of snakes, lizards, and sometimes, the even walking alone by himself

in the cover of darkness. His father hated seeing such traits in his kids, more so in his dearly beloved son, David. He loved the world for his enormous ego and he was eager to show it off whenever he had an opportunity.

To him, women were big-headed, meaning insolent and arrogant, and he was fond of asserting that no matter how bigger their heads were, it didn't mean necessarily that they had any brains in there! His vocal critics, of course not within his earshot, were occasionally on the offensive. Some claimed that he had, all his years, been biting indiscriminately without knowing that he could end up eating his own tail!

David had gotten accustomed to such kind of talk. It made him felt nervous for his was not a soul of a lion. He had a face of a child and the heart of her feeble, submissive, and ever obedient mother. Had it not been for his smart brain, he was sure his Pa' would have loved to detest and torment him for his tasteless weaknesses. He was simply being a realist and trying to follow his heart. However, his Pa's iron fist was menacingly at standby, should he stumble and stray.

He had made it known that no one was going to do anything stupid to make his dearly beloved son to change his mind about his career choice and get away with it. No one dared to. Joram, six-feet tall, heavily built and strong; had grown to be extremely hot-tempered and was visibly irritated even at the slightest provocation. At his mid-sixties, he was still revered, feared even, and regarded with high esteem. His strict enforcement of disciplinary measures had made his name to travel places.

He had worked hard and had since expanded his initial five acreage of land to almost fifty now. His elder son, Ndiema, had closely followed his example. He was now an even stricter disciplinarian and surprisingly with a quadrupled appetite for wives and children. Leading by example, Joram had recently married a fourth wife and would soon hit his fiftieth target in terms of children!

He had survived Francis Lekoolool's wrath and had used his secret savings and position as a village elder to expand his farm instead. His eldest son, Ndiema, had been lucky to be allotted one plot at Tindibaree just a mile or so before Kipsigon. He had moved his family there, and they were now neighbors with Chepkemei, his sister.

Joram had also used some of his savings to purchase a parcel of land in Trans-Nzoia, Machewa. Chebyuk Settlement Scheme Phase II had been unkind to many of his friends. From over thirty acres, some were now remaining with one acre only! Unmarried, young Ndorobo boys and even girls in some instances, which government had favored were occupying the other chunks.

Everybody knew their lives would not be the same again. The majority Bok knew too well that a revolt would only worsen the matters for them. As such, they swallowed hard and waited.

The government had earlier initiated Chebyuk Settlement Scheme Phase II as an attempt to correct the situation, which had fast become messy and scary. Mr. Francis Lekoolool, then the Provincial Commissioner of Western Province, had acknowledged that the Chebyuk Settlement Scheme Phase 1 had been inequitable and he wanted something tangible done to correct it.

However, he was soon transferred thus ushering in an unnecessary vacuum that would later worsen the land crisis at the settlement scheme and inevitably, rekindled strife and enmity between the Bok and the Mosop. Consequently, District Officers later commercialized the exercise. Some faced accusations of corruptly selling the available plots to undeserving people who ironically owned more than enough elsewhere.

The process was also marred with political interference led by the area legislator, Mr. Wilberforce Kisiero and his cohorts.

However, the widespread wave of nepotism and corruption saw an unexpected end to it.

Some officials ended up with more than four plots of land when some people had to share plots, after erroneously being allotted same ballot paper numbers, some people ended up with seven plots using same name, or presenting their names in different constructs, for example Kaptunwo Kones Ruto, Kones Kaptunwo Ruto, and Ruto Kones Kaptunwo. In some instances, even children of school-going age, using the Identity Numbers of other people, benefitted with at least one plot each.

A sizable number of Meto's relatives who did not receive their allocation tried for the third time, having failed in 1979 and 1988, to return to Chepkitale, but were forcefully repulsed by the police since the area was now a game reserve. Bok losers opted to try their lack in distant places such as Machewa, Kasawai, Koikoi,

Chemichemi, Saboti, and Kapretwa. Trans-Nzoia was then a booming land market and multiple land schemes were still active.

Meto had sure connections with chiefs, elders and District Officials responsible for the entire process and it was no surprise to see him retain his entire land and awarded three extra plots. He had also made parallel arrangements for Kipyego and his brother Cheptot who were now proud owners of two five-acre plots each.

With enough land to feed, clothe and rare his numerous kids, he decided come what may, his daughter will go back to school and finish her studies. He had secretly 'procured' a plot for her despite it being 'unlawful' and against the traditions. Through his interactions with his relatives living in Kaptama and Chesito, he had heard of the success stories of educated girls.

She might have let him down yes but it was not too late to allow her redeem his once glorified image. The little child would soon be old enough...on its own, unarmed, overwhelmed, and encircled by all manner of insecurities or so he thought. The past was now gone and what was more, no matter how much he continued brooding over it, there was no way he could alter it.

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The letter he had written a year earlier was a little ploy of proving his literary prowess to his once sweet darling and winning her heart over...again! It was his special way of saying sorry. He waited to hear a word about it but none seemed forthcoming. As months dragged by and uncaringly speeded away with no sign of a reply from Helen, David feared for the worst. Her seemingly intensified indifference towards him further aggravated his fears.

Mathew was one season old now and once or twice, she had allowed David to hold him. Nakuru and its famous smell of flamingos seemed to have dissolved a sizeable chunk of meat out of him. Though Wakesho had mended her attitude and guarded her tongue wagging with commendable eagerness, the thought of abandoning the love of his life and a blameless child any further become intolerable.

For the first time in his life, he had openly defied Joram and returned home amidst protests from Joram and Chemos. He had rehearsed his unpredictable reunion with Helen for days on end hoping she had had time to read that letter and that her pain perhaps had somehow receded.

Helen had no courage to rebuke him. She had been keen, however, to avoid his guilty eyes and his trembling hand that he had unknowingly extended for a handshake. She had also adamantly pointed to a sit in one corner of the hut. David ignored the offer and instead, remained transfixed to the ground: perplexed, confused and with no energy left to open his mouth.

He looked at his original photocopy and he could not help wondering how much such a tiny thing could look exactly like him. Talk of God's wonders; this was what their perversion had resulted. The ears and the nose were unmistakable! He saw his own eyes though they were a tiny pair that was yet to start getting used to the strange light. He chuckled sheepishly and handed over the baby to its mother.

Ma' and Meto had been reluctant to welcome him. In the end, after rigorous discussions, they rendered their half-hearted consent to his request. Here he was...alone with Helen in her newly erected hut. The hours of rehearsing had reached their peak. It was time to take his most critical move now. He knew this was it: his last chance of either getting back Helen or losing her forever.

He too had been keen all the while to avoid looking straight into her eyes...he felt her pain, the cold in her bitter heart was freezing, the heartache betrayed by heavy throbs heart-breaking and the deep cut right through her soul, was heartrending. It was difficult to imagine that all these were because of his treachery, betrayal, and unforgiveable cowardice. He felt the stab of her quizzical stare that sharply pricked his conscience and he could not hold the burning tears in his eyes any longer.

For a hundredth time in his life, David cried! For a hundredth time in his life, he defied Joram and wailed like a widow mourning her deceased husband! He had come face to face with the ugly reality of the long-overdue misery, untold bitterness, and enormous pain he had ushered into the life of the only thing that once meant the world to him.

He realized how far his savagery had made him wander and felt like dying. He saw, for the first time, that hurting her had been the best way possible he had managed to pay her back as dividends for her selfless love and the gift of her precious virginity.

He remembered those flowers she would give him during their wild adventures in the forest many years back and the

innocence with which they had done so many things for one another. He remembered his own words that kept echoing in his mind as a fresh well of tears freely flowed down his cheeks.

*I will never let you down!*

The fact that he had violated his own oath made him feel stupid, useless and not worth Helen's love. She had lost a lot of weight and had seemingly been keen to neglect her body. Her eyes were almost popping out of their sockets and she looked distant; like a ghost, which had been disturbed and awakened from its stupor. She was bony, emaciated, and seemingly glaring to an imaginary darker, expansive, and brutal emptiness before her. He imagined the cackles, giggles, sniggers, and jubilant jeering of her slanderous that had reportedly made it their full time job tormenting her.

"I am sorry...!" That was all he could say amidst heavy sobs. He knew too well that if you pick up one end of the stick you also pick up the other. He was sorry! Was he really?

"Birds sing not because they have answers but because they have songs...one who causes others misfortune also teaches them wisdom...ugliness with a good character is better than beauty. Love has to be shown by deeds not words. He that digs up a grave for his enemy may be digging it for himself. Rain beats a leopard's skin, but it does not wash out the spots...." She had sadly said.

"We need not to look where we fell but where exactly we slipped; it was my restless feet which led me to a snake pit, dear...If you offend, ask for a pardon; if offended forgive!" He had replied; quietly, sadly, and remorsefully.

He meant it! He said it with his violent sobs. He repeated it with the burning anger that threatened to choke him. That night, Helen had read that infamous letter. It was so long she thought he had copied its contents from a storybook. The letter read:

*"Dear Helen,*

*Sweetheart, it is with mixed feelings that I am writing. You need not to ask why...I will tell you! You have added meaning in mine life in ways that one can never imagine...not even you, Helen. Those hours we ever spent together in our wildest of imaginations are a part of an invaluable and indispensable treasure that I will forever cherish.*

*Tragedy is when one's own faults makes them lose a treasure that had all their miserable lives been within their reach. Double*

*tragedy is when one's own sheer cowardice won't just let them face those they secretly adore, love and cherish and confess their innermost convictions...of how much they had lived loving them, how much they had secretly cared, how much they were ready and willing to sacrifice and let go so they may be a part of their lives.*

*Sometimes in our seemingly ever-unpredictable lives, we happen to stumble upon people that are in a million ways, bound to affect almost every single aspect of our lives. Their coming into our shadowy and meaningless lives coated with tears, fears, penury and hopelessness; might at first impression seem a mere mistake yet the would-be impact they end up leaving behind can be so profound we will live remembering for years on end.*

*If my recollection is any closer to being correct, repeatedly, humanity has proven incapable of exhibiting true love. That love that the Holy Bible ingeniously describe as patient, kind, not jealous or conceited, not proud, not ill-mannered, not selfish or easily irritable, not vengeful, love that is happy with truth, that never gives up and above all, love that never ends. You will agree with my candid sentiments that the fashion of love we humans exude does indeed fall short of the aforementioned criterion by far yet it is not true in its ENTIRITY that we are incapable of loving.*

*The tiny seeds of love have no seasons or say a favorable climate for them to germinate and perhaps grow gradually beyond their inevitable fruition. Love is never premeditated. Love is just that...love and when close to being half-true, or say half-way near to the perfect love exhibited in the Person, Life, Death and eventual Resurrection of Jesus Christ; our stupid, stupid hearts never fails to notice its cordial embrace.*

*Love usually docks into the harbor of our unfortunately ever-unprepared hearts with a mighty wave. Its strong slaps are hard to ignore however fierce our resolve to turn it away might be. No matter how much we might strive to pin it down, it always bulges out and inevitably betrayed via our unguarded talk, deeds, and gestures that might have once been selfishly preserved in the most secretive part of our inner being.*

*Courtesy of that strange feeling we end up harboring in our young hearts, we are inevitably bound to make tough decisions.*

*Sometimes, we can make silly and regrettable decisions. At times still, circumstances will force us to sacrifice old habits that are*

*so dear to our hearts. Still, we might have to put up with a few ugly dots here and there, as we aim to make the other even much happier and contented. In the end, we graduate into reliable pillars that our 'partners in this crime of loving and being loved back' will from time to time (when in anguish and pain) lean on for comfort.*

*However mysterious or exciting our past might sound or appear to be, that strange feeling we might share for one another might and can be an excuse of one day turning the tables upside-downside. Truth is, you can be a reason he or she might consider changing (for the better) who they used to be. Together, you can both covertly and overtly let go each and every single yesterday and still refuse to pitch a permanent tent in that dark corner of last year.*

*You can choose to believe in your secretly newfound relationship and make it work against all odds. You can choose to wrestle down the perennial cloud of cold and that bout of loneliness and instead fill each other's lives with swollen promises, hope, love and faith of seeing yet another day rise and yet another day die.*

*Being honest and true to our feelings is extremely vital. It is by far the sole means of shunning self-imposed ostracism. In fact, it is the key to your freedom and a proven weapon of letting off your caged heart. It might sound the hardest thing to do yet the long-term rewards are ideally worth the gamble. With it comes a new lease of life, a new awakening that will take you places once unknown. Such is the time when one shortly bid farewell to his or her 'perfect world that is ironically a product of life's imperfections) and take a giant leap to a newly crafted world riddled with boundless niceties.*

*For the short yet very long period, I have lived in this world, I have learned also, to my shock that one can never run away (literally) from what you genuinely feel. You can run away from an imminent danger, walk away from a sworn adversary harboring ill intentions against you, dodge a bullet, and survive a car wreck but you will never run away from love.*

*The cruel claws of love are bound to haunt you beyond your matrimonial bed. Its sharp and strong teeth will tear and wear down the fence of that hideout. Always, it will be a life full of struggles...struggling to forget those butterflies in your tummy every time you saw him or her, struggles to shrug off that nagging emptiness in your heart whenever they were not around you,*

*struggles to forget in vain those special moments you shared together.*

*Days and nights will come and go...go and come back again yet those ever disturbingly vivid and alive feelings for him or her will repeatedly refuse to walk again. His or her favorite food, best song, preferred TV program, or even their exaggerated phobia for snakes or the dead, will be among your lifetime memories. Night and day, day and night (after he or she is long gone; perhaps happily and lawfully wedded), you will helplessly remember the few smiles you ever put on their expectant faces and the enormous pain you caused them.*

*Through their exceptional care, unmatched kindness, and unselfish warmth, we get to forget our sufferings and hidden pain. Many a time, their mere presence in our gloomy lives (even if out of our wildest imaginations), is reason enough for us to be merrier, cheerful, joyous, happy and contented. A thought about their simply being there for you is enough excuse for you to wear a golden robe of euphoria around your dispirited heart.*

*Yet as fate would have it, hell can break loose and things can start falling apart without even a prior notice or a warning cue for that matter. A foul wind might blow your way and cast your secret love into the four unforgiving winds.*

*However, before they do again, as they have, I hereby confess my utmost regret for having ignored your letters. I read each one of them, WORD BY WORD, SYLLABLE-BY-SYLLABLE yet; I could not just gather enough courage to write you back. This, believe me you, did not meant that my deepest and sacred affections for you were no more.*

*I might never know for sure who loves me, but I know whom I love, and that is you. You may tell little lies, small as a thorn, but they will grow to the size of a spear and kill you. That I too I know and I am not planning to tread on that 'less-taken' road...not anymore, Helen. If you will find it in your heart to forgive me, Helen, write back to me at the soonest opportune possible.*

*Warmest Regards,  
David."*

That was characteristic of David: too wordy yet with an almost-flawless ingenuity and a remarkable taste. How she wished he were not Mr. Preach Water-Take-Wine! If he were to stick to his

philosophical thoughts to the latter, she saw no reason why she would not consider forgiving him. She harbored secret respect for his writings and despite the helpless resentment; she felt he deserved a second chance. Sad thing is it is always easier said than done. She had read all the Bible verses that talked about forgiveness and she was aware that unless she offered some herself in the first place, God would not forgive her.

Ma' had taught her by example that the greatest vengeance of them all was forgiveness. How many times had her co-wives conspired to bring disrepute to her good name and she still wined, dined and related with them with love and kindness? How many times had Meto abused and tormented her yet she still respected him as a husband, cooked his favorite meals, warmed his bed whenever he was not in good times with his other wives, nursed his wounds whenever he was injured, and stayed by his side whenever he was ill? What is more, Cherop had earned their respect this way. Meto had started treating her with some dignity and her co-wives were cautious about soiling her name no matter how ugly their envy grew.

Secretly, she promised herself that she will forgive him, yes, but will be cautious to take her time before breaking the grand news to him. Such a break will also give her an opportunity to see if he will live by his word and be true to the spirit of that letter. One way or another, she will need him. She had needed him the most all those months and it won't be a loss having his shadow hover around her for a little longer before he could disappear again to Nairobi.

The last thing Helen wanted was to bring up a bastard so other crooks and irresponsible scoffers in their village could find enough reason to molest, torment, and jeer at him. Her son furthermore was urgently in need of a name to inherit. Soon he will be man enough to start asking uncomfortable questions and she was not prepared to confront her son over such issues when in fact there was still a possibility of taming his father. Ma' had been happy for her decision and had encouraged her to let go the spiteful venom from her troubled heart.

“You need it more than him, trust me...people know each other well on a journey; you now not only share a path but the journey itself as well!” Ma' assured her as she held Mathew firmly against her bosom.

Mathew smiled innocently, letting bare his toothless mouth that seemed hungry for its mother's breast to suckle. So harmless and uncaring little Mathew was that his sight brought tears in Helen's eyes whenever she remembered about what she had had to go through...

"You could be right, Ma'. Perhaps my heart might find some peace...finally!" She replied, sounding unsure and visibly carried away by her conflicting emotions.

"He seems resolute to behave himself this time round, child, give him time, time is all he needs." Ma' told her.

It was true yet some part of her was not just willing to accept the turnaround of events. She had so much in her head and David was the least important thing in her long list of things to do.

"Okay, Ma'. I will...I mean; I will give him time. He might change, who knows." She intoned with finality though Rael could not help noticing her shaken voice.

She trusted her daughter to make the right decision. Helen meant it. Inside, she knew it was time to let go her past no matter the price. She also knew that the bloody crook would get a free ticket of walking shoulders high. His social status had improved greatly or had it not?

Four months after holding his baby for the first time, David had convinced his father to organize a surprise-get-together party. Helen had half-heartedly agreed to attend and had sternly warned him that nothing would change that much soon and that she was only doing it for the love and respect of his parents. She had all her life regarded David's parents as her second parents. For a stranger, it was easy to assume the two families was indeed one big extended family.

The overstretched night was finally ushering in a bright dawn! His grand plan worked for the two families had a great opportunity of mending tattered relationships. Amidst the chitchatting, uncomfortable questions were asked and uncomfortable answers given to all manner of naysayers and born-pessimists. The grownups had dined and wined happily and the kids, some with stringed beads as their only clothes, had their fill too and freely roamed the village.

It was not surprising that Helen accepted to share a table with David late that grand day. For the first time, Mathew as a subject took center stage. Together, they planned for his tomorrow. His then

essential yet meagre needs-clothes, medication in case of illness, food supplements, should they ever be necessary for they had enough, and his schooling when the time comes.

Helen was slightly taken aback when David asked about what she was planning to do with her life. She was not prepared to tread that path...not just yet...of course; she had plans, good plans in fact, she had discussed about them at length with her parents and had begged for the consent of the disillusioned Meto. He had agreed to finance her studies on a condition that there shall be no more another Mathew in-between her studies!

Two of her younger siblings, a boy and a girl, second and third born respectively, had failed to make it to High School but had scored considerable grades enough to take them to a Teachers Training College. Alliance High School had made it clear that they would have loved to have her back yes but it was just against the rules.

“Rules are rules. We are sorry there is nothing much we can do for your daughter.” A fat, dark skinned and round-eyed woman had told Meto at the office.

There was no doubt in his mind she meant he was supposed to dance to that old tune of scratch my back I scratch yours. Problem was he simply had no enough money to play by the unwritten rules.

Lack of money is lack of friends, if you have money at your disposal, every dog and goat will claim to be related to you...but wait...do dogs do not actually prefer bones to meat or it is just that no one ever gives them meat.... What will he do? Where will he go?

He left a rather heartbroken man. His protégé had earlier advised him that in case his request is turned down, which they both knew too well it would, that he had better talk with his relation, Wilson.

Wilson was well connected and a master of such unwritten rules. He was an honest Kenyan who knew that a man who pays respect to the great paves the way for his own greatness. He understood the dangers of calling a forest that shelters you a jungle! He knew too well that at times, money could be thicker than blood, and sharper than a sword!

Mrs. Kwatenge had a cousin teaching at David’s former school, then the only mixed national school in the country. She

pulled the strings and the school head accepted to take her in should she pass a mandatory interview test, which was a mere formality.

She had not told David about all this. Instead, she had promised she would make it her personal business to let him know when the right time comes. He agreed to wait.

David was never used to bothering and pestering her about anything. He had squandered dozens of opportunities of breathing out his I Love You, and she had then made it even more difficult with her unyielding, bold, and nonsensical nature. As a boy, he had been shy, as far as she could remember, she was the only girl he EVER talked with, and whenever they talked, and she was the one who did all the talking.

Sitting beside her at that table that evening, he could feel how time, circumstances, and his absence had changed her. Helen was no longer that cheerful, playful, and talkative girl she used to know. Her stare lacked the once formidable wave of self-confidence it had inspired in David. In fact, a direful wave that made him very uncomfortable seemed to have since replaced that adorable wave of self-confidence. It was hard to tell what was going on in her mind.

Still, he was not sure if she had ever read his letter.

“Did you read it?” He finally asked after realizing it was the best chance he had.

Helen ignored his question. He had to repeat it again and to his shock, she pretended as if she had no idea about what he was saying.

“I meant the letter...the one I sent you through Masaek Primary School Address.” He clarified, sounding a little disappointed.

“Oh, that one...does it matter if one read or never even received it in the first place?” She quipped with a tinge of sarcasm in her melodious voice.

That was unlike Helen that he had known all his life. She always seems to answer a question with yet another question, never forgetting to lubricate her piercing words with a subtle tinge of cruel sarcasm.

“Well, it does...it matters, I mean, Mmh.” David remarked bluntly.

“Time will tell how much it matters...I think that’s enough for one day, Baba Mathew, right?” She sarcastically intoned, naughtily sizing him up with her all-knowing eyes.

She was almost leaving when she noticed the pain and unmistakable shock in his face. She raised her right hand and unwillingly extended it for a handshake.

Ignoring her coldness and suffocating indifference, he shook it much longer than necessary, looked straight into her eyes, and echoed a section of her last remark.

“Time will tell how much it matters, indeed, or so I presume Mmh!”

As she left, she could not help laughing to herself given the anxiety she had achieved to arouse in him. Like a hungry dog begging for a bone, David was subdued and without much choice. She could not help remembering Ma’s words: a man with sweet food before him cannot understand the bitterness of famine. Only that the reverse in her case was true...it was such tact that had denied him an earlier opportunity to take away her virginity. She would often play hard to get for she knew too well that he loved him. One way or the other, she always wins, or does she?

Inside, she honestly longed for their past and had almost forgotten how kind life had been to them. Then, truth and sheer innocence was a bond that sealed their love. Neither of them had been in the business of love for too long a time to know when the tides were coming or when they were leaving.

Today, she loathes truth. It had become a breeder of strife and long-term enmity. Strife was what that truth was trying to unearth every time she tried to let go her yesteryears. That truth can set you free, was to Helen, a bloody, fat, and round lie that only a blinking idiot can believe!

She had resorted she will be her only true friend and few a time, if her weaker-self deems fit, a true enemy as well. She knew prudence in future was a mandatory pillar that will help her regain her former-self fully. She had learnt how to tread more cautiously. When state of affairs becomes too much for her miserable soul to bear, she has since mastered the robes for her ultimate survival.



## Chapter 7

"Rise above principle and do what is right." — *Walter Heller, 20th-century American economist*

Wilson and Wakesho had taken a whole week off from work to celebrate their daughter's birthday. He had protested about the idea of taking a whole week off and travelling but in vain. Monday, 11th October 1993 it was and coincidentally, David was reporting to the Main Campus of the University of Nairobi, formerly the Royal Technical College of East Africa.

Wilson had completed his driving lessons and granted a Driver's License early that same year. Mrs. Kwatenge had offered her privately owned Chevrolet Chevette to the two lovebirds to travel to Nairobi and have some good time together with their daughter.

David was too happy to be enjoying a free lift, and be part of the extravagant and lavish spending. He had planned to travel to Nairobi on the eve of their reporting date but Wakesho had insisted they travel on a Saturday. Wilson had to oblige more so because he was supposed to accompany David to his new would-be home away from sweet home.

David was excited. It would not be his first time in Nairobi yes, but it will be his first ever in one of the most celebrated institution of higher learning in the region.

The journey to Nairobi commenced that Saturday early morning with David sitting alone at the back seat of the comfortable and spacious vehicle. He listened as the two argued over which present was more appropriate, the budget ceiling, parks they will visit, where to sleep and so on and so forth. Occasionally, Wilson will turn his head back from the steer wheel and ask for his disapproval or approval. David would nod a yes then a no, a no then a yes until everyone was tired as the vehicle cruised through Lord Delamere's expansive Ranch.

The occasional hooting interrupted his sleep as Wilson tried to frighten and drive away a straying hare or hyena. In his half-sleep, David looked back at his life and realized how the going had been tougher. He had had to trudge up the hill armed with his inner resolve of never giving up. Mr. Kagondi, his Secondary School

favorite teacher, used to say that behind every genuine success, there is always a story, a tale to re-tale. He was writing his story and the numerous hurdles were proving quite useful.

“Strive to make comfort your enemy number one and instead, seek discomfort for tears always bring the best out of you.” Mr. Kagondi used to advise them.

Being a father and a student at the same time, to him, was discomfort enough to wake anyone from his slumber. His weak shoulders were now a fortress that a vulnerable army of dependents heavily relied on for protection. He knew so much was at stake now and he was not ready to disappoint again. He had promised Helen he would refuse to live a lie a day at a time and honor his words this time round.

The dirty business of lying is never premeditated in the first place or so he thought inside. It is instantaneous and a viable option especially so when truth will hurt either of the two concerned parties. Consequently, one’s weakness can coerce him or her to bend the truth after having known such inevitable eventualities.

No matter the magnitude of its benefits, lying is evil, degrading and a recipe for disastrous indecencies. For the few years David had lived, he had witnessed its other ugly side; the undertones of its horrific fangs and the cruelty with which it had struck many an innocent soul, down-trodden a gazillions of ambitious hearts and utterly destroyed aspirations of countless persons. Greed, theft, prostitution and corruption, just to mention but a few; are all implicit fruits of lies.

He listened keenly to Mr. Kagondi and his fiery rhetoric during Set Book discussions. One book in particular had fascinated him... Glory of Dark Angels was the name of the book). The Set Book depicted a fictitious country called Beji ruled by an army of corrupt, wicked, treacherous, and shrewd leaders. In Beji, underpaid guards, peanut-salaried government employees, small-scale merchants, and ordinary Wananchi drove limousines, own bungalows and were known to have taken their kids abroad to receive a much better education.

Unlike in the neighboring developed and wealthy countries where academic success meant a well-paying job and an improved living standard, here it meant torturous, eternal back and forth tours to some prospective employees who unless you share your surname

with, will never lift their finger! Without a godfather trailing behind you, securing a job was a nightmare however impressive your academic performance was.

Instead of say securing good grades and going through all the required academic levels, the law-abiding citizens of Beji would rather buy a decent certificate from a poverty-stricken home and inherit everything including their names! Armed with this grand lie, such smart and hardworking scholars are bound to walk tall in the job-markets, rise higher in their ranks and career ladders, and become rich overnight. As such, a huge chunk of Beji's Civil Servants was unqualified, undeserving, and invariably on payroll illegally!

Given the un-attended to loop holes and fissures in the government systems of Beji, illiterate sons and daughters of the mighty had ascended to the top ranks in the institutions of higher learning, ministerial departments, government agencies etc. Indeed, in some instances, only one out of five civil servants had genuine papers! The rest were cheats who had been robbing the taxpayers silently, crippling their already weak economy, offering the people low quality services and denying their bright sons and daughters precious opportunities.

Mr. Kagondi had compared their dearly beloved country with Beji and at that age, it had been impossible to relate with his insinuations.

“Like Beji, our country is a nation whose citizens has employed crooked means of survival, lives in the expense of others, cares the least about their compatriots, and are ever more than willing to do anything conceivable to plunge every vulnerable life into a pitch-dark abyss! It is, you will realize, a lovely den of hungry wolves whose ugly claws often extend a cold handshake to every beggar in the next turn.” He said during one of his literature lessons.

He had heard stories from friends and relatives who had sought government services at their district headquarters; stories about clerical officer's eager to perpetrate institutionalized mandatory illegal fee to in order to get documents signed or rubber-stamped. Rumor mongering, talks over a series of unimportant topics, tampering with files and documents, forging signatures and sneaking names and details of their relatives and friends in would-be favored lists of yet another bunch of uneducated buffoons, was said

to be their fulltime preoccupation. Once they see a bank note or some serious coins, they always spring into action and offer you their level best!

Ironically, educational achievements back at home still received lukewarm reception at its best and at worst, overt grief and helpless discomfort rather than ululations, hosannas, and ferocious euphoria. Often, one was bound to hear of food poisoning and impromptu ailments specifically designed to end one's life. Whereas some communities prevailed elsewhere and marked notable credentials, theirs was ever busy dragging its cold feet, and seemingly headed to nowhere in particular!

They were lucky that their immediate neighborhood was earmarked as a safe zone. Down beyond Cheptais Centre, specifically in Sasuri, Chebwek and Chepkube villages, sorcery was still rampant and a prevalent killer. Those who had accidentally made it courtesy of their cutthroat patience and luck, were keen and eager to enjoy their hard-earned sweat elsewhere for fear of being prematurely dragged into their graves or turned into useless zombies. Such people were dreaded and abhorred by an equally measure by armies of illiterate morons, whose exaggerated envy had turned them into bloodthirsty savages.

David's stupor came to a sharp halt thanks to a sudden jolt when Wilson applied the hind breaks and maneuvered a sharp corner near Kikuyu Bus Stage. He announced they were now heading to the very heart of Nairobi and those who wished to entertain their eyes, were welcomed to do so. It had been almost two-and-a-half-hour journey and from the looks of things, Wilson might fail to hit the three-hour mark.

The speeding locomotives on either side of the Highway fascinated Mwanaisha who had miraculously survived almost half of the journey without sleeping. Her mother had held the ecstatic little baby-girl a little higher so as she could have a vantage point. Her world was still a mess of confusion and vast emptiness. She reminded David of Mathew and he smiled unknowingly, unthinkingly.

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It was almost 9:30AM. Nairobi had not changed that much though the eerie wave of uncertainty still hovered on its deserted streets. G3-Rifles wielding Fanya Fujo Ujionee General Service Unit

young men and women dressed in their red huts and jungle uniforms could be spotted here and there guarding the sensitive buildings in the city streets.

Moi was still talking and acting tough. Arrests of rumored dissidents together with their cohorts, displeased with his 1992 first presidential election under a multi-party system landslide win, were still a daily occurrence.

Everybody was always living fully oblivious of the limits. Verbal diarrhea was no longer a common phenomenon, and the price tag of instigating one was too heavy to bear. Ordinary Kenyans had come to embrace the reality with very heavy hearts... University students had since joined the forces of dissent and were now the pride of the nation.

Many sane men and women were tired to the bone of a piteous generation of old guards who were busy draining their blood and sweat. Many had hoped that the old boys would cease messing up with their lives soonest. Many had thought the fatal retributions their kindred endured following the aftermath of the 1982-attempted coup would remain firmly hinged to the confines of history. Instead, arrests, accidents, poisonings, and kidnappings kept increasing.

To appease his vocal critics, Baba scrapped the queue voting system, otherwise known as Mlolongo. In addition, he eased KANU stringent rules, which meant errant members, could now 'justly' expelled. However, this alone was not enough to tame the runaway dissent surge.

Soon, members of civil service, opposition supporters, and enraged university students were in the streets. The wave had now gathered more strength and momentum. Street marching sessions followed. People came out to the streets in their hundreds, armed with faith and inner passion for their country that had been an endless victim of defilement. Moi and his cohorts had continuously violated their basic human rights as they watched helplessly!

Impromptu arrests had been the order of the day. Many scholars faced imminent detentions and potential long jail terms without trials. Jogoo top brass officials were facing an uncomfortable purge that saw all perceived foes of the state blacklisted. Subsequently, the Fanya Fujo Ujionee boys launched earnest and rigorous 'man hunt'. Bank accounts of key opposition political figureheads were frozen and their assets confiscated. Arrests

followed. Weeks later, remains of ‘enemies of the state’ would-be discovered in Ngong forest, riddled with bullets.

The Comrade Power never died. The struggle went on. Guns would be planted on cars then arrests, long jail terms, disappearances or even deaths would follow...that was the heavy price he had to pay for being a true patriot. At times, rolls of bhang, cocaine, opium and heroin impounded by the state (usually re-sold to the public overtly by the very same so-called law enforcers) would be used as a bait to tame itinerant dissidents.

Student Leaders at the University of Nairobi received impromptu expulsion letters that often lasted for not less than three thousand academic days. That is, excluding weekends and holidays, meaning they were going to show their dreaded faces in the institution after almost a decade. Their tears never aroused any pity from the administration. It was final and no matter how loud they were going to complain; nobody will alter even a single ruling.

A few proponents cringed back others gained momentum. The mother and father of the nation cringed back, too, but then again they resurfaced and barked even louder...steadfast in their mantra they remained. In fact, such threats served as an impetus in their quest of enslaving an entire nation. Days were coming and dying; years were coming and will be dying too.

The leaders of tomorrow had hoped that such old boys would no longer be recycled into the already tarnished system, and crowned they were going to be. The National Cake, handed over by the White colonial masters, and not by anybody’s fault, was damn sweet and addictive! Perhaps young blood was still flowing in their silly veins.

Only death – only death, will deprive them the zeal to continue messing around. These were men and women who understood too well that there is no shame whatsoever in not working for money! A majority of the population still believed in rainmakers, and as such, it was easy to justify such gestures and then squarely lay the blame on such sheer ignorance. The moon was shining on them, and it was useless to blame the cripples for craving for a walk too!

It was heart breaking witnessing the enormous strength with which the master-servant notion was gripping the whole country. It was sad witnessing helplessly as selfless men and women in the frontier of the second liberation were being crammed behind bars,

disappeared, forced into exile and handed exaggerated jail terms. It was painful listening to stories about their torture and untold sufferings.

Rumors always flew back and forth. More arrests followed. More deaths and skillfully pre-arranged accidents followed. By early 1990s, the crusaders of the second liberation were convinced it would take the hand of God to sit in the High Table and finally have a share of the national cake. To many, no chance was forthcoming.

Millions of Kenyans were fed up...calls for the sole political vehicle to be dumped into the political recycle bin became even louder by the day. Ironically, the path of peace they had chosen was tragic in every respect. However, nobody seemed to care. For years, every miserable soul vested with power, had no thought for the ailing and the hungry. People were wasting power and money to read and watch how the saints and the angels were looting their sweat and blood.

All they could do was watch and wait. Watch and wait they had done...now it was time to say enough is enough!

They were slightly euphoric and happy that the bleak years when their white masters dreamt for them and they were not even allowed to reason were now long gone. News of a black man devoured by a mob of white dogs and left to die just for stealing a glance at a white man, was unheard of. Stories of your wife raped before your entire clan, as Her Majesty's rifles held you back, were no longer common.

They had come a long way as a people. From the days when the white masters had struggled to save their grandparents from illiteracy and ignorance, which had blinded and crippled their nation, and from the days when shipping in of white medicines, white doctors, white nurses, white teachers, white administrators and white everything was the rule rather than the exception. They had watched as their former oppressors tried to heal their wounds with generous donations, loans, aids and grants, and scholarships for their bright sons and daughters abroad.

They had also watched as their new black masters conspired with their nemesis to deplete and deprive their country of its rare hardwoods, minerals, ivory, gifted and exceptional doctors, architects, engineers and so on, and so forth.

They were hapless spectators now. The drama unfolding before their eyes was fast leaving behind open mines infested with mosquitoes, understaffed hospitals, shameless corrupt men and women, rulers who were overtaxing them, tribal lords whose loose tongues were bound to stir strife and enmity among the peace-loving Kenyans, and hell knows more!

The children of light understood that even though the moon moves so slowly, it always crosses the town, one way or the other...Milk and honey have different colors, but they share the same house peacefully, isn't that so? He who thinks he is leading and has no one following him is only taking a walk.... If the cockroach wants to rule over the chicken, then it must hire the fox as a bodyguard.... The children of light were beautiful; but they had to work hard despite the deprivation for nobody eats their beauty!

Many of these children of light covertly wished they were free, so they could speak their mind and shout that their captives had locked all the doors leading to hope...that their hope had been sand-witched between vague brains, trampled with old feet, then crumbled and thrown into the pitch darkness of an equally foggy tomorrow.

However, many were fast realizing that not all was lost anyway; they realized that because they were destined for power, they needed not to fight for it! That hopes there will be, if the young blood will learn to lead in the front and encourage from the back as well.

Hope there shall be, when the young shall rise up against social injustices, against corruption, against trivial and petty niceties, and preach justice, truth, and honesty.

Hope there will be, when someone will stand up and make the voice of reason be heard everywhere for the tree of liberty must from time to time be watered with the innocent blood of martyrs and heroes.

They all wanted a better tomorrow, a tomorrow whose basis is fairness, a future whose pillars are honesty and truthfulness, a tomorrow propelled by sincere hard work, and a future, which will house, clothe, and feed every single breathing soul. They will sing, shout, cry, wail, and mourn from house to house, village to village, town to town, and city to city until hills, valleys and mountains would sing along!

Their rapturous choruses had undeniably irritated the ever-alert big ears of the old boys sitting on the High Table. Her Majesty's G-3 riffles silenced the soloists together with their choirs...their painful cries were swallowed by thick walls of Kamiti Maximum Prison, Nyayo Torture Chambers, Manyani Prison and other secret torture safe houses.

Most of these so-called choruses were harmless dirges or perhaps not exactly dirges! May be we can call them eulogies! They eulogized the living-dead who were now practically scavenging and eating their very own.

The old boys mistook them as poisonous ingredients, which will otherwise poison the National Cake – hence people will die. The ingredients were banned and the- would- be soloists intimidated.

Everyone, including Mr. Kagondi, who was a secret active member of the Second Liberation Unarmed Army, himself, felt jittery, moved back and they were soon silenced forever!

The Head of State was hell bend on becoming the undisputable Father and Mother of the Nation, the sole Law, and Order Architect of the Country, The Jury, The Chief Kadhi, Judge and Hangman, Prosecutor, The Highest Priest and a revered god and goddess. Using every available means at his disposal, Moi was not going to spare his detractors. He will follow them beyond their graves and exact the hefty penalty!

The wave of dissent, deafening cries for a multi-party state, only grew even bolder. In the end, Moi conceded and paved a broader way for the reforms. However, a majority of Kenyans wanted more or so he later learnt with utmost disbelief and shock. They not only wanted reforms but also wanted him out!

Sensing defeat in the coming 1992 General Elections, the government operatives resorted to unorthodox means to cement the chances of its ultimate survival. Loyal KANU diehards, KANU Youth Wing, brainwashed sycophants, cronies, and Moi sympathizers waged a decisive all-out war against outsiders perceived to be sympathetic to the opposition parties and living among their constituent's days before elections.

Chaos, clashes, skirmishes, and mayhem soon followed in Rift Valley, along the coastal strip, Western, some parts of Easter and Nairobi Provinces. As was expected, thousands left their homes and were therefore not able to vote. In Mount Elgon, Sabaot clashed

with the neighboring Bukusu then allied to Martin Shikuku and his opposition counterpart Jaramogi Oginga Odinga. Thousands of houses were burn down, hundreds killed, and tens of thousands displaced as a result.

Some key opposition political figures were reportedly bribed, intimidated, blackmailed, harassed or blatantly coerced to orchestrate chaos instigate violence. Soon, the opposition was no longer speaking with one voice. Kibaki and Matiba both decided to go for the presidency (a move that would prove disastrous). The political suicide voluntary committed by the duet worked to the advantage of Moi and further spoiled the chances of the opposition outsmarting the self-declared professor of politics.

Such were years for the solid- hearted. The dust hardly settled down. You had to tread cautiously and watch your tongue. The enemy was forever within, heavily paid to ensure you never lamented...and there were secret lectures by Baba himself on loyalty and good manners to those who were hard headed!

Thousands had felt like moving far, far away... very far away from their beloved country. Many felt like moving any hour, any minute, but the ever-homely, vulnerable, anguished, yet hopeful faces could never let them. They figured the prospects of the hopeful masses and their undying faith, and decided against the urge. A few who could not stand the heavy hand bowed away and continued their onslaught from afar.

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David bed the young family goodbye that late evening with tears in his eyes. He had enjoyed their company as much as they had enjoyed his. The admission procedure had not taken much of Wilson's time who was eager to resume his work.

He walked into the University of Nairobi full of expectations. His high hopes were however shattered before they could even take root as he arrived at the college. The famous College of Architecture, ADD Building that churns out dozens of Architecture, Quantity Surveying, Planning, Design and Real Estate students was nowhere near, what he had envisioned. The building itself looked like it had been lifted from a 1960's landscape; not an element of it befitted its caliber as a school that produced the best designers and architects of this country.

However, he soon realized that even his high school dorms would easily beat the university hostels. The 1970's and 80's buildings showed no signs of renovations or upgrades. Numerous leaking taps and blocked water closets were the norm. All manner of clogs blocked the few sinks available at their mass washroom and the showers were always a mess of soap foams and leaking sewerage.

As a male fresher, he was going to live in wooden prefabricated hostels. With broken windows, dark corridors and wooden exterior, these shackles could easily pass for barnyards in the countryside if one did not have knowledge of their use as university hostels. The wooden houses cover a huge tract of land that would easily provide enough space for the construction of modern hostels to house thousands of students were they to be demolished.

All the same, David counted himself very lucky. Others had missed out or were living on worse conditions. He remembered what brought him here and braced for even harder days ahead. SONU (Student Organization of Nairobi University) had been suspended back in late 1992 for having allegedly supported the opposition and some of its top officials were in jail, dead, missing, or in exile.

Without a student's voice and the continued disappearance, intimidation and detention of student leaders; there was no one to raise their concerns.

SONU leaders over the years had actively participated in matters of national concern. Students led by Wanyiri Kihoro and James Orenge demanded establishment of a truth commission by organizing mass protests after the assassination of JM Kariuki. In 1982, SONU chairperson, Mr. Tito Adungosi was arrested in connection to the coup against President Daniel Toroitich Arap Moi that failed miserably. Mr. Tito Adungosi, as had been widely expected, ended up in jail for ten good years. He would eventually die in prison thanks to the then cruel and bloodthirsty prison warders. His successor, Mwandawiro Mghanga, was expelled, harassed and arrested on multiple occasions for allegedly colluding with other 'enemies of the state' to undermine the government.

Mr. Wafula Buke, then the chairperson of SONU, and others joined hundreds of other detained dissidents in prison, though briefly, in 1987. Mr. Buke was eventually imprisoned on suspicion

that he was spying for the Libyan government after being released temporarily only to be re-arrested again. It was not until 1992 that Mr. Wafula Buke walked out of his cage following the introduction of multi-party system. In February 1990 SONU leaders took to the streets following the mysterious murder of the then Kenya's foreign minister Dr. Robert John Ouko. After four days of mysterious disappearance, charred remains of his mutilated body turned up at Got Alila near his Koru home. This led to closure of the University.

During the struggle for multiparty democracy in Kenya, the union was steadfast in supporting the leaders of opposition who comprised the doyen of Kenyan opposition politics the late Jaramogi Oginga Odinga, Masinde Muliro, Martin Shikuku, George Nthenge, Philip Gachoka, and Ahmed Salim Bahmariz. SONU played a significant role in transforming Kenya into a multiparty state.

Fearing the body was becoming a threat to his firm grip on power, Moi ordered its disbandment in 1992. Many student leaders were suspended or expelled.

David had no interest in politics and his parents repeatedly warned him never to tread that path come what may. Things were not right yes but of what use will his death be to an already bleeding nation? So much was at stake for his little neck. He was a father, a parent and a future husband. He was the sole bright star the entire clan back at home depended on.

He was here to get his Architectural Degree within three years and disappear!

All descend brains from all corners of the great Nation had been converged here. Future doctors, future nurses, future engineers, future professional cheats and heartbreakers, future adulterers, future run away mothers, and fathers...the list is endless!

All descend brains driven by one desire... a massive desire to siphon as much as possible from the pool of wisdom and knowledge. Their bright, enthusiastic, and anxious faces betrayed their unalterable and unshaken tremendous zeal to alter their every bleak tomorrow, a desire to lead desirable lives someday – for they were the leaders of tomorrow.

Soon David realized he was not the only one wallowing in his dark dungeon.

Many comrades were wallowing in their own dark dungeons, too after blindly walking into the trap set by clueless parents and a

government out to gain a political mileage. It was hard to understand why some parents were never ready to accept the fact that people are different, and that they can never be like them.

The many literature books he saw on the neatly arranged rows at the Jomo Kenyatta Memorial Library (JKML) rekindled his dying passion. He soon found himself skipping architecture lessons at the ADD Building to read a novel or an anthology of either poetry or short stories. African literature especially fascinated him for the huge white-written novels were simply wordy and lacked a tinge of creativity. With the exception of one Introduction to Architectural Studies textbook, the rest in his small library at their shared room were novels written by the likes of Chinua Achebe, Ngugi WA Thiong'o, Wole Soyinka, Okot P'Bitek, Enrik Ibsen, Violet Kala, and Margaret Ogolla among others.

The lectures at the ADD Building were ever boring and seemed to take an eternity. No matter how hard he tried to concentrate, the concepts kept eluding his disinterested mind. He would instead take an imaginary trip all the way to Chebyuk, hundreds of miles away, and see himself walking at the riverbanks of Emia or Teremi. He would wander aimlessly listening to the whistles of the birds, the bubbles of the waters as they softly made their way alongside the gravity down towards Kumorong' waterfall and the chuckles, laughter and giggles of his younger siblings as they wrestle with the mighty currents of the waters trying to learn how to swim like their seniors.

Sustained jostling, incessant murmurs and endless chattering of his fellow students once the lecturer ended his or her tutoring, were the only things that interrupted his self-induced stupor. Every day he left those menacing lectures, he felt like a caged bird. He had the wings that could take him to places yet his captors will not just let him. He had the will and the energy to flap his wings yet there was no space.

Inside, as days turned into weeks, he felt unsure more than ever before. What will he do? Suppose he fails in his exams, what will his parents say? Fortunately, their college had put an announcement via the main notice board and some of his friends sharing his fate had applied for inter-faculty transfers. The deadline was fast drawing near and he was yet to make up his mind.

He contemplated writing to his father but decided against such a move. A letter will take ages and the deadline would have expired. Furthermore, he feared his father might travel and confront him. He thought of travelling to Nakuru, a two and a half hours' journey away via Kenya Bus, but he feared he would get lost before he even found the Bus Station. The numerous streets and skyscrapers dotted here and there made it almost impossible to master the city.

Nakuru had been modest and the buildings were hardly beyond six stores. In the end, he decided to apply for an interfaculty transfer. He avoided the option of Education and chose instead the BA, Bachelor of Arts. A friend who had applied for the same course had convinced him it was what he needed. Under BA, he will have other options, which included majoring on languages, Economics, Political science, Sociology, Mass Communication among others.

He had heard of the many jokes other students were making against those who were doing the BA. It was widely perceived as an inferior course meant for the dunderheads and lazy bones unwilling to utilize their brains fully. Bachelor of Anything was one of the most famous torturous taunt used against them. Others included Baba Alinituma, Baba Ameniita, and Bila Amani and so on and so forth.

Such words never killed. They demoralized and embarrassed yes but in the end, what mattered was fulfilling one's wishes and being able to enjoy your work. The drawings and designs would not help him. He might get extra coins and respect out there yes, but what about his inner peace and satisfaction. He had always wanted to do something that will bring him close to other human beings and not confine him to the periphery with inanimate objects. He wanted a rightful share of their grief, laughter, emptiness, pain, joy, and dissatisfactions.

He decided should his interfaculty transfer sail through, he will not breath a word about it to anyone...not even his sweetheart, Helen!

After an everlasting month of waiting, a typed list of the names of the 'chosen few' came. A Good Samaritan later posted a copy on the notice board. To his utter shock and disbelief, his name was also on the precious list. He was overqualified and there was no way he could miss yet he feared he might not make it. That was the key to his cage. His campus life now had a new meaning. He was

now free to flap his once clogged wings and explore the wide world before him.

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Helen joined Nakuru High School, endured all manner of challenges, scorn, and ridicule, and excelled in her co-curriculum activities, club activities, and exams. Eventually, she proceeded to form five and then later to form six. She was a tiger in her class and in spite of the occasional sneers from her jealous classmates, she was adorable and hard to ignore.

Nobody had known she was a mother and the Principal was careful enough not to spill the beans. She was ever quiet and hardly mingled with her cube mates who had enough excuses of gossiping about her. Alienated, rejected, disliked, and abhorred, Helen had only one comfort: reading! She read all the books necessary and her efforts reflected on her exceptional results repeatedly. She was the undisputed number one in her stream until her very last term in Nakuru High School.

Meto was too pleased with himself for having made that grand and risky decision. He bragged openly about her girl's outstanding performance and was too willing to show his jealous neighbors the trophies her daughter had bagged.

Little Mathew was growing faster and soon he would be old enough to join a nursery school. He had quickly learned to pronounce the word Momo in reference to her grandmother who had been breastfeeding him since his mother left for school.

During the brief vacations, he would play with his mother's dark, rough, and well-plated hair, fondle her tender fingers, stroke her high cheeks, and sometimes try to pierce her big eyes using his tiny, curious, and seemingly untenable index finger. The more time she spent with Mathew the more attached and bound to him, she became.

The playful little angel seemed so harmless it made her cry whenever she remembered her evil thoughts against him. There had been times when she had wished she should have even aborted him! A girlfriend had even showed her the most effective herbs that would rid her of the unnecessary burden. She had heard of agonizing experiences from those who had been through abortion and the subsequent miscarriages or total barrenness. In the end, she decided to bear it all.

David wrote occasionally and hardly came home. Nakuru had since become his second home. He spends most of his long holidays with Wilson and his family who enjoyed his company and regarded his presence as a blessing in disguise especially for their growing daughter who needed a mentor.

Mwanaisha was a curious child and full of endless questions. David was patient with her unlike Helen who was dismissive and ever engrossed on her thoughts. She had stayed with the couple for two weeks only before hurriedly leaving to reunite with her child whom she missed a lot.

The two had been like their parents. They had welcomed, housed, and treated them so kindly. Occasionally, Wilson and Wakesho had visited Helen at Nakuru High School with niceties and always left her with enough pocket money. During weekends, especially on Saturdays, they would often accompany her to KITI SDA Church or to Great News SDA church. Whenever Mrs.

Kwatenge was in her usual good moods, they would use her vehicle to travel to Nairobi to see David.

Wilson had come to learn that he no longer kept the Sabbath. It was hard to believe that David could ever contemplate abandoning his once strong faith. During his stay at his place when he was in High School, David used to share Bible Verses with them. Using the knowledge gained from his numerous interactions with Pastor Abel, he had constantly reminded them to observe the Sabbath.

To Wilson, then a devote Catholic, it was not easy to appreciate his teachings. All his life, he had lived knowing Jesus resurrected on a Sunday thus its observance as the Holy Day. In their church, they were not encouraged to read the Bible freely and whatever the priest read to them, apparently dictated from thousands of miles away in the Vatican, the headquarters of the Holy See and the so-called Mother Church, was final, irrefutable, the truth and nothing but the truth!

He had researched and read dozens of different Bible versions and realized David's preaching had some tangible truths. He read Genesis 2:3, Exodus 20:8, and Luke 4:16 and so on, so forth, and realized he had not been keeping the Sabbath. Within no time, he had shifted his allegiance, joined Crater SDA Church near present day Menengai Medical College, and influenced not only his wife but also three of his staff mates, Mrs. Kwatenge included.

“What happened to you, cousin?”

“There is hardly time and energy left after a torturous week behind books and lecturers...”

“That’s not a clever pretext...he who fears the sun does not become chief!”

“What does it matter anyway? A large chair does not make a king!”

“It is God’s command you are going against...you do not tell the man he is carrying you that he stinks! Have you forgotten how you used to tress to us the importance of the Sabbath to anyone calling himself or herself a Christian?”

“Of course I haven’t...but that was then. I have been reading avidly and have since realized that observance of a day alone is not relevant. Read Colossians 2: 16...I have seen church elders overtly perverting with the very flock they are supposed to shield from earthly pleasures and comfort.”

“It is not up to you to play judge...that’s the responsibility of God alone!”

“Trust me it has not been easy to share the same roof with hypocrites who profanes the name of God and blasphemes...I am the church, remember?”

“Well, if you say so, cousin...”

David had been battling with an inner conviction that was threatening to separate him with the so-called church. He had read the Church Manual, noticed some inconsistencies with the Bible, and concluded that their doctrine was not wholly holy after all! He revered the Holy Bible and he regarded it his sole doctrine.

Nevertheless, he never turned down their request of accompanying them to church whenever he visited to spend his usually prolonged holiday.

Mrs. Kwatenge had encouraged David to learn how to drive and he had been too eager to begin his lessons. Life in campus was awesome and everything, with the exception of his little, tightly guarded secret, seemed to be going on well. He had met and interacted with friends from almost every corner of the country and was fascinated by their rich, interesting yet diverse cultures.

He occasionally shared his wild escapades in Nairobi with Wilson, of how it had been increasingly becoming hard to shy away from its tempting lifestyle and about his roommate, Onyango, who

drinks alcohol like a thirsty fish! The doctor repeatedly tried to warn him never to drink and the Satan's urine had done a great deal of damage to his liver. He had helped him fight the irresistible urge but in vain. In the end, he had himself started taking small mouthfuls of the devil's urine!

Onyango consumed the liquor with the rate with which he consumed the generous beauty pageants strutting in the corridors of their hostels every night. At first, he had had to leave his roommate do his dirty business but when the frequency became too much to sustain his self-exile; he had to stay behind and withstand the tempting moans, groans and squeaking of the bed. Not only was he the de facto undisputed lady-killer, but also a professional flirter whose luring tongue brought home generous harvest every evening.

Onyango liked them young and fresh...preferably tight, inexperienced and with absent or at best, minimal knowledge about his tainted name in campus. Funny thing was that it appeared even the smartest, disciplined, and stingy campus women, despite their full knowledge of Onyango's sexual misadventures, wanted to be laid by him!

Nevertheless, Onyango was a bright young man who could score straight A's in almost all his units, this in spite of his minimal contact with books. More so, he was sociable and easy to make friends with him. Even though David despised his exceedingly exaggerated pervasiveness, some part of him could not help admiring Onyango.

One evening, Kerubo, Onyango's regular bedmate, came with her friend Wairimu. She was such a beauty...light skinned, five feet tall, slender, with a full chest, average bosom, thin lips, a long nose, and small eyes. She had hurriedly left that night though he could hardly forget the warmth, the bewitching smile, and the tender voice... every day he was praying for God to bring her in his lonely life. No other girl had affected his system the way Wairimu had done, perhaps with the exception of Helen ...hers was a permanent effect that refused to go away for days, weeks and months on end however hard he tried to shrug off such thoughts.

She was doing the same course with David was his secret admirer. David was a specially gifted student and he seemed to know almost everything. He was kind and too willing to offer his answers

to the tricky questions on the past papers they would often revise together that was ‘especially designed’ to fail serious jokers.

He had seen her and had noticed the manner in which she eyed him. He had been too naïve to reciprocate and thought there was nothing sinister about her alluring looks. Her coming, together with Kerubo, into their room opened his eyes.

With time, any free time he had, he could pop into their hostel, just to say hello and see that gorgeous face. Secretly, the girl had also come to like his handsome face. When they were through with their last paper of the second semester of their third year, he had wanted to know every single detail: from her favorite meal to the name of her great, great grandmother!

Sweet Wairimu was living in Thika with her mother. Their rural home was miles away in Runyenjes. A certain Wanyoike, occasionally introduced to her as her uncle by her mother despite bearing physical attributes similar to those of Wairimu, was the one complementing her financial needs. She had come to discover she had a father, after all, who was working in the city though she was yet to meet him physically, and so on and so forth.

When they parted, either one of them was crying. They promised each other that they should meet often once the university reopens.

“What should I do, Wilson?”

“About what?”

“My feelings for this Wairimu girl...”

“Save them for another time... The most beautiful fig may contain a worm! A Kikuyu is a Kikuyu, whether dead or alive!”

“And I presume a Taita is a Taita, dead or alive too, Mmh! A hyena cannot smell its own stench! They might be beautiful yes, but they all walk around with empty brains!”

“It is only a stupid cow that rejoices at the prospect of being taken to a beautiful abattoir. Wakesho is different! She is not a gold digger and her feelings are not fictitious...”

“What makes you so sure?”

“I just know it!”

“But I love her... she is such a beauty, man!”

“You have no idea what you are talking about... getting only a beautiful woman is like planting a vine on the roadside everyone feeds on it!”

“Ugliness with a good character is better than beauty...I felt the chemistry...those proverbial butterflies at my tummy and I think...”

“You really believe she is the one, right? Think again, brother...Patience is the mother of a beautiful child; why the rush? You still have a long way to go, brother!”

“Why are you being so mean? You and I know that love is a despot who spares no one!”

“I am not being mean, Naibei. I am being a good brother! To run is not necessarily to arrive; patience is the key, which solves all problems..., patience, can cook a stone! At its bottom, one can find heaven!”

“I thought good brothers support each other! If relatives help each other, what evil can hurt them?”

“Not with such kind of problems, brother...women are like a pepper; till you have chewed it you do not know how hot it is!”

“I know it must be Helen...Home affairs are not talked about on the public square, or are they brother?”

“So you know...why are you doing this to her? What has gotten into you, Naibei?”

“What do you mean? Since when can one control their feelings?”

“You are a father, remember? Ears that do not listen to advice, accompany the head when it is chopped off!”

“Oh, not that again...of course I know!”

“No! You do not know!”

“I know, trust me...but the fact that we have a baby with Helen does not tie my heart to her forever, Mmh.”

“There is a very thin line between love and infatuation...takes your time, brother!”

“But I know I love her...sometimes, man must learn to trust his instincts! Wait until you see how beautiful she is, Mmh.”

“That is what I call madness now! A snake is a snake, whether big or small!”

“It is not madness...it is love. Why are you being so blind to my plight? It is all about love...I loved her, would have loved, more than anything, to love her, but I also think I am falling in love with Wairimu!”

“What about the child?”

“A child belongs to the community! I haven’t denied him...everybody know I accepted the responsibility, and I am willing to take good care of him...”

“Abandoning her mother will not do him any good...he will grow up and hate you for it!”

“Hehehe, is that what you think?”

“I do not just think but I also believe so...these things happen. Open your inner eyes and tread cautiously please!”

“Well, let’s see what happens with time...”

Wilson warned him further about potential dangers of the riotous lifestyle his friends were living. He had talked about the prospects of contracting fatal diseases such as HIV/AIDs should one engage in indiscriminate sexual activities with multiple partners.

His wife once regarded that strange disease as a timely punishment from God and he had come to agree with her candid sentiments.

“It surely is a way of curbing our runaway pervasion...”

“What makes you think so?”

“Have you ever imagined a world without such plagues?”

“Well, not really...”

“Trust me people would be free to pervert anywhere and with anyone...”

“You could be right, dear...”

“I have been wondering why such incurable sexually transmitted infections are often fatal and come with severe symptoms.”

“Well, one can never know...a disease is a disease, I do not see how special HIV/AIDs is, my love!”

“Wait until you see its victims at their final stages...”

“Well, unless I see one I am not convinced. We must not always drag God’s name into our messy lives. I do not understand why everyone blames him for everything, Mmh.”

“I am not blaming anyone just trying to find answers...”

A week after their conversation, he had accompanied his boss to see his relative who had been terminally ill for close to three months. His friend was kind enough to warn him beforehand that their would-be host was dying of HIV/AIDs. He had heard of the indescribable open sores in the victims’ bodies, the violent and

ceaseless diarrhea, the eternal coughing, shifty appetite, and the inevitable emaciation, but he was yet to see it for himself.

There was no shaking of hands. They kept a safe distance between the mats where their almost lifeless host's body lay throughout. He had had to mimic, rather irritably, the careful dodgy movements of his boss when he would every now and then uncomfortably shift his head to avoid the piteous stare emanating from the emaciated bag of bones, which kept creaking because of a coughing. The coughing was often persistent and from the jerking and twitching movement of the numerous creases in his bony face, he could tell it was painful.

He had uneasily watched his boss struggle to find the right words for the condemned relation. The dying man had trouble-identifying people for the disease had found its way to his eyes. His eyes seemingly threatened to pop out of their sockets and after offering him the packed food they had carried with them, Wilson realized he had trouble eating. Of course, the sores under his tongue were making it increasingly difficult to eat solid food.

"That is not his thing anymore..." A slender, tall, dark skinned and quiet woman sitting beside the mat where her husband's lifeless body lay said, almost in a whisper, as if the talking itself was a painful and laborious thing to do.

"It is better if it is a little softer..." She continued, her right hand trying to support his weak body.

Wilson could not help eyeing her every movement. He saw the pain, sorrow, and misery in her tired eyes as they studied the man. His gaze followed her left hand as it repeatedly wafts the air above his body to scare away an army of irritating houseflies. He saw the hopelessness in her face as she struggled to hide her fears with a wry smile meant to make us feel at home.

"How are you feeling now, Samson?" Samson tried sitting up but he had no enough energy left to support him.

The woman hesitantly supported him and for the third time, he studied their faces intently.

"...Mmh, not any better...whom did you say you are again? My eyes..."

"It is Yator, your cousin..."

"Oh, how kind of you to come visiting..."

"That's what brothers do, I suppose...holding each other with

both hands!”

“And your friend? Do we know each other?”

“He is a colleague from the office...”

“Oh, I see...thank you!”

“I just wanted you to know that in case of anything, I am here...”

“Oh, how kind of you...there isn't much to do though.”

“Do not say that, brother...”

“The doctor was here last yesterday...I overheard him saying to my wife that I will not live for long, is that right, Miriam?”

Miriam shifted uneasily. She avoided his cloudy eyes and said nothing.

“Well, that is up to God, brother...no man can tell the day or the hour of our setting off...”

“You are not looking at me...I just have this weird feeling that he was right...”

“You will be okay brother...you will be all right, trust me!”

The coughing resumed. After the coughing, he had vomited vehemently even though he had only smelled their expensive package of deep-fried fish, Kachumbari, and a slice of Ugali. Yator could not take it anymore. He hurriedly stormed out of the house and silently sobbed. He mourned, cursed, and asked why?

Samson had been his childhood friend. They had endured the difficult terrain, dozens of miles back and forth school, and constant cattle raids from the neighboring Pokot cattle rustlers. He had helped him singlehandedly secure his job and had housed him for the first three months before he could finally settle down. He had taught him the robes of survival, showed him the best drinking joints, and introduced him to his ill hobby of perverting.

“Do you use condoms?” He would always ask Samson.

A friend advised Yator to play his cards closer to his chest and he had been treading cautiously. The generous and cheap slats often straying in front of bars or in the dark corridors in between drinking joints, were the weapon of choice Samson embraced in as far as assuaging his seemingly insatiable appetite was concerned.

“Why? What fool eats a banana with its peel?”

“Restless feet may walk into a snake pit.... There are pregnancies, and diseases, Samson..., and you have a family, remember?”

“Who cares? Abortions are cheap to procure these days, and those nasty white wrappings you call condoms do not wash down well with me either! Only a mad man eats a sweet with its nylon wrapping, man!”

“Well, never say you were not warned! Only a fool tests the depth of a river with both feet!”

“I will not be the first, will I, friend? A bird will always use another birds’ feathers to feather its own nest; rain does not fall on one roof alone; a child’s fingers are not scalded by a piece of hot yam which his mother puts into his palm!”

“Don’t set sail using someone else’s star...I just want you to be careful, brother...they might appear healthy on the outside, but one can never tell what is eating them on the inside, Mmh.”

He had always laughed and ignored his best friend’s warnings. After all, he was a lucky bearer of proud heart, which can survive a general failure because such a failure does not prick its pride! It had not taken long before the early signs started materializing. He started sweating excessively during the nights that were surprisingly usually cold. Overtime, the abnormal sweating had graduated into ugly pimples all over his body, vomiting, soreness in his throat, swollen glands, rashes, joint aches, muscle pain, diarrhea and persistent coughing and headache.

“It could be typhoid or Malaria...” His naïve wife consoled him.

“But I have been on medication and the pain all over is not showing signs of abating, Miriam!”

“Be patient!”

He had been patient but years came and went and his condition only grew from bad to worse. Yator advised him to see a doctor and upon being tested, the results had been positive! He was fast losing his weight and the diarrhea was now chronic. Infections were regular in his body and he had open sores in his mouth and skin. The fever, coughing, and headache worsened.

Out of frustration, Samson resigned from his lucrative job as Post Bank Branch Manager, packed his belongings, and retreated to his backyard silently. Yator had kept close contact and occasionally visited. It was during one of his usual visits that he had asked Wilson to accompany him.

Exactly a month later, he was no more. The scourge that was fast eating into the flesh of the nation had once again claimed the life of its one additional victim. They buried him in a hurry and soon, they had all forgotten about him! Behind, he left three fatherless kids without a financial benefactor and bleak futures.

David had listened and promised to behave himself. He had not even heard of the so-called scourge and the news of its very existence in the first place. It was strange how so much could be going on right beneath his dumb nose without him ever noticing. He had one more year to go before completing his BA Degree (almost two years less than the Architectural Degree would have lasted him there).

## Chapter 8

"But if you ask what is the good of education in general, the answer is easy: that education makes good men, and that good men act nobly." — *Plato, ancient Greek philosopher*

Chemos had shifted to Machewa to occupy the farm his husband had bought some years back. Joram had since abandoned his impromptu stops at his hut during the night and her other three co-wives had increasingly been on her neck, occasionally, over unfounded accusations.

Not that she had any grudges against him...she was beyond her menopause nevertheless and such life never excited her anymore. The last stroke had been allegations that she was the one encouraging their hot-tempered husband to beat them.

Joram was fast aging and ironically, the more advanced his age grew; the more untenable his enormous anger grew. He was too happy to see Chemos out of his sight. He was even more elated when Meto agreed to allow Mathew to accompany her. Everyone agreed Machewa would be lonely for her...what was more, Helen would be going to the university, and the little child will have no one to take good care of him.

Cherop had not been great company to him. Many a day, she had shouted at him for no reason at all. As such, he was always afraid of her and it was understandable to notice enthusiasm in his young face when asked if he would love to accompany her other grandmother living across the fence.

Kipyego, Cheptot, Ndiema, and other young men had helped load her belongings to a hired Datsun KZA Pickup. Upon arriving at Machewa, they were instrumental in purchasing building materials ranging from a giant mahogany, corrugated iron sheets for the main house, grass, and sticks for the kitchen and an extra hut. Friends, who had earlier emigrated to Shamba or Trans-Nzoia, were too willing to offer their hand and soon, Chemos was living in her brand new Mabati house.

A week later, a small herd of cattle arrived, driven by Ndiema and his peers. Life was slowly taking a new shape and when the time came, she hired a neighbor to prepare her farm. Machewa

was a little warmer though with infertile soils that needed cow dung for crops to produce rich yields. The tiny plots of lands had no room for her cows, a bull, and several heifers to graze. She was compelled at times to allow them to join those of her neighbors, which were driven, down to Kamorombo forest.

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After secretly graduating, David visited. He had graduated with honors and had been awarded a scholarship to further his studies in a faraway country, which he had turned down out rightly for obvious reasons. With the help of Wairimu's relative, a Mr. Wanyoike, he had secured a job as a Social Worker and the pay was more than enough.

Mother had been sending greetings often through Wilson's friend who recently transferred to Nairobi after allegations of corruption. He knew she had missed him so much. Officially, he had a year and so before finally graduating. He had heard of the news of her mother's move to Shamba and had asked for the directions to Machewa.

Wairimu had seen him off at the Kenya Bus Station. Nairobi had been hectic. The routine at his working station had worn him out and as the bus begun its stretch across the land; he longed to be home with his beloved mother.

Onyango could not make it. He had visited him a day earlier at Kenyatta National Hospital. He was a terrible sight and his peers at the exclusively TB Ward showed every sign of bidding this world goodbye any minute. He left feeling angry for not doing enough to warn him beforehand. He felt guilty for not sharing Samson's sad tale with him. He felt angry that Kerubo had had to abandon him leaving behind a suicide note blaming him for her inevitable decision to end her life.

Kerubo had been such a sweet friend. It was she, who opened his naïve eyes to the real world. Before dating Onyango, she had dated not one but three other 'church elders' who were so revered and could even speak in strange tongues at the pulpit! He had just walked away from the UoNSDA, University of Nairobi Seventh Day Adventist, for the same reasons and a friend had introduced him to the Christian Union. He was a devote Christian who could easily pass as the only virgin in the entire campus!

The praise and worship team had been incredible and so were congregates who openly wept in the midst of their ear-splitting, aggressive and solemn prayers. However, it was the holy spirit manifestation hour that fascinated him more than anything else did. During the prayer hour, young men and women would fall on the hard floor with a thud after being allegedly possessed with the Holy Spirit.

Truth was some of these so-called holy men and women were Kerubo's secret lovers. She was a celebrity in her own rights, elegant, beautiful, immaculate, graceful, and nimble yet at times, an out rightly invidious young woman whose lack of astuteness often landed her in troubles. She was one of those girls we now call Chips Funga whose generosity assuaged the sexual appetite of many a hungry man in campus.

She spilled the beans one evening.

"They are all cheats and liars!"

"How could you be so sure? Do not anger the voice of the Lord, sister!"

"Looks are deceiving, brother! They all are a Mr. Old-Man-Monkey who marries Mrs. Old-Woman-Monkey!"

"How dare you accuse angels of God? The sun will shine on those who stand before it shines on those who kneel under them!"

"Hehehe, angels or demons? Rain beats a leopard's skin, but it does not wash out the spots!"

"Stop it already! Only when you have crossed the river, can you say the crocodile has a lump on his snout, remember?"

"Wait you will see one of your angels tonight crawling in our room..."

"Unless I see with my own eyes I won't believe it!"

That evening, Maina, the CU Chairperson, reportedly the holiest man of God, carefully and discreetly reported to his sweetheart's dungeon flowing with honey and milk. He had started dating Kerubo's roommate after she ditched him for charming Onyango and as the tale goes, it was a scheme of punishing her for her sin.

Two days later, Kerubo showed him a jubilant team of holy men marching with stiff, erect, and conceited gait along their corridor towards room number A25 on the left far corner. It was very late in the night and unexpected for the holy men of God to be at

such ungodly hours. Room number A25 was the de facto warehouse of all manner and type of latest pornographic literature.

Just that same day, David, through Kerubo, had procured a comprehensive pornographic magazine that he carefully hid under his government-issued mattress. Often, strange moans in the dead of the night interrupted his sweet sleep and each time he opened his one eye through the edge of the blanket, he always noticed the repeated jerking of Onyango's hind limbs under the cover of the blanket.

When he was away, he had inspected his bed and accidentally discovered the discreetly hidden magazine with naked men and women perverting!

That he had his own copy, which came from room A25, was proof enough that the so-called holy men of God were no ordinary angels: they were ugly wolves masquerading as God's sheep!

"So the strange tongues and hysterical noises they have been making in church are all fictitious, Mmh..."

"Grow up, David...stop living on that imaginary world! It is all about money! Money and sanctified sex...I read somewhere that unlike what the church has made us to believe, the devil actually is the greatest friend the church has ever had; he has singlehandedly kept it in business!"

"I thought it was all so real, trust me...that everything was simply in black and white!"

"Now you know, Mmh...it is a *do as I say, not as I do* world...besides, money is thicker than Christ! A modern day born-again Kenyan knows poverty is slavery...they all know too well that lack of money is lack of friends; if you have money at your disposal, every dog and goat will claim to be related to you!"

"Very clever of them, ah...It's a pity they forget that even though it is not shameful to make some money, it's unwise to allow money to make you!"

"You can say that again...Dogs do not actually prefer bones to meat; it is just that no one ever gives them meat!"

"That explains why I no longer believe in the existence of an all-powerful master upstairs!"

"Well, you are going too far, Kerubo..."

"Not far enough, David...I now believe in here and now. Forget about those Sunday school fantasies that were wittingly stuffed down our naïve throats...there are no rewards for the meek

and humble...there is no and they lived happily thereafter end for the so-called pure in heart. There is, you must have realized so far, pain, suffering, misery, poverty and a gruesome death for such blind believers! They say if slapped on your left cheek, you turn the other cheek, Mmh. Well, I am telling you if you were to slap me right now, I will smite you hip and thigh with unmatched ferocity! That is being a realist! You have not been living in a real world, so wake up from your doomed comfort zone.”

He had woken up and decided not to live a lie a day at a time. He realized that for too long, he had been deceiving himself and had allowed others to make a fool out of himself.

“After all I am a church, or so says the Bible. The religion, Sabbath-keeping, festivals-adherences, and other rules were merely a shadow for the things to come.” He always reassured himself whenever the nagging thought of joining other faithful followers in honoring the Lord’s Day resurged.

Inside, he knew it would be impossible to forget that voice of reason. She was a brilliant mind who excelled in her CATs, many a time thanks to Mwakenya, and the tough examinations despite her eternal trips to the discos and impromptu parties. She was hardly sober yet whenever she opened her mouth, which she often did; her words always exuded exceptional wisdom. That their dreams and aspirations in life can end in such a cruel manner was heartbreaking. He had silently cried as he left the hospital and promised his former roommate that he will constantly remember him in prayers.

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Limuru had not changed so much. The menacing thick fog was still there. Vehicles had to literally crawl and move at an exceedingly slow pace, for it was almost invisible. He had carried a Daily Nation newspaper to ease the inevitable boredom.

Robert Mugabe, Zimbabwe’s president, was still talking tough, though the article under political analysis had revisited the dark movement of Zimbabwe. Gakurahindi, rain that washes away trash, had not died. Gakurahindi was flexing its muscles and its heat still being felt as well. The movement had been responsible for loss of over twenty thousand lives, immediately after independence, back in the 1980s.

The minority Ndebele community paid heavily for crimes they never committed. Armed gangs pushed scores of their young

men into mineshafts and their crammed bodies' subsequently riddled with bullets! At gunpoint, bloodthirsty militia ordered young boys and girls to set fire on the houses full of their family members.

The shocking revelations reminded him of the infamous Indemnity Act he had read about in a Sociology Textbook. Passed in Kenya's parliament in the late 1960s, the act had served as a basis of untold marginalization across the northern frontier and some of his Somali classmates had attested to this fact. Some years back, Kenyans of Somali extraction could not pass to be Kenyans enough unless they had an extra card identity card!

In the eyes of many, it seemed the government had long decided to crush the northerners completely. For many years, insecurity and destruction had been the order of the day in the north. The Malka Mari (1981), Wagalla (1994) and various other massacres had been dealt the Somali community a severe body blow it will take decades to recover from. Now it seemed the north would forever suffer untold levels of neglect and deliberate marginalization by successive regimes.

From his sociology lectures, it was clear his country was becoming a perfect capitalist firmly controlled by a few bourgeoisies who were keen on maintaining the status qua by hook or crook. In fact, he saw no wisdom in claiming that a country called Kenya was in existence. To him, there were perpetual thieves their hapless victims, saints fervently being demonized every passing minute and demons occasionally canonized by the authorities.

He was aware how that fictitious geographical element labeled Kenya was loosely curved based on ethnic arithmetic as a clever ploy of divide and rule by the Britons in their quest to establish an expansive empire. He was aware how native communities subsequently turned against each other and how the black colonialists had inherited such a phenomenon blindly and ironically taken it a notch up higher with exaggerated enthusiasm!

He was also aware how the Somali's had tried to break away from the motherland during the infamous Shifta War and the inevitable retribution that had followed...so much social injustices were being perpetrated and orchestrated by the state machinery against them yet nobody bothered. The indifference among his comrades was also extremely worrying.

He quickly flipped over the pages, stopping here and there to marvel at a screeching title about yet another disaster, yet another arrest, yet another corruption scandal, yet another land grabbing, yet another mysterious murder of suspected dissident and so on and so forth. One was left wondering if nothing good ever happens for the news people to write about.

The bus swayed from side to side, from here to there due to a generous number of potholes. Moi's government had seemingly no time and money to repair the roads, yet there was enough to invest massively in private ranches and businesses abroad!

The only time a shaky and speedy repair is ordered, was when Rais Mtukufu had a special date with miserable Wananchi in some marginalized, rural areas. To add salt to injury, it was rumored that his envoy always carried sags of fresh notes to entice the meek crowd lined up on either side of the road under the mercy of a sun that was literally roasting their bodies thanks to its scorching heat as a way of ensuring they sing his name even louder than before!

It was very late when they reached Nakuru. The smell of the soothing breeze was so familiar. The lake was not visible at that and neither was the Menengai crater on the north. They waited for hours before heading further west. A few passengers had alighted then replaced. He had no plans of stopping by to say jambo to Wilson and his little family but he knew if he would not do so while returning; he will be in big trouble.

As the pleasant lights faded away in the distance, the bus gaining momentum, it stroked 9 PM. Eldama Ravine route was superb. He thanked heavens for guiding their genius pilot. His geography had not been terrible as such. He knew they were now traversing Baba's extensive land. He knew somewhere in the cover of darkness; herds of cattle were comfortably resting their tired bodies on largely unused tarmac roads. From his slightly opened window, he could see tiny bright flickers probably of florescent lambs outside abandoned grass-thatched huts.

On either side of the road, lay the massive plot protected by an electric fence. He further knew there were more others in the Heart of Rift Valley and elsewhere...lying idle like a cobra, which had swallowed a whole goat! Somewhere in between Kapsabet Boys High School and Makutano Junction, he had fallen asleep, as the miraculous mobile house took him to his beloved mother's home.

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Kitale was still the same. Milk Lorries came and went, went and came back again. From the long queues of idle Lorries waiting to be loaded with maize bags, he could tell the ADC farms were still going strong. As they headed deep into the maize forests, David could not wait meeting his mother. It had been almost five years of yearning, craving and waiting. Obviously, the absence had made his heart fonder.

Mzee George's farm was still intact. A forest of trees covered most parts of it and so was Tondorie Estate. Machewa River was ever full, protected by the thick bushes and tall trees. From its heart in Mzee James's swampy farm, it roared down to Kamorombo forest...funny though, a strange voice from the wooden Transit Receiver, every now and then announced deaths in the North due to lack of rainfall.

Here, signs of prevalent flooding were unmistakable. Later, he heard that some few weeks' earlier three goats, a cow, and a Machewa Primary School standard seven kid had succumbed to the wrath of floods.

It was late July 1996. It seemed it had been raining eternally. The soils were muddy, tiny streams that had seemingly materialized from nowhere overflowing and the banks of Machewa River almost giving way to the large volume of water. Despite soils being eroded year in year out downhill, crops were doing well. Some neighbors who had been keen to plant early enough had started eating their maize.

Mother was ecstatic. She was happy for seeing her child back home in one whole piece. They had hugged for an eternity and allowed the tears of joy to freely flow down their cheeks. As soon as he had sat down on a stool under the shed of the giant bougainvillea, she offered him a whole gourd of Mursik.

The fresh smell of the flowers surrounded with brightly cultured papery bracts was refreshing. He had bend to pick one underneath the table in front of him and nearly sent the unbalanced table flying over alongside the precious gourd.

"He seems too preoccupied with the toys..." Mother informed him.

He had wanted to share the milk with his son. He hadn't seen him for years and had longed to hear him call him Pa'.

“That is very selfish!”

“He is just a child, Naibei...”

“Well, every normal child enjoys the company of their mother especially if they haven’t seen each other for years, Mmh!”

“He is a little shy and perhaps afraid...”

He was disappointed. The thought of rejection by none other than his own blood and flesh was too much for his tired soul to bear. He was glad nevertheless that Mathew had not turned down his extravagant gifts. The toys had cost enough to last him for a whole month!

The tiny Bata Shoes were a little larger for his small feet but they looked nice and also matched with the brown shorts, a black heavy sweater, and a white Michael Jackson shirt. David felt jealous. At his age, shoes were merely an imagined phenomenon. He had worn his very first during his reporting date to Nakuru High School many years back.

It was awesome being home. It just felt wonderful being home. They had talked all day long and mother had wanted to know so much ...in fact, so much he was wondering what she was up to. How soon was he planning to marry Helen? Had he met with someone else? When was he going to graduate?

Well. He had dared not be too candid with his sweet mother; however, the truth kept bulging – threatening all the while to sneak out. It had taken time.

“I am still waiting for the right time; patience attracts happiness; it brings near that which is far; a patient man will eat ripe fruit!”

“There is nothing like the right time, my son! Time waits for no man...”

“I just want to be sure...we both know if you find “Miss This Year” beautiful, then you’ll find “Miss Next Year” even more so...”

“Sure about what exactly? Beauty? What can be more than the beauty of the heart? Always remember that getting only a beautiful woman is like planting a vine on the roadside everyone feeds on it...If there is character, ugliness becomes beauty; if there is none, and beauty becomes ugliness! And what about her?”

“Helen? She is beautiful, no doubt about it...”

“Then what are you still waiting for? She has been waiting all these years and so has he, Mmh!” She said with a tinge of sadness in her voice while pointing her index finger towards the direction where Mathew was.

The little boy was innocently playing with his new toys. He followed the direction of her index finger and saw the child: playful, harmless, innocent, unblemished, and yet seemingly uncaring.

“The child is here, mother, and I will be providing for him anything he needs!”

“What are you trying to say? What about its mother? That poor girl really loves you, Naibei...she really does! Dare not forget that no matter how far an eagle flies up the sky, it will definitely come down to look for food!”

“I know, mother...The gentle strides of a tiger do not indicate cowardice!”

“If you are that much brave, then what are you waiting for, Mmh?”

Mother had not expected this. She felt obliged to pry as far as her newfound courage will allow her. True, it had taken a goliath of courage to pry her son’s life. Nevertheless, she was just trying to be a nice mother.

“But surely you must have known she has been waiting...”  
The struggle was effortless.

He had to tread cautiously.

“Yes mother, I am fully aware...problem is we hardly communicate!”

“That over there is excuse enough to forget such rhetoric! It cannot be raised without a mother!”

She eyed him angrily; he quickly shifted his guilty eyes away. Again, he saw the little boy. He was now in class one and could write from one to ten without struggling. The ABCD...Z sketches were still visible on the floor and he had seen the clay toys he had made. It reminded him of his childhood. He saw himself in this little child and wondered how he will survive at the hands of Wairimu.

“Mother, worry less, I will figure out what to do with time...” “It better be sooner than soon!”

“It is okay, mother...” Inside, he was certain nothing was ever going to be okay!

After briefing Ma' about his plans of eventually settling there in Machewa, he begged to be allowed to rest and wrestle down the fatigue caused by the safari. Ma' had intentionally avoided using the third, tiny hut since it was completed and she had hurriedly arranged a wooden bed, a second hand mattress and some new sheets to be brought in. She insisted he move CreatWall black and White TV there as well.

“He may need it, Ma’.”

“That is extremely careless of you...he is too young to be spoiled!”

“There are children programs which are really educative and informative, Ma’...”

“Anyway, who will be operating such a complicated magic box, ah?”

“I can teach you two or you can ask a neighbor who knows how to operate, Ma’.”

“That will be unnecessary, son...trust me he is not in need of such a thing! Just take it with you to your room!” He was too exhausted to argue.

It was the second in Machewa. Mzee George had been a proud owner of a 1980s wooden black and white Sanyo TV. Occasionally, perplexed and awed children were always welcomed on Tuesdays to watch the Wrestling program. During such coveted time, Agnes, Mzee George's house cleaner, would move chairs and tables to the fringes of the massive sitting room to create ample space for the curious lot who enjoyed watching the magical box.

The New Chloride Exe battery and the TV Set had been on offer and he had figured it would be the best gift for her mother who had spent her entire live in darkness. She was old yes yet he felt it was never too late nevertheless. After a week, he headed further west. He left her mother enough cash to purchase two acres of land and enough also to erect a two bed roomed Mabati house, a grass thatched kitchen and a grass thatched store.

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He was welcomed as a hero by the villagers who had not expected his impromptu visit. Pa' was all smiles. The new Kaunda suit fitted him properly and so did the Safari Boots. He had something for almost everyone including his youngest stepsisters and stepbrothers. The unfortunate few who missed the freebies

received coins to buy themselves sodas and snacks from the canteens at Chewangoi center.

He felt he could have done even more to light a smile on their faces. The brightness in their grateful eyes made him want to cry.

They were his family whether they shared mothers or not...had they not come from the same loins? He had always known that however far a stream flows; it never forgets its origin!

Pa' did not even allow him to rest and was too eager to introduce him to the new neighbors, friends, and relatives. So much had changed and he was shocked to learn that Meto, their long time neighbor and his unofficial father-in-law had moved to Chepkurkur. He wondered what would happen to his rightful share of a Kaunda suit and a brand new pair of Safari Boots.

He had a surprise gift too for Cherop. She had liked him and had not been that hard on him during her daughter's pregnancy ordeal. He always called her mother and she in return treated him just like her son. At no time, as far as his recollection could go, had he disrespected her. It was very late in the evening when they returned, tired and in cheerful spirits nevertheless.

He had noticed a tiny makeshift on their way in which later turned out to be a toilet.

"That is very thoughtful of you, Pa'."

"What now again, son?"

"The toilet thing...I was always afraid the bushes will spring forth cholera and other fatal epidemics..."

"Mmh, I also heard about such strange things from your father-in-law. He hardly sits down nowadays. Today he is in Kapsokwony, tomorrow Chwele, the next day Chesito, then down to Bungoma and sometimes across the border to Toroso. He always comes with news about many things. He has recently been spreading around rumors of a deadly disease, which killed people in Bungoma because of defecating on the bushes. Ndiema heard the news fast, erected one like this in his compound then the next day came over here..."

"Wow! That is just awesome, Pa'."

"Well, talk of diseases, your teacher died last year. We buried him and his wife soon followed. Their children moved away...back to Namwela and the eldest gave me his wooden Transit Sanyo Radio in exchange with five bulls!"

“Oh, so sorry to hear that...”

He wanted to inform the old man that he had been robbed without violence but decided against it.

The Wanjusis had long been like their relatives. Mr. Wanjusi had been his role model and he had not even noticed the mysterious absence of the once formidable and awe-inspiring Mabati house. He later learnt that enraged villagers who had suffered under his reign of terror at Masaek Primary school had plundered his deserted compound in retaliation.

“What about Meto, the compound seems deserted, Pa’...”

“So you have not heard as I had suspected Mmh!”

“Father, how can one get the wind of what is going on in these jungles, ah?”

“Dare not call a forest that shelters you a jungle, son...Never underestimate the power of silly people in large numbers! She ought to have told you, Naibei...she is right next to your nose in the big city, or so I hear!”

David felt a terrible contraction down his tummy.

They were sitting on simple, wooden, brown chairs on either side of a rectangular table in between them inside his father’s central hut eating roasted maize cobs. He had not confided to neither of his parents about the cold war between him and Helen. She was just next door at Parklands Campus pursuing her Law Degree and will be through soonest.

“Well, we hardly have time for each other...blame it on studies, the hectic city life and such stuff, Pa’.”

“Liar!” Joram thundered, eyeing him almost angrily.

He avoided his persecuting eyes. He always had a way of tormenting him with his ever suspicious, unbelieving, and curious eyes.

“Good thing is now I know!” He replied, carefully outwitting the old man in his treacherous game.

“You had better go visit him in Chepkurkur as soon as last year!”

“Oh, I thought that was part of the forest reserve...”

“Not anymore...your Mosop in-laws are all over there now.”

“Oh, how strange...”

“It must be strange indeed given the fact that it happened

immediately you left for the big city and despite your learning, you have not heard a thing about it, Mmh.” He kept quiet.

The next day, he met with Kipyego at Chewangoi center. He was just loitering around and surveying their land overlooked by the two parallel rows of canteens, newly erected Mabati houses and a hotel with his red eyes. He curiously took after his mother though he had Helen’s nose. His baldhead shone with sweaty beads and he wore an Oversized white Michael Jordan’s t-shirt. The creases and folds beneath the skin of his angry face coiled themselves out like electrical wiring he had used to set up the television set back in Machewa at his tiny hut. It made him look a lot older yet he was his senior just by a few seasons.

He quickly noticed he was limping and Kipyego did not like his frank interrogations.

“You really want to know why I am limping, ah.”

“Will it hurt if you tell?”

“I suppose it will not especially so if your very own grateful father in-law did it!”

“Oh, so sorry to hear that Kip...brother-in-law!” He intentionally added the last phrase so as not to hurt his feelings.

It felt strange no one had an idea of what was happening between him and Helen.

“Why? I have known your father all my life...he might be hot-tempered yes but he would not do such a thing to you!”

“You know so little about my father! He is a monster!”

“A monster, really?”

“You heard me right...a monster with a tail and a pair of ugly horns to be precise!”

“People, just like seasons, do change but not to such an extent...”

“I knew you would not believe me just like everybody else!”

“I would love to believe you, yes, but...” He left him standing there and talking to himself like a fool.

He saw his back receding towards the far end of the left stretch of buildings and felt sorry for his supposedly brother-in-law. It was hard to believe anything he had said. Meto had since disowned him; this as far as the village grapevine was concerned.

The official reasons given by Meto himself, including his family members, were acceptable and seemed reasonable for they

had to do with allegations of committing incest! Already, Kipyego was widely known for his insatiable appetite for women and girls thus accusing him of such a vice would easily sail through.

Truth of the matter was he had accidentally discovered a carefully concealed armory. No one had the knowledge of the existence of the catches of arms except his father, Meto. The armory was just less than ten meters outside the edge of their new extensive, fertile, and freely acquired land in Chepkurkur.

He had at once summoned his father and pointed at the armory disguised as a shrine.

“What were you doing here? This is a no-go zone! Your ancestors will curse you!”

“I was just passing by, father...”

“There is certainly no passable route here, is there?”

“But it is not a shrine after all!”

“I want you to go back home, shut that big mouth up and never say we had this conversation or you saw a thing, is that okay?”

“But...but...”

“Save your butts for another day, you disgraceful child!” His father grabbed him and slapped his frozen cheeks twice.

“Is that clear?”

“Clearer than crystal, Pa’!” Out of confusion, Kipyego had retreated towards the ‘shrine’ and accidentally stepped on a loaded AK-47.

His father had been there earlier and had prepared four guns he was to use with his other cohorts to steal herds of cattle belonging to the Bok deep in the jungle. The mysterious stick exploded sending Kipyego flying in the air. He came down sprawling and hit the hard ground back first with a heavy thud and fainted instantly. Something hit him on his thigh and the wound was a terrible sight. Meto had hurriedly carried him home to his room and called in a medicine man.

Once healed, Kipyego shared his plight with one of his Bok girlfriend who spread the news like fire in a forest and it was only a matter of time before Meto could hear it too and that is how he ended up disowning him. Luckily, the people, mostly the elderly people, bought his side of the story and were quick to dismiss Kipyego’s fashion.

Two weeks later, David headed eastwards. He spent a night at Machewa then travelled the next day. He had one more week and a few days before his leave could end. The loan he had asked for had not accomplished his mission though he was pleased with his decision of purchasing a land. From the look of things, he had no future in Chebyuk.

He had tried to persuade his father to sell his land and join his first wife in Trans-Nzoia but he refused without giving any reasons. He figured it could be his now large family and the prospects of slicing yet another free land for himself at the would-be designated Chebyuk Settlement Scheme Phase Three in Chepkurkur.

Everyone, Pa' included, had advised him it would be inappropriate and disrespectful for him to visit Helen's parents given his strenuous relationship with their daughter. He had thus handed over the cash and the gifts to his father and promised he will visit when the appropriate time comes.

## Chapter 9

"A moral being is one who is capable of comparing his past and future actions or motives, and of approving or disapproving of them." — *Charles Darwin*

David was convinced a second love had finally found him, and that he was more than ready to sail through thick and thin to see to it that it never ends. That fateful evening after their final paper, he had asked her out and she had half-heartedly accepted. The duo of Onyango and Kerubo had been pestering him for days, weeks, and months. He was unsure of the outcome of his bold move and had anything gone wrong, he would not have forgiven his roommate!

Onyango had accompanied them to one of his favorite drinking joint along river road. She had been shy-so shy he could not tell whether she was all right or uncomfortable. Nevertheless, she had allowed him to shower her with praises he had mastered so well, over the years thanks to his roommate.

Wairimu was simply superb, awesome and finely made. He just loved her, and that was that! Dinner had been splendid and Michael Jackson's music had rented the air. Dolly Parton had followed. When they thought it was over, Kenny Rodgers had sent the whole pub into insanity he had not experienced his entire life. He could not help it when Bob Marley's *no woman no cry*...cut through the fabulous evening air.

She had accepted to dance, though they were carefully enough not to violate the two- inch traditional distance. It was not easy to resist the manly presence and charisma that David manifested. May be the presence of the youthful drunkards and their peers did something to dissolve a sizeable chunk of shyness out of her poor soul. Then there was the music *no woman no' cry* indeed!

Well, what else would a single college student do? She felt at peace. She had all the right all the same. To discover the world and its other side...the ever-concealed sphere that drizzle with honey and milk! Seeing his handsome face, lit with the multi-cultured light; Wairimu could not help remembering the day he had asked her whether she had any serious partner in her life.

She had laughed so heartily-a pleasant laughter that to date still rings in the ears of David's soul. It was pleasing both to the ear and to the heart. He had felt good, and wished he could hear it repeatedly! The young man knew well there was none; not that she needed any anyway.

The high school life had been pre occupied with strenuous routine. Then there were the endless Rats and Cats. Moreover, mom was forever talking tough. She did not want her only daughter to end up as a housewife. She had seen others turned into balls, tossed over, kicked around aimlessly, and shouted at like slaves in the old days.

Njeri divorced her husband as soon as he started showing those unmistakable chauvinistic symptoms. Wairimu was just two years old. She could now remember almost nothing about her father...her stubborn questions about him always ended up on deaf ears. Her mother's long deceased parents left behind a huge farm in Runyenjes and the farm produce was enough to cater for meagre needs in school, including the school fee. Ma' took to being both. People revered and adored her strong will and her every single word was law to Wairimu. She was hardworking, self-reliant and a perfect role model for her vulnerable daughter.

Therefore, Wairimu had lived with that dream of ever doing one's best all the time just like her mother. Indeed, she understood that everyone is always best at one thing or the other. God is rational and cares for all. You only need to identify your inner passion, embrace it, cultivate it, and develop it with much enthusiasm! As such, he had kept her distance with boys and men.

"Perhaps you are the first unserious partner", she informed him with a wide smile that slowly turned into a shy blush.

"That's great to know then..." He retorted, barely hiding his triumph betrayed by his wide smile and audible sigh of relief.

Innocence was all over her dazzling face. He could not doubt her. When he had asked if she had ever felt a thing for him, even hatred or something close to abhorrence, she had felt cornered like a caged bird. The question was weighty. Her faint soul could not just bear the weight.

"No" had been the answer, though her white and tired eyes had betrayed her. Suddenly, bob Marley had stopped singing, and her thoughts too, came to an unexpected halt: the show was over!

Almost the entire troupe was dead drunk except for Wairimu whose bladder was obviously full of soft drinks. She had taken three bottles of coke and her system was almost giving way. Kerubo was a parrot and had almost had a fight with a drunken woman. Onyango was always in his best moods after downing at least seven bottles of Guinness, also christened panty remover! As for David, he was too drunk to remember his name immediately after his very first bottle of Guinness!

Outside, the cold ruled and so did the drunken young and old busy bodies. As they left, here and there, pairs of lovebirds with hands firmly on their waists met them. They joked and laughed and the darkness swallowed their laughter bitterly. It was lonely without proper company, for the mist was no more.

It was so great being together that night, just the two of them.

Their souls would be merged and as eternal partners, share in their merry and grief. They did it and decided in was great. They made discoveries and realized they had not done anyone any harm...everyone knew they would do it repeatedly!

The more time he spent with Wairimu, the more he forgot about his first love, Helen. He knew she was in Parklands yet he could not bring himself to facing her. Deep within his heart, he knew he had wronged her. The last thing he wanted was yet another ugly confrontation with her. He bit his lower lip and surrendered everything to fate and time.

He was relieved when Wairimu announced the commencement of her periods the following month. He had protected them the second and subsequent times for fear of yet another unwanted pregnancy.

She had not taken it kindly though. He had been her first and she hoped he would live to be her last. More important, she was sure about her feelings for him. Not that she openly attacked him over this...she had a way of silently punishing him by retreating to her serene world and confiding herself to impromptu solitude anytime they did it and he insisted on using the freely distributed condoms readily available and strategically placed at the 24/7 open entrance of their hostel. He was not just ready to face yet another fiasco and he knew should anything stupid happen, we will not survive the disaster this time round.

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Chemos had come to know that there could never be great philosophers than those who have graduated from the hard school of life. Human nature had repeatedly proved that humans would never be first-time learners...that they would rather feel the ill-timed bruises of fate before accepting the obvious.

It is one sad thing to rehearse a life you have to live only once! They say you need not to take sides when you know the earth is round. Like many others, years of penury and tears had brought her close enough to this realization. True, alike, many a fumble, and a tumble had opened her inner eyes.

As a young girl, barely ten, after losing both her parents, she badly wanted to know what life had in store for her. She had no plans for tomorrow and cared the least about its unpredictable slaps. She was not fortunate like many of her peers. Hers was seemingly destined to be ever tearful, fearful and the future promised nothing other than pitch darkness. One thing she never realized though was the invincible protection and affection of a merciful God upstairs.

Every minute, every hour, He was there...Sun was ever rising, seemingly over unkind darkness, and cleansing their miserable lives with hope.

Many years later, she could still hear Nang'uni's words: *Life is so brittle, be cautious ever.*

Years had gone and come back, yet those memories from childhood never seem to fade away. She had been through thick and thin yet she had survived every storm however severe and here she was.

She had accepted Christ then christened soon afterwards thanks to Pastor Abel's persistent reproaches. He was now old and shaky though his voice was still commanding and full of vigor. He often came to visit and was so happy to see her in cheerful spirits and apparently swimming in abundance.

"We must thank Lord for everything sister!"

"You are absolutely right, brother!"

"Who could have known you will come this far, ah?"

"I presume no one, I included, Pastor!"

"That is how our Lord works...in mysterious ways unknown to man."

"May He bless you for everything you have done to our family, Pastor!"

“It is no use to thank me, sister. The Lord takes all the credit!

We are mere vessels and middlemen!”

“Well, praises to His Living name then!”

“Amen!”

“Amen!”

Sometimes, she regretted not having embraced the faith earlier. She admired Pastor Abel’s way of life and the easiness with which he embraced every challenge that came his way. He had sacrificed a lot yes but God had been kind to him in countless ways. Many of his former clientele had shifted to Trans-Nzoia and he had used every opportunity to pay them a visit.

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Apart from the hide and seek game, the gathering of wild fruits along the numerous bushes in Tiot-Luget farm, the occasional fetching of water and at times collection of firewood; there was that sweet story telling session after the evening meal. Grandmother was such an apt witty storyteller. The pathetic narratives brought tears, icy feelings, anger, frustration, sometimes-enormous hatred for something Mathew knew so little about. Then there those funny ones, which ushered in painful laughter, wonder, amazement and sometimes awe.

Life was so full days came and went without their slightest notice. Sunday school was necessary and kids Mathew’s age braced themselves occasionally to recite memorable verses. Grandmother was always there; old and shaky all the same but with an iron will and a great zeal. He loved her and her every word was law to him. Sitting by the fire with an often-anxious stomach, perhaps cracking jokes with grandmother, little Mathew would always try to impress her princess.

“For God so love the world that He gave us His Only Son, that whoever believed in Him shall not perish but have eternal life...” (John 3:16). Applause and a giggle from Princess will always follow.

“Behold I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come to him and dine with him and him with me...Revelation 3:20”. Another round of applause will follow.

“Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of the sinners, nor sits in the seat of

the scornful; But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in this law he meditates day and night...Psalms 1:1-2". An overstretched clapping and a secret yet genuine smile both from her affectionate eyes and her dry lips from would follow.

Mathew knew without any slightest doubt that she liked it so much. Her joy and ecstasy was his happiness too.

"Now, my little, beloved king, learn those very words by heart and follow them. God will reward you. John 1:12 says: 'but as many as received Him, to them He gives the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name'". As a green gecko, he will nod his head and wonder secretly how much love there was in the heart of this ever-happy mortal.

True, papa and mama hardly showed up. They were not poor yes, yet he knew something was always missing in his young and delicate life...something he could not explain yet he just felt it was missing! Whatever that thing was, somehow, without any slightest doubt, he knew grandma was taking good care of it.

Grandma was an admirable figure, hardworking and lived her life to the fullest. The now numerous wrinkles did not wither the radiant smile that was her trademark. She nurtured, nursed, and took good care of him as if he were her own kid. Rarely did she lament about the ominous absence of mama and papa. She had taken kindly to being both. He treated her as such.

Of all the memorable things Mathew will live remembering, is the National Anthem that Grandma made him recite every evening before he went to bed and the radiant smile it would put on her princes' face. She had mastered the tune though she could barely pronounce a single word. Her mastery of the Swahili language was exceptionally poor and she had no reason to learn it either.

"Oh! God of all creation, justice be our shield and defender, may we dwell in unity, peace, and liberty, and plenty is found within our borders..." KBC programs often begun and end with the national anthem and even though he did not make any sense of its powerful words, he enjoyed its tune and always looked forward to hearing it.

Often, Grandma would coldly have reminded him of a father and a mother he knew so little about.

"They care and love you...it is for this reason that they are away working so hard so you might live a happy life, my beloved king!" She would always say.

“Are they really caring that much?” Mathew would ask out of sheer innocence.

“Of course they are!” Grandma would answer bluntly. “And why are they not here with us?” He would want to know.

“Because they are busy...”

“Grandma, but other kids my age live with their loving parents, Mmh?”

“That is not true...how they feel about you, Mathew, is what counts, never forget that!”

He had noticed his classmates had parents that they often shared many nice and exciting stories about. That is a long way off before he knew that he actually existed in the very first place. Such were times when he thought the horizon beyond the Cherang’any hills was the end of the world. His hopes and dreams were this vague too. He hardly imagined beyond the joyous Gateman in Tariff’s bungalow or the funny milk-boy at Mzee George’s place.

“Who is the Moi for Uganda?” He would innocently ask.

“He is Museveni Gaguta Yoweri.” Bewildered yet unperturbed, Grandma would answer back.

Well, Moi’s name was forever floating in the air. A strange voice whose owner was Mbotela Leonard Mambo, repeatedly blurred out from the wooden radio: “Rais Mtukufu Daniel Toroitich Arap Moi, hii LEO...” So little children the age of Mathew thought the rulers (rulers because Grandma said they never led) of the other strange maps surrounding Mama Kenya went by the name Moi.

There was something called a CHAMA, symbolized by a JOGOO, which the radio claimed was the sole Mama, and Papa of every Kenyan. Mathew wondered if it had grandchildren or parents of its own. Every time he wanted to know more, she just shrugged her shoulders and promised she will tell him when I will be a little bit older. He waited with Job’s patience.

“What do my parents do for a living?” He wanted to know one evening.

He missed them and she knew it too well. Sometimes, he could hardly remember how they looked like, especially her mother whom she had seen when he was only four and a half years old.

“You ask too much, my young King!” Grandma would simply answer, her soft skin wrinkled excessively...it seemed it

always reminded her of something she did not want to remember at all.

Her silence during such times was menacing, unkind and very loud. His was a misty world, vague and promised a lot of nothing. Days came and went. So did years. He got used to it. He enjoyed the cold and heat that came their way. Most important, he hoped and hoped and hoped. He instead channeled his loneliness and frustration on books and was soon unbeatable in his class examinations. The occasional thrashing never weighed him down neither did the awful morning cold wind descending from the slopes of Mount Elgon.

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Mama finally came home in December. Mathew was now in class four and the next year he will be moving to class five. He had clanged on her the way kittens would to their mother. For unknown reasons, had cried and cried and cried. There was no denying it was the happiest moments of his young life. She brought him new clothes and three new pairs of shoes. They ate beef and rice, a thing that happened during Christmas only, and gulped litters of orange juice.

“Welcome home my daughter...it is good you have finally come!” Grandma was lost for words and this was what she could only say.

Tears were Mama’s answers. She sobbed violently and they wondered why. They seemed tears of sorrow rather joy.

“Why is he not with you?” Princess prodded a little.

She was facing away from her daughter-in-law. They were all sitting on the green grass below an aging Mahogany outside their mushroom-like mud house that served as the main kitchen. They all waited for an answer. Helen gazed at them. It seemed she had not heard a word from the way she studied their faces, especially that of Mathew. Perhaps she was wondering how fast he had grown.

“So he has never told you!” She finally remarked.

“Well, he has, but tells me about what exactly?” Grandma said shifting her position to face her daughter-in-law for the first time since they came outside to enjoy the cold wind under the tree. That December was especially hot and the sun was angrier than never before.

“Mathew, go downstream and come here with clean water!” Princess instructed him with a low tone. He disappeared, leaving the two alone.

“So David has never shown his filthy face here and confesses his sins to you, ah?” Helen asked looking in the direction of the gate where Mathew had slipped past on his way to the stream.

“Why?” Princess wanted to know.

“He has been showing up at least once in a year and every time he left without saying a word about you. I thought you two were still together. What happened?”

“There has never been WE since I joined university until I finished and got a job next to his place of work...he has been avoiding me all these years because she has been seeing another woman!”

“That sounds strange...very strange for him not to have breathed a word all these years!”

“I thought you should know...I am tired of waiting and I have been moving on too.”

“How could he do this to you?” “He surely will tell you why...”

“Oh my God! I am so sorry to hear this...”

“No need to be...I am so over it already!”

Mathew’s rather unexpected arrival halted their conversation. They both shifted uneasily and still, he wondered why.

Why? Why? Why? It was hard for Chemos to understand why her son was doing all that he was doing. She had raised him well; singlehandedly taught him good manners and warned him against breaking hearts of others. She had known him to be a good boy incapable of harming anyone. That he had long abandoned her was not easy to believe. She waited to confront him personally.

The next day, which was a Sabbath, Helen refused adamantly to accompany them to church. She loudly reminded Princess that she was a church herself and God knew she had not wronged any soul.

After all, God was more concerned with their hearts! Mother stayed throughout December. She was happy he had never disappointed in school. His results were almost perfect with the exception of English homework, a majority of which had a Pull up Your Socks and a See me remark.

“Why English of all the subjects, ah?” She wanted to know.

There was no way one could perform so well in all the other subjects and at the same time score exceptionally poor results on one. Something must be wrong somewhere. “He hates me!”

“Who? The English teacher?”

“Yeah, Mr. Ndege hates me that is why I hate his subject!”  
“That is not very clever!”

“You have no idea how much he hates me!”

For unknown reasons, Mr. Ndege did not like him very much despite his excellent performance. He was just that type of a teacher who would have easily made an excellent soldier and was wasting his and their time. He was ever unsmiling, stern, and unsociable.

More disturbing was his fashion of dismissing curious students like Mathew.

“Save your breath young man, you are not the only one who knows, are you?” He would angrily dismiss his hand and the class would burst out laughing.

His competitors would sneer and giggle loud enough for him to hear and he would feel like running away for good. When everybody got the wind that Mr. Ndege in particular did not like his face a lot, many made it their business making his life miserable.

What he never knew was the fact that Maria, his auntie who visited often, was behind his woes. Somewhere along the way, the warmth amongst a number of other male teachers, which he later learnt were secret admirers of Maria just like Mr. Ndege, was slowly displaced with unkind coldness and occasional brutal glances.

To some he was no longer the young soldier or the clever parrot. Ironically, he was now a classic moron- a good for nothing piece of cabbage. Others chose to cane him every time they were in the mood. Consequently, his grades soared down and even though he remained at the top of his class, there was nothing to smile about anymore.

“They hate me mother. All of them!” He bitterly complained in between soft sobs.

Mother tried to be empathetic. She had been there herself. It had not been a bed of roses.

“Well, they don’t...they only want you to become somebody someday!” Her voice was soothing but not convincing enough.

Inside, he doubted her words. How could they mean well with all that hatred? Mother was so sweet and with time, her indispensable wit found its way through the thick wall that housed Mathew's troubled soul. It was late in the evening and Princess was milking Maua, one of their many cows with calves. Chemos called it Maua, flower in English, for it had a mark similar to a red rose on its healthy back. In the western horizon, the dying rays struggled to survive the unyielding wave of the forthcoming darkness. Mathew was silently reading a Kiswahili novel titled: Nyota Ya Rehema that mother had bought for him. Then out of blue, he had asked the unexpected.

“Where is he, mother?”

“Who?”

“Father...he never misses Christmas!”

“Well, worry less; he will be here sooner than you think!” He started sobbing.

The sobs increased rhythmically and systematically with a humming crescendo that rose higher and higher then fell down gradually. She saw the tears forming a sinister figure eleven on his worried, harmless, and innocent young face. Inside, she felt sorry. She loved Mathew so much, and seeing him crying like that, made her feel like crying also. When he had shed enough tears, Helen mobbed his face using her bare hands with a motherly love.

“Worry less; everything will be alright, son!” Mathew nodded his hanging head in confusion.

Of course, she was right. He too knew everything would be all right. She understood what it must have felt at that little age to withstand such harsh treatment. He must have felt rejected, despised and condemned. In that abyss, pain and suffering must have been his sole friends. The world had nothing much meaningful anymore to offer him...She had been hardly there for him. Alone, he roamed about a dark, expansive emptiness. Like a rolling stone, no one expected him to gather any moss.

“We are here for you Mathew...Papa loves you and that explain why he comes here every now and then. The teachers should not scare you. You have a long way ahead. You need not to fear...”

She saw his tiny head moving up and down. That is all he needed badly: assurance indeed! That December, David mysteriously never showed up...and would hardly thereafter. He had

heard of her unwanted presence there through a friend and had instead decided to kill time with his sweetheart, Wairimu. A month earlier, he had bought a brand new Motorola C113. With such a magical gadget, it was easy to track the movements of his enemies.

Wairimu finally became expectant, and it was now her third month since the conception. She had managed to convince him to move to Mbotela Estate along Jogoo road to a more specious and larger three bed roomed house. The two bed roomed house at Imara Daima estate according to her would not be enough once they welcomed a third member.

He had since increased the tempo of drinking and even though Wairimu hated this, she never openly rebuked him. She had heard of wife-beating horrors among the Kalenjin and her friends had sternly warned her not to overstep her mandate unless she wanted to lose an arm or even a leg!

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After her graduation, Helen returned to Kitale where she had spent nearly a whole Semester as an intern. The Kitale Law Court had offered her a job and she had accepted it. The shift, though uncomfortable, relieved her agony of ever meeting with David and his slat. Most important, she could have ample time visiting her son. She had no room for relationships anymore. She had learnt her lessons the hard way and there was no time to waste with another heartbreaker. Men were just but men: obsessed with their egos and ever unrepentant. She had secret plans of switching allegiances to Catholic so she could enlist as a potential nun there.

Father had been supportive though disappointed that she had to do it on her own without a man. He was proud of course and had every excuse of bragging to his peers, just as he had once done when she was in Alliance Girls' many years back. He had loaned her some money to rent an office in the middle of the ever-growing town.

Soon, clients, in their dozens, started knocking at her door with all manner of cases. She loved her job and she was living her childhood dreams.

Her rental apartment was just a mile away at Kibomet Estate. Once she would settle down, Mathew would come accompanied by Maria and they could have spent the long holidays there. The indoors life was not his thing but he enjoyed the cartoon programs and wrestling. The reunion was what she had always yearned for. He was

always on her mind throughout her university life and she really missed him. Now that he was within her reach, she would give him all the love and care he had lived without all those years. Maria accepted to stay for good and Mr. Ndege had finally succeeded in wooing her. In effect, Mathew's life in school had changed for the better. As the deputy, Mr. Ndege wielded his influence on the rest of the male teachers whose attitudes also changed with time.

Auntie and Princess helped a lot with their splendid narratives. Auntie with her usual tender, humble and unassuming smile, offered wholeheartedly and somewhat meekly, did lit the dark corridors that ever nagged his young life. Now, come the dreadful weekdays, they had to endure whips and mockery from unfriendly quarters. There were endless reproaches over unfounded claims (only that those on the receiving end had changed). The list grew considerably and some of his former adversaries and jeerers became the exemplary idiots who could hardly rival the ingenuity of mere ants!

It slowly got into their nerves that they knew not a thing. Many a time, Mr. Ndege paraded some of his classmates, branded them bad company, and compared the girls with spoilt eggs. At times when his mood was awful, he compared them with useless whores. Of course, there had been rapturous applause.

To some considerable degree, Mr. Ndege always emerged the winner. True, the rumor of his secret plans to marry Maria ushered in discomfort of highest order among his staff mates. As for Mathew, despite receiving nice treatment, there was hardly room to think straight and concentrate fully on his studies. Worse, such were times before the free everything for the present day primarians.

Then, there was the cow dung every Friday which came with intense and extensive plastering of muddy walls, under bullies and whips, the many miles back and forth for some, the in numerous assignments yet a whole class of over forty, shared a single textbook! Many resigned to their ill-timed fate, dropped out, and led regrettable lives. A few surged forward still...never worn out. A number of girls, whose futures appeared promising, dropped out to deliver what the noble male teachers had been teaching in darkness! Others just got married to wrestle the menacing poverty.

It was exactly like going to war empty-handed: armed with an unshakeable zeal and bravery of a lion solely! On and on and on

they moved forward. Just like a car on a long, torturous, and tiresome journey, they negotiated corners, avoided potholes, and had to halt here and there for a while for servicing. Auntie, mother, Princess, and sometimes father, oiled the engine of his car, repaired worn out parts and urged him on. Apart from the scanty role modeling from the ever-absent Papa, occasionally visiting mother, Princess, and auntie, a major sphere of his decisions had a basis on an undying desire to become a useful citizen someday. He worked hard and impressed his teachers. He did his chores back at home and obeyed his guardians. He listened keenly to his friends and enemies, and stayed focused.

## Chapter 10

“There are some people, be they black or white, who don't want others to rise above them. They want to be the source of all knowledge and share it piecemeal to others less endowed. That is what's wrong with all these carpenters and men who have a certain knowledge. It is the same with rich people.” — *Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Kenya's self-proclaimed 'Prophet of Justice'; Dramatist, Novelist, Essayist and Lecturer*

*“Dear Helen,*

*I understand what you have been going through. I know it might take years, perhaps decades even for you to contemplate forgiving me. I am so sorry for causing so much pain and unnecessary tears to roll down that beautiful face.*

*I am not writing to ask for your forgiveness...I am writing asking for your understanding. Why it all had to happen, one can never tell.*

*Nothing is right. Nothing has ever been right either since we parted ways. You must have heard of Wairimu and our almost five-year-old baby girl with her. It is a shame I must learn living me now. We both know we cannot reverse what happened. Nevertheless, I will forever remain grateful for everything you have done in my life especially so for our handsome son, Mathew Naibei.*

*I must also thank you for loving me.*

*Helen, you must know that despite everything, you, and Mathew are still dear to my heart. I know he is coming to the city to join Nairobi School. You had better know that I have opened an account with one million in it for his needs!*

*We will meet during the reporting day so that I can brief you with finer details.*

*Forever apologetic, David.”*

This time round, she was more than prepared to resist the effects – that proverbial magic that always humbled her to her knees. It had done her more harm than good in the past, and she was not being quick to forget this! Had everything been working out according to her original plans, she would have been ecstatic and

joyful. The next Sabbath, she would have shared her testimony with fellow brethren.

“God is not forgetful. In His rightful and appropriate time; he remembers those who believe in Him!” She would have whispered loudly.

Her admirers in the congregation would have applauded and shout hallelujah! She was no longer herself. Sometimes, she felt uncertain if she really knew who she was anymore. That pretty, naïve, unpretentious, kind, forgiving, loving, and submissive Helen was long dead.

She had just ditched her tenth boyfriend over a text message she had received a previous night from her ninth wishing her sweet dreams and a lovely night. Like the rest, he was obsessed with his enormous ego and wanted to enslave her. Since David, she had sworn never again! Nobody was going to imprison her in that cage ever again.

She had expanded her office, hired two assistants and a secretary, and was in control of everything, including her emotions. She wrote back thanking him for his generosity and remorse. She thanked him for being frank and accepted his sincere apology. As for the cash, she accepted though made it clear that it was not enough to buy the love of her son. The year was 2004 and Mathew would report to his new home on February 2.

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The hangovers of the new millennium were not yet over. So much was happening it was impossible catching up with everything. The old man had come visiting with a list of problems. Therefore, as was expected of him, he had to part with a sizable chunk to offset their woes back at Chebyuk. He was now the official village elder, Mukasa, of Chewangoi at Emia location.

The thirty thousand cash Kenyan Shillings gift had worked the miracle he had anticipated. Joram was too excited to think straight. Nobody bothered to ask him about the graduation that never was and the Architectural Course he had gone to pursue in the University of Nairobi. He was sure they must have heard but were simply too afraid to confront him. Now that he had a job and he could pamper them with gifts every now and then, nobody bothered to rise up such a topic.

The fertile land back at Chebyuk was still wrestling down stores with its dazzling fruits. Still, people freely and sometimes forcefully allocated themselves plots at the remaining forest reserve portion at Chepkurkur. The Komon family, formerly from Cheptais, were now the largest beneficiaries of such seizures. Still rumors flew back and forth about AK-47 guns crossing the porous border from Uganda. Night raids and cattle rustling had since increased and village elders like Mzee Joram had to do some explaining. Of course, the actual culprits evaded justice for obvious reasons.

He vehemently complained why he hardly visited. As for his Kikuyu wife, he avoided speaking his mind for fear of losing the occasional gifts and cash from his son. Wairimu and little Shiro thus remained a taboo subject between the two and the rest of his relatives who were clearly offended and angered by his recklessness.

He had nevertheless promised to visit them soon. Some part of him was missing the childhood adventures in the wilds. Ah, yes, and those old good days, when they would gather wild fruits deep in the forest, play hide and seek, climb up tall Oaks, and enjoy all other childhood adventures with Helen. It seemed time had killed all those nostalgic moments. The time had deprived him of the zeal to embrace that old good with a fresh awakening... deep within him, he feared that time will take his life away too!

He was happy his nephews and cousins were working hard in their studies and lives in general. Whilst they were dinning and wining with his old father, David kept imagining how life would have been say had he stuck to Helen. May be he would have been surrounded by amused faces of five or even six happy, contended and successful children, all yearning to hear all he has gathered these years as a regular student of the esteemed school of life.

Well, he had gathered a lot of nothing! In his own home, he no longer wiled a thing. Wairimu was both head and tail! She ordered him around and made all the decisions. The other month, she had threatened to sue him should he not accept to include her name in all the necessary documentations related with property ownership.

He was tired inside...tired of being tired! He fed up with the ever-angry looks of his relatives whenever they visited, whom he knew would never forgive him for abandoning Helen. He was tired of Meto's insistent curses and Cherop's endless complaints. He was

tired with Wairimu's heavy hand, her yelling, her nagging, and her jealousy.

Dr. Ali had warned him to reduce his drinking after he had started showing symptoms of liver cirrhosis. Upon testing, the results returned positive! His livers were fast becoming overwhelmed with his heavy drinking. More so, his asthma had worsened over the years. He always carried an Azmasol Inhaler wherever he went to and the wheezing at night was more frequent than before.

Looking back at his troubled life, David at times found himself contemplating, and occasionally nursing suicidal convictions. He wanted to rest in peace... a rest that has no end and there will be no room for anyone to judge him, question his choices, make his decisions, push him around, and dictate every single aspect of his miserable life.

Sometimes he thought Dr. Ali had tricked him. It was ironical that he could still survive with morsels of kidneys despite doubling his drinking efforts!

Why was it taking too long? Why? Why the eternal waiting? He knew deep inside that his time would soon come. He will perhaps leave a history that will break many hearts. Had he a second chance, or so he thought, he would have set the record straight.

Many would have learned from his past. All was gone. His sole role was to wait for time to do what it deemed best for him.

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One afternoon on a Sunday, David was resting under a mango tree inside their gated compound and just a few meters away from a tiny garden. The sun was barking hot and the cold wind silently blowing under the shed of that tree made his newspaper reading worth his valuable spare time. The sun's rays pierced cautiously through the thick foliage of the tree. It felt good sitting there, flipping over those pages unthinkingly, thinking about nothing in particular, and worrying about the ever unfriendly tomorrow.

Sometimes, he wondered loudly what views will the diverse audience have if his life were made to be a movie... Will they reproach or exalt him? It was hard to tell.

Then, someone had called him. He had not heard the ear-splitting hooting of the car outside his gate nor the footsteps of his daughter as she went to answer the call. The voice sounded distant, perched with some familiarities here and there.

At first, he confused it with that of his wife, Wairimu. It was almost lunch hour and she had been busy in the kitchen preparing their meals. It felt strange that she should call him in the middle of his reading.

Slowly, he shifted his stare from the Opinion page of the newspaper he was reading towards the direction of the intruder.

There – in front of his naked eyes, stood the ghosts of Kerubo and Onyango! It was unmistakable –he did not move. He just stared– his- mouth wide open!

He wanted to run away!

“Hey, roommate, it’s me, it’s us!” Silence...

He was now shaking from head to toe.

A campus mate had a month earlier informed him that he had heard the news of their separate deaths. How could they be here and alive?

“Onyango and Kerubo from campus, ah!” Onyango moved forward to hug his old friend.

He literally dived to the dismay of Kerubo who was all smiles.

“Wait a minute! I thought you guys were long dead, ah!”

“That’s why we are here...our enemies in the business have been doing rounds announcing our deaths!” He studied the pair quizzically.

Wairimu had heard the commotion and had come outside. She saw her two friends and ran towards them. David had no energy to stop her...he just stood there...transfixed to the ground...confused and shocked beyond words! It took him time before coming to terms with what was happening right before his eyes. Once he would overcome his shock, he signaled Wairimu to welcome the pair who looked healthy and happy!

Onyango later explained everything...about the miraculous and almost accidentally on purpose reunion with Kerubo, her ingenious proposals of establishing an NGO, their going public about their HIV/AIDs status, their secret wedding ceremony, the subsequent hatred from close relations, the inevitable stigma and so on and so forth. They had heard about news of their deaths and scathing allegations that they had stashed millions meant for the NGO on their individual bank accounts via a newly established vernacular radio, and upon confronting its producer, they learnt the

shocking announcements were the works of their competitors in one of the NGOs.

“Why could anyone do such a thing, ah?” David wondered silently.

He was still not thinking straight. So much was going on in his head. “We have been asking the same question too...” The pair retorted in unison.

“That is pretty straightforward! They want to discredit your organization, right?” Wairimu offered.

Kerubo asserted that was the obvious reason and announced that they were working on it.

“So, how could we be of any help?” David wanted to know.

Onyango then explained how the unfortunate news had stalled the pre-arranged plans by their sponsors to finance their genuine program (entirely meant to enlighten young university men and women about HIV/AIDs).

“Good news is they are now aware we are still alive and kicking!” Onyango said.

“More so, an external and independent auditor has verified all the accounts in question and submitted his report which has been given a clean bill of health!” Kerubo added.

“Here is where you come in...the sponsorship will resume yes, no doubt about that, but it will not be as soon as we would have loved...”, Onyango carefully began.

He was sitting opposite to David on a comfortable sofa set covered with brown leather. Between the two pairs was a huge mahogany table with untouched bottles of sodas. Wairimu, ever alert with her arms folded across her chest and her eyes alternating from Kerubo to Onyango, was sitting right next to David. Above them on the white-painted wall, were two large portraits: one of former President Daniel Toroitich Arap Moi and another one for the newly elected President Mwai Emilio Kibaki.

He studied his frozen and a seemingly indifferent face. For a while, he thought he was not the same young man he had singlehandedly taught the robes of survival back in campus. He had been green, timid, and unsure about everything.

“Mmh, am listening...go on, brother!”

“Like I was saying, the sponsorship is guaranteed but time is our challenge. Simply put, we were asking for a soft loan!” David

lowered his red eyes. He avoided the two pairs of eyes from across the table and picked a bottle of Fanta.

After one long gulp, he lowered the now half-empty bottle and cleared his throat.

“Well, sure we would love to help... isn’t that so Wairimu?” Wairimu, unsure of what to say, just nodded her head.

“So, how much are talking about?”

“Well, just two hundred thousand shillings, brother!”

“We will see what to do...”

“That will be very kind of you... thank you in advance!” Wairimu smiled, stood up abruptly, and made her way to the bedroom.

A minute later, David’s Nokia 1110 mobile phone vibrated. He proudly held it above for his needy visitors to see and checked the text message. He frantically excused himself and joined her wife. After ten extremely long minutes, the pair returned. What transpired indoors, Onyango and Kerubo guessed only.

“You will have the money!” Wairimu stepped forward and announced the good news.

“Thank you!” The pair echoed in unison.

“Eh, my wife and I have also agreed that given the magnitude of this favor we are doing you, the money should come back with an interest of at least twenty-five thousand!” David almost whispered!

It was not his idea and everyone in the room knew it too well. In the end, Onyango and Kerubo agreed to the terms, made to sign some neatly crafted wordings by Wairimu and the chitchats followed as if nothing had happened. After having their lunch, Onyango requested to tour the compound as a pretext of taking leave from the company of the two women so he could be alone with David.

“I know you meant well from the beginning, brother... In the moment of crisis, the wise build bridges and the foolish build dams!”

“Well, I am happy you still think good of me, Ja’ Karachuonyo! If you are filled with pride, then you will have no room for wisdom!”

“Hehehe, it is Ja’ Ugenya, jakom!”

“Oh, sorry, I had forgotten... You know what, to be without friend is to be poor indeed, Mmh!”

“That’s why I will always you with both hands! These Mount Kenya people are like that...always been like that, man. You see how they have betrayed Tinga?”

“You mean the MoU thing?”

“Yeah, I always knew it will never be honored!”

“Well, he must have had his good reasons, Mmh!”

“What reason on earth could justify letting down someone who made him president? Had Tinga not say Kibaki Tosha, would he be in State House?”

“You are right...the Ministry of Roads and Public Works is certainly not a proper gift for Agwambo!”

“You are now talking!” The bitterness in Onyango’s voice was unmistakable.

“Anyway, how did you end up together again? You were all alone at that bed in KNH when I last visited you, brother!”

“That is a long story...” He closed his small eyes for some few seconds then uneasily opened them.

They were sitting under the mango tree on a permanent bench. Meanwhile, the two parrots were busy gossiping and their occasional laughter busted through the silent neighborhood. Shiro was busy with her homework in her room and had no idea what was going on.

The Daily Nation Paper was still there, though a little ruffled and some pages strewn on the ground. From his silence and strange look, David could tell it was not a nice story to tell.

“Are you sure you want to hear this?”

“Yeah, I would not have asked in the first place, Mmh!”

He began from the hospital. He told him how he survived the tuberculosis that nearly killed him, how everyone then seemed keen to make a call only, and not willing to come in person to see him. He spoke of how friends had rejected him and how everyone avoided him. He told him also how Kerubo had managed to track down his village, made an impromptu tour down there, and subsequently ended up luring almost every member of his family to her fatal trap. She slept with his father, two of his older brothers and their last-born. He told him how she had come back to break the news to him, how he had ended up on a comma only to wake up almost a half-a-year later and see the very same Kerubo beside him on his death-bed!

“Why did she change her mind about you...did you forgive her?”

“Well, she blamed her actions on her helpless urge to revenge and I believed her!”

“Just like that?”

“Yeah...No one is sure today who had it first, you see!”

“Meaning it could have even been her, right?”

“Yeah, do you remember that flamboyant CU Chairperson she used to date?”

“Of course I do...Maina was his name, right?”

“He died of the scourge just a month after our graduation!”

He quietly replied, nodding his head up and down like a lizard.

“What?”

“Yeah, I read his obituary on the daily and his nephew, who happens to be friends with Kerubo, nursed him at Nyeri Level Five General Hospital...”

“Oh my God!”

“Sometimes, it is hard to understand anything, even yourself...”

“Well, you could be right brother...”

“With death then a reality to both of us, it was no use going round hurting each other...we chose instead to forgive and we have been trying to forget...”

“That is quite a story, brother...”

“It is that story that we are sharing with others...more lives will be saved, trust me!”

“Sure they will...how kind of you, brother!”

“I owe my sisters and brothers in campus a lot more...” Tears were welling up on Onyango’s sad eyes.

He removed his white handkerchief and wiped his watery eyes. David was moved...almost to tears as well.

“You know what; forget about the interest thing and the cash altogether. I have my secret savings unknown to her. I will clear your debt and we can pretend nothing happened, is that okay?”

“That will be very kind of you...I knew I could always count on you!”

“Brothers we all are...we might be from different mothers yes but brothers we are all the same!”

“Well said brother!”

“Oh, I almost forget to ask...how come your health does not show it anymore. You have added weight and look even healthier than me, Mmh!”

“Well, it was Kerubo’s idea again...she had heard about ART from her friends at the NGO...”

“ART? Never heard of it!”

“Antiretroviral Treatment...only meant for people like us!”

“Oh, I heard something about treatment of HIV/AIDs patients but was not sure how it is called...”

“Now you know...nobody likes the idea of knowing the coming of their death beforehand. If you happen to know, you will do anything humanly possible to postpone it, right?”

“I suppose you are right, brother...”

“It might not cure the thing yes but at least it controls it and keeps us healthy...more so, it reduces the viral load and is helpful for women willing to give birth for it lessens the chances of passing on the virus via breastfeeding to their babies.”

“It sounds great, brother...”

“Yeah, and with our positive attitude, trust me the stigma will not succeed in wearing us down any time soon!”

“I like your attitude, brother...I will see how I will be of help so you can help others faced with the same nightmare.”

“We will really appreciate, brother.”

Later, Wairimu shared Kerubo’s tale with his husband. After realizing the damage, she had done to innocent relatives of Onyango and many of her closest friends; she had decided to commit suicide. She had, after all intentionally killed hundreds, possibly thousands, or even millions!

When she broke the news to Onyango and he ended up in comma, her suicidal tendencies even worsened. She constantly dreamt about dead friends that she had slept with and how they were suffering and calling out her name. Every time it was a struggle, trying to convince herself that, it was not real, but in vain. Those images were forever alive in her troubled mind. She saw them everywhere – no matter how hard she tried to close her eyes, they were ever there.

She kept wishing to join him sooner. Then one night, she dreamed that she had died. People were all over their compound. They slaughtered dozens of bulls; wines and spirits were in

abundance and so were delicious meals. Her friends came just to confirm whether she was dead or she had just fabricated the whole thing. Others wailed bitterly, then in the darkness, screamed that she was a gentle riddance! She could see others busy distributing her few belongings among themselves. Some made love in the dead of the night, and kids sired moths later...

Life went on normally. Nobody cared. Moreover, they soon had all forgotten about her. Therefore, she decided she might as well disappoint them. The next morning, she left her traumatized parents and siblings in Suneka and travelled back to Nairobi.

Onyango was still laying half-dead at KNH. Her mother had showed up twice then she had ceased. Without anyone to look after him and the hospital bill still mounting, she had to intervene. Using some of her contacts, she soon joined an NGO helping people like them. They heard her plight and helped them through and that is how they ended up with Onyango... again!

Ironically, they were now fighting the same organization that had helped them. With time, its leaders had become corrupt and started misappropriating the funds intended for HIV/AIDs victims. That is when they stepped in, drafted a proposal, and applied for grants. Using their story as a weapon, sponsors started calling...

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He had not been there and Helen would not hear any of his excuses later. All the same, David had called and explained why. For some unknown reasons, Wairimu had intentionally picked the same February 2 as the day they were to transfer their daughter to an Ukambani Boarding School. They had been quarrelling a lot since she accidentally discovered 'good night' text messages on his phone sent to Helen. He had had to explain himself and he had been trying to be honest with her. Occasionally, there chats were about the progress of Mathew and updates about other unnecessary things back at home.

"I thought you said it was over, ah!" "Yeah, ages ago..."

"Then why the endless text messages?"

"Because she is the mother of my son!"

"And I am also the mother of your daughter!"

"Why the jealousy anyway?"

"Hehehe, who is jealous?"

“I have reassured you a million times and I do not see why we should have this conversation almost every night...”

“I have every right to know why and who you are conversing with!”

“Every right, ah? I believe I am entitled to such rights too, how about I make it my business going through your text messages, eh...” She often lacked an answer for this and the heated debate will grow cold feet then die only to resurrect a few days later.

She was increasingly becoming insecure and David was fast losing his patience. To solve the little problem, he procured a separate Safaricom line and another phone without informing her. It was because of such unfounded fears that she had readily agreed to his proposal of using contraceptives. Now that Shiro will be away for months on end, she feared he will miss her naggings and endless questions then perhaps, he might start broaching up the subject of yet another baby!

Shiro had been performing exceptionally poor and most of her free times were spent watching cartoons on the newly installed DSTV. More so, Wairimu was keen to show off to her friends since her husband had just bought a British-Made Toyota Saloon Car. She was tired too with the demanding task of preparing and tidying her up every five in the morning then waiting for the school bus five compounds away along Jogoo Road.

Knowing beforehand that being frank with his ex-girlfriend would worsen things, he had lied that Shiro was ill and they had to rush her to a nearby hospital. Not that she was that much desperate for his presence; truth is he had made a promise and she expected him to be man enough and honor his own word.

Well, she had been seeking an external transfer for years now, and her fellow workmates had advised against the move. It was hardly granted, they told her, that is, if history was anything to go by, and he too had told her of the difficulties. That you had to know someone who was working there, but he will try to help her out anyway. She wanted to be near her son and avoid inconveniencing his wife whenever she might want him to visit Mathew at Nairobi School.

She had forgotten that favoritism, nepotism, and tribalism were the second definition of democracy here. The will of the people no longer counted. The few elite capable of manipulating the state

machinery were literally the ones calling the shots. The zero tolerance on corruption myth was yet to yield any tangible arrests and prosecutions though the Ministry of Finance had just enlisted the services of the Kroll Associates to investigate alleged major corruption scandals that took place during the twenty-four-year reign of Nyayo.

The Nyayo era was over and most of her friends were now out in the cold thanks to retrenchment or mandatory early retirement. Some he had known had hardly reached class three yet they had miraculously ascended their career ladders to become CEOs, managers, directors and so on and so forth. Nairobi offices were fast becoming the steps of Mount Kenya: it was, just as it had been for them, their time to eat!

Lawlessness was the order of the day, and justice still belonged to the rich only! The poor had other roles to play: paying excessive taxes, whining in secret, fattening wallets of corrupt police officers, among others! Still, one had to be proud, not regrettable, to be Kenyan: you had to sing the national anthem passionately and hung His Excellency's portrait in your office affectionately.

Like almost everybody else, she too resented Baba's regime. She had followed the news and every update with a renewed hope. During Kibaki's inauguration, unscrupulous hate-mongers smeared Baba's car with human refuse! The crowd interrupted his speeches every now and then for many, her included, firmly believed he had done a great deal of nothing for the bloody two decades and so, and deserved nobody's respect!

*Yote yawezekana bila Moi* became a temporal national anthem. Over the years, he had risen to being one of the wealthiest rulers of Africa. Unfortunately, he had joined ranks with the likes of Robert Mugabe, Laurent Kabila, Hosni Mubarak, and Colonel Muammar Gaddafi, and other renowned authoritative dictators. His was a much memorable name; Kenyans will hardly forgive and forget for many years!

Baba went home a stressful mortal that grand day.

The so-called old boy, swept to power, boastfully riding on an anti- corruption platform. He promised zero tolerance on corruption. A million other reform agendas was his word, his big word. Everyone believed him. The meek Kenyans had then rejoiced. So had she. It was ululations and hosannas. At last, an angel, whose

saint face offered people the consolation they had yearned for decades, had come for their much needed rescuing.

Well, corruption was going to be no more but everywhere in the cozy government's corridors. Kenyans were never going to hear of it except through the perceived foes of would- be angel's governance. The vice was going to be wholly crushed and its remnants pocketed discreetly! The angels were going to lie for our well-being.

The old boy was going to snarl, then bark a little, and be careful enough not to bite. The overriding presidential powers were never going to tempt his cronies to put their angel hands into public coffers...Indeed, the heaven Kenyans anticipated for seemed too good to be true. Every pro-reformist and anti-Nyayo sailed though it as though in some unimagined wilds; perhaps the farfetched riches were on their way at long last!

She held her breath and just like millions of other Kenyans out there, she decided to give the new regime the benefit of doubt.

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Wilson was in town to register a private consultancy firm dealing with Auditing and Accounting and when he called to ask if he will be available, David used this as a perfect pretext of securing a temporary 'leave' from Wairimu. It was late in the evening when he drove towards the heart of the city.

University Way was unusually deserted. The Nairobi rush hour was at its peak and usually a snail-slow traffic occupied all the major Highways. He was just about to negotiate the corner at the Uhuru Highway-University Way roundabout when he heard the unmistakable blast of teargas canisters. Passers-by coming from the direction of the blasts hurriedly crossed the zebra crossing and on seeing his frantic face through the open side window, one volunteered and cautioned him.

"Lower State House Road na Uhuru Highway *kimeumana boss...*"

He meant to say the rioting students had blocked the Highway and the very route he was to use to link up with Wilson and Helen who had been waiting all day for him at Hillcrest Hotel.

"*Asante boss!*" He thanked him and after tipping the light-skinned young man with dreadlocks and wearing a red t-shirt with

the words if you must steal, just steal a little inscribed on its front with a fifty bob note, he hurriedly retreated to the CBD.

After carefully packing his vehicle at the jobless corner and paying a mandatory fee of two hundred bob to a red-eyed Kanjo, he picked up his other phone and dialed Wilson's number.

"Halloo..."

"Halloo...will you be serious please!"

"Calm down, big brother...change of plans!"

"Why again?"

"Comrades are everywhere and I cannot use the Lower State House Road...can we instead meet at Hilton Hotel?"

"Mmh, it is okay...give us about thirty minutes!"

"Okay! Will be waiting just outside here..."

He requested him to drive Helen and Mathew to School and he had gladly honored his request. For years, he had been like a father to him. He had emulated his tireless spirit and silently ignored his own inner convictions that initially made him turn down sizable offers from favors-seeking corrupt men and women.

"It is our time to eat, brother...eat like there is no other time to eat!" He always encouraged him.

He had read somewhere in the Holy Bible that there is no greater sin. He was a sinner before 'eating' and he will thus remain one thereafter. More so, they were living in a nation where the church was seemingly keen on corrupting morals, the universities were destroying knowledge, hospitals were destroying health, banks were destroying the economy, the government was destroying the freedom of its subjects and the media was destroying information.

Theirs was a country in which the electorate would rather hang an honest man other than elect him to public office. Ironically, thieving tendencies were the most admirable qualities that would easily add credence to the true lies used by cheats and shameless men and women masquerading as politicians to woe voters. Theirs was a country in which good men and women were vilified and the bad beans in their midst celebrated instead. Theirs was a country in which a post in a public office was an ideal gateway to overnight millions. Theirs was a country in which the security personnel were the default bank robbers terrorizing neighborhoods, streets, and alleys in their towns and cities.

He imagined the frustrations of comrades fighting with the anti-riot police that evening. The street battles were often risky and at times, fatal. It made him remember their hay days in campus and the memorable stories of SONU (Student Organization of Nairobi University) pioneers who championed worthy courses on behalf of the then largely ignorant masses. During those golden days, SONU was a beacon of hope for many a disenfranchised, distraught, disillusioned man and woman...a sleepless watchdog agitated for integrity, end of tribalism, end of corruption and so on and so forth.

SONU was now operational, free from any government control though reportedly under a tight noose thanks to an insecure and corrupt administration. Recently, it had been all over the news for bad reasons. Simply put, SONU was now a pale shadow of its former self...it had lost its initial vigor, glory, and authority.

Its leaders were now full-time sycophants, side-kicks, boot-lickers, and part-time proxies of local and national politicians. Many are sex-hungry, liquor-thirsty morons who waste their precious studying time partying, gambling and hell knows more. Some are simply guns for hire or fulltime boot-lickers, motivated by freebies and privileges that comes with a post at the prestigious Student Body.

Comrades were now a common sight on the highways, going on rampage, injuring motorists, blockading crucial means of transportation at the slightest provocation ranging from impromptu power outages, shortage of condoms in their hostels that occasionally serves as brothels in the night and so on and so forth.

This was more often during the eve of an impending exam. He had had an opportunity of offering a number of the University of Nairobi would-be graduates, and no doubt potential unemployed youths, internship opportunities and as expected, a hundred percent of them proved to be too green. Their virgin brains intoxicated him. Occasionally, the simplest possible of tasks naturally designed for a class eight kid overwhelmed such highly educated men and women and yet exceptional credentials trailed behind them.

The young men appeared to know a great deal of nothing apart from tuning loose, vulnerable, and immoral office messengers and perhaps an army of naïve jobseekers from shags roaming the streets of Nairobi. On the hand, the girls seemed keener to squeeze something out of any 'generous' male worker who was not satisfied

back at home. A number traded their flesh in exchange of being guaranteed an easy time and a more appealing recommendation once they are through with their internship.

Such were the days when universities seemed too preoccupied with expanding their commercial empires and ripping from the knowledge-thirsty. You had to pass CATs and RATs and then the main exam and wait to be churned out as half-baked would-be ineffective, semi-skilled, and semi-literate employee. The free primary had since diluted the quality of education and thus inevitably guaranteed the continuation of the vicious cycle of unemployment. That meant perpetual poverty and a ticking time bomb for the highly ‘ethnically’ polarized and most unequal nation.

“Hi there...” He had not noticed the two approaching.

He was sitting at the edge of the oval concrete that served as a permanent ‘waiting’ seat for Nairobi jobseekers and villagers perhaps snubbed by their shrewd relations who were too broke to feed yet another empty stomach.

“Oh, sorry, hi there, brother...hi, Helen.” He stood up and extended his hand.

“Come on, brother...a hug won’t hurt!” He hugged Wilson and then Helen.

The latter returned the hug coldly. She had not opened her mouth since the last time they talked over the phone and from the corner of his eye, he could tell was she given a chance, she would have strangled him to death without any remorse.

“You need not to worry...I will pay the bills!”

“Oh, how kind of you, brother...you are my guests and I thought it will be right if I pay.”

“You two were once like my own kids, do you really remember? Let me be a father...tonight...again!” David was prepared.

He had passed through one of the numerous KCB Bank ATM Booths to withdraw enough to avoid any unnecessary embarrassment. Hilton was no joke. It was here that their former colonial master would-be queen received the news of her crowning. It was here that one of his friends remained stranded for a whole week after failing to raise enough to foot the bills just a month earlier. There was no time to marvel at the luxuriously and extravagantly tailored state-of-the-art interiors. The cutlery was like

no other and so was the food. Throughout their dining and wining that night, an ominous, intense, and ugly tensioned reined between Helen and David.

Wilson did all the talking...not that it mattered to him...he was aware of the deep rift separating the two ex-lovebirds. He spoke of the Kenya Farmers Association (KFA) and its rapid descend to the recycle bin where many others like KCC, RVR, and KB were silently nursing their irreparable damages. He talks about his brand new palatial home and the army of servants and two guards in it at Milimani Estate in Nakuru. He spoke about Wakesho and their undying love.

He proudly spoke about his flourishing privately owned Boarding Kindergarten, Primary, and Secondary School (It was a joint business venture at Free Area in Nakuru with Mrs. Kwatenge).

He mentioned something about his clever and hardworking 6 kids, about Aisha in particular and her nauseating, meaningless and barbaric dreams of becoming an actor at Hollywood, and his Consultancy Firm that he wanted registered as soon as last year.

They did all the listening. He lectured them on the challenges of being a parent in a country with off-the-roof inflation rates. He lamented about the challenges of coping up with adolescents whose full time jobs was disagreeing with you. He complained of the inevitable endless fights regarding subject-choices, friends-choices, sports-choices and so on and so forth with shortsighted kids who think they know everything when they know nothing...He specifically reminded David why it was critical for him to do more than dishing out handouts to his son.

In the end, without thinking, without knowing, and to the horror of the two, he broached up that subject which they had both been avoiding all that evening.

“So, how is your son doing, David?” Helen shifted uneasily in her chair.

She eyed David and waited to hear what he had to say. “Mmh, not bad...except for the asthma I suppose.” He answered carefully.

He was aware Helen’s persecuting eyes were all over him. He had since learnt that asthma was hereditary and he had been hoping it would spare his son. He was disappointed to hear he had started sneezing after his second day in Nairobi School. He had

visited the next weekend with two Ventolin Inhalers just in case the wheezing got better of him. The school administration had excused Mathew from certain mandatory chores and allowed to wear an extra sweater and gloves during the morning and evening preps.

He hated himself. He hated his father. Sometimes, he thought he loved Helen, or did he really loved her? Sometimes, he blamed himself for everything. Had he not lured Helen into his trap that fateful day, things would have been a lot different. He hated Wairimu, or did he? He hated Wanyoike. He hated Wilson. He hated Helen. There and then, he only loved his unfair world for the glass of wine. He focused his now dim eyes on the half-empty wine bottle and mumbled a few inaudible words under his breath. Wilson had been looking forward to this time.

“What do you mean not bad? You must get near him...know him inside outside. I tell you sometimes I doubt if I even know some of my kids!”

“Oh, is that so?”

“Yeah, despite the fact that I am always there...”

“Everybody thinks I am a bad father, right?”

“Nobody thinks so; brother...you are an excellent father!”

“Ask Wairimu how I have been treating our daughter...you will be shocked, brother!”

“We just want you to be there, Mmh...be there physically, or something tangible like that, is that not the case, Helen?” She nodded her head.

They remained silent for a while. David had not tasted his food. He was more eager to down as much liquor as his damaged livers could accommodate and withstand.

“You are drunk; brother...we should take you home!”

Wilson was studying and carefully watching his every movement.

He had been watching his mouth twitch every time he gulped the liquor and closely watched his small eyes close as the liquor hit his being. Slowly, Wilson bent over, took away the empty glass from his trembling hands, and motioned the nearby waiter.

“H-h-h-heeeey! Wheeere d'ya think yeeeer goin'?” He slurred, pointing his index finger at the approaching waiter.

The young man who seemed barely twenty stopped midway and waited patiently.

“I am tired of everybody here...” David said, words tumbling out of his twitched mouth in a rush.

The syllables were barely distinguishable and Helen knew he was about to cry. Wilson tried to grab his left hand but he dived, tumbled to the floor slashing the table contents all over in the process. Then he had started crying!

“I –a-m n-ot dru-nk! I -am the –sobe-rest ma-n i-n he-re!” He yelled as he unsuccessfully tried to stand up.

“E-v-r-y bo-dy t-h-i-n-k-s so, why –l-i-e?”

“That is not true, brother...”

“You- know- me, W-i-l-s-o-n...”

“Always have!”

“That is enough now, Pa’ Mathew!” Helen shouted angrily. David ignored her and turned his tired eyes to Wilson.

“I -will -try, bro-ther...now-that –he- is -here, I w-ill, I wi-ll...tru-st me!”

“I wish you both well...despite everything!”

“We will definitely see him through High School, I promise!” Helen quipped.

She was not happy with what was happening.

“I am happy to hear that...” Wilson said with a small smile on the edges of his eyes.

He was fully aware of the bad blood between the two. He had repeatedly struggle to ignore the rift and whenever he could, try to reduce it. They had talked with Helen at length and she had told him about the money.

“Money is not everything, Helen...” He complained.

Mathew needed his father’s presence. He needed his love, his protection, his physical presence, and not an overflowing bank account.

“I have no courage to face him...besides; he is contended with his wife and daughter.” She had retorted defensively.

David had a curious way of communicating his feelings. She had known him all her life as a dull coward!

“I will talk some sense to him when we meet...” Wilson had assured her that early morning before beginning their journey.

He was disappointed. He was not happy that they had ended up separately. It was not easy to comprehend why David chose to take such a ‘less-travelled’ road.

He had heard of his heavy drinking and the constant warnings from medics. He had also heard of Wairimu's uncle. Wanyoike had singlehandedly propelled David from his junior position as a mere Social Worker to now a senior government official at the Ministry of Planning. He was worried he might lose his cousin for good first to the devil's urine then second to Wairimu!

"Gerroff me!" he shouted, "I'm s-o-b-e-r... W-i-l-s-o-n!" Wilson backed off.

He could hear the unmistakable wheezing and he immediately realized if he did not do anything, something undesirable could happen. He fidgeted over David's jacket and found the inhaler at the breast pocket. Helen struggled to help him up. David stumbled forward and grabbed a leg of a table for support. He clung there, slack-jawed and slumped over, for a long time before he said, "You can't leave me here, Helen!"

"Nobody is leaving anyone!" He passed out.

A tall, dark-skinned heavily built bouncer in a black suit and a grey necktie volunteered to help carry him. It was approaching midnight when they left the compound of Hilton Hotel. David was back at his feet and the wheezing was slowly dying out.

"You see, even God understood such situations, and that's why in First Timothy Chapter Five verse twenty-three, Paul advises His followers to no longer drink water only, but a little wine, for the sake of their stomachs!" He retorted defensively when he realized all eyes were on him.

She had attended First Aid lessons back in campus and she had used the little knowledge to resuscitate poor David.

"I will drive you home, if you won't mind!" Helen offered. "Sure, why not...please, Your Highness, be my guest!" She ignored the tinge of sarcasm in his slightly slurred voice together with the strong smell of red wine emanating from his mouth and opened the rear door for David.

She had just completed her driving lessons and the numerous road trips as part of her driving practical back in Kitale had proved quite helpful. Wilson had promised to help her procure a Prado Nissan Four-wheeler and she will be a proud owner of a car soon.

Wairimu called to ask why the lateness. Wilson explained and she called back to say she was expecting them. Her anxious and worried voice was one heavy with confusion. Her darling was

cheerful and in super health when they last saw each other early that morning and in case of anything, he always informed her. Jogoo road was clear that night and the traffic had since died away. It only took them twenty minutes to reach David's home at Mbotela Estate. The two women shared a bedroom, Wilson slept alone in his bedroom, and David spent the night in Shiro's bedroom.

The next morning, which was a Tuesday, David woke up with an ugly headache and the usual hangover. The two raw eggs left at the fridge worked its miracle and the hangover soon disappeared. He did not defend himself so much; a lame excuse here and there and they soon realized that she was not completely sober. Then he had started crying like a child again!

It was a sign of weakness and sheer arrogance if an African man cried, especially so like a two-year-old kid! He dared not tell anyone that a retributive wave of guilt that had repeatedly refused to go away was consuming his once pure conscience. He felt no need to be candid with these two women...Everybody was seated at the sitting room and the two women had not said a word to each other.

He half staggered towards the cupboard and fished out a bottle of John walker.

"With this, ladies, you can never walk alone..." He declared with a sly smile and a silly grin.

"Liquor is best to those whose spirits are down to the earth...some silly frogs, like some people we know, say it is Satan's urine! I swear I don't like such jokes, this thing is damn sweet, and it makes me feel like I can really fly, eh?" He continued with a wry smile carelessly lingering on his red-hot eyes.

They just watched. Everyone was preoccupied with their emotions and thoughts, and the last thing they wanted to hear, were David's revelations about hidden miracles of strong wine.

He is such an ugly piece of a sore ass! Who does he think he is? Helen cursed inwardly. She hated him with all her soul and she would have loved nothing else other than see his shameless brains shattered and scattered to the four winds by a fatal thrust of a bullet. Walking down her memory lane, she remembered the overstretched night hours spent on imaginary experiments designed to exploit viable means of doing away with David finally. Then there were those painful pangs of pain down her belly afterwards. In the end, she simply could not bring herself to implementing the results of her

experiments.

She angrily watched David down half of it then unsteadily walk towards them. Wilson was busy with his expensive Nokia Cell Phone. He had been trying to hide the embarrassment with his stupid jokes that seemed to fascinate nobody. He was waiting for things to calm down before asking for permission to leave. He had a lot in store for him that day.

They watched in horror and silence as he stopped halfway then; the frightening figure went tumbling down like a demolished story building, groaning like a sick animal. They both thought it was a joke, yet the man had hardly joked in his life, and they secretly admitted this to themselves.

They took him to Nairobi Hospital right away. The two women kept daytime vigil as Wilson drove downtown to meet his old friends so as he could pull strings and secure the registration number and other crucial documentations for his firm.

Helen and Sheila shared a room for a second night in a row. Nobody was willing sleep alone during such a critical moment. They talked all night long about David: about his past, his real self, the hidden self and the other man they both thought they knew yet they did not. The more they talked, the more Helen got dejected and felt guilty.

The minute she set her eyes on Wairimu the previous night, she had concluded without any second thoughts that she was just an opportunistic whore! She had lived hating this woman they were now sharing a bed with most of her adult years. Here she was... what will she do and say? Her passionate hatred mainly reserved for Wairimu had rekindled the stomach ulcers that literally took her ages back to her pregnancy period. She had consequently hated everyone from her tribe and had it not been for real threats from those nagging Municipal Officials in Kitale, she would not have hanged Kibaki's portrait on the walls of his Law Firm offices!

She had liked the least the way she grinned every time that odious devil opened his useless mouth complaining about the whereabouts of Shiro when he knew very well that she was many miles away in Ukambani. She was shocked to learn that David had lied about her very existence. How could he? The revelation had struck her like lightning. She almost felt sorry for the poor girl.

They were classmates and had shared almost every unit until their third year when she majored on Languages, and minor Sociology, which David majored. She had liked his face... and they had fallen for each other. When she was expecting a baby, the man was busy working out a formula to sidestep her. She hatched a plot to tie him awhile longer in the city with the help of his well-connected uncle who secured them both jobs immediately they graduated.

When she came to the hospital to hold the baby for the first time, he said he had decided to marry her and that is how they ended up together. It was only until recently when she overheard him calling a Helen in the dead of the night and wishing her and a Mathew good night. When I confronted him and threatened to mention this to her uncle, then a respectable businessperson in the city and a de facto protégé of many top-ranked government officials, he spilled the beans and told her everything about Helen. In the end, he assured her it was nothing romantic and that Helen had moved on already. She believed him!

Helen was speechless. The only thing she could mumble under her breath was why: why did he do it? Unknowingly, she had cried and Sheila had fished out a large, brown handkerchief. They had, for years on end, been sailing in the same boat, in love with the same man, confounded by the same fog and ignorance. What a merciless creature David was... perhaps he was rightfully paying for his sins. Life had a way of rewarding good for good and bad for bad, and one will never run away from the inevitable damnation!

Nairobi was cloudless and the dry season had just started. She had a lot to do back at home including preparing a farm she had rented. The April-September rains would soon come and she wanted to be ready by then. After a sleepless night of earth-shaking revelations, Helen woke up very early the next day. She declined Wairimu's request to accompany her to the hospital. The only thing she wanted was to be as far away as possible from David. Her host understood why. Some part of Helen had felt like staying behind so she could at least help in whichever way possible but then she realized it was useless... David would not change, cannot change no matter what. A cheetah cannot do away with its spots anyway.

She headed west. The journey was so boring, her mood somber throughout, and her heart a lot heavier. Now the ulcers could

do her much damage than she would have loved. It was too much to bear. She prayed for strength and courage. She silently cried. It felt better and better when the tears rolled down what that useless he-devil had called a beautiful face!

## Chapter 11

“Without civic morality communities perish; without personal morality their survival has no value.” — *Bertrand Russell, 20th-century British mathematician and philosopher*

David barely survived the asthmatic attack. He was wholeheartedly embracing his present. He knew his duty would be paying for what he had initially thought a precious hobby. There were times when he had allowed his weakness to beget a gap every woman wanted to fill with ill pleasantries. His soul had had its fill...and his body had absorbed as much liquor as much as his lust could accommodate.

That he was today operating with a dead pair of kidneys was no miracle; it had been his own making indeed.

Well, he did not like the idea of dying. He just did not want to die yet. Dr. Ali had given him five years to live. The waiting proved tricky; sometimes he thought of bridging the gap with a rope. He had applied for an early retirement to the consternation of Wairimu, and because of Mr. Wanyoike’s widespread tentacles, none was forthcoming.

In-between his back and forth trips to Dr. Ali and the hospital for medical check-ups; he had had time to visit Mathew at Nairobi School in Westlands. Wilson’s words kept haunting him and he felt more obliged to play his part.

Occasionally, he would remind Mathew of his schooling experience. He would often tell him how some of his friends had had to trek dozens of miles to some muddy classrooms to read.

“Soon, the society will have no place for the uneducated.

Wealth will no longer be determined by the land acreage under one’s disposal—rather, it will be determined by how much one has invested in education...” He always told his son.

He knew he always heeded his counsel for his grades were ever exceptional. Soon, they will be big men and women with massive tummies perhaps striving to enslave their own like their predecessors. Some might end up like him. The powerful were lying—waiting with Job’s patience! The country had become like a hen, which was eating its own eggs!

For years, the David's tribesmen had relaxed. Baba had opened avenues for them. A degree meant nothing for even a class one drop out could it easily become an army general or an Executive Officer with a six-digit figure salary. Onyango's tribesmen had gone back to class, and after the books, some had emigrated overseas looking for greener pastures, married the whites and rested to squander. Meanwhile, the conquerors had been amassing wealth from the fertile highlands and streets. Today they were sending their kids to universities at the highest rates. Slowly, the breath takers were becoming poor after spending the esteemed products of their brains in luxurious lifestyles. Aids had long come hot on their heels.

Time was running away still. Helen called to say hi during one of his visits on a weekend. She had later talked with Mathew using his cell phone. It was impossible to realize how such little things they were doing for him played a pivotal role in his exemplary academic performance. She was still guilty following her unexpected disappearance at a time that he clearly needed her the most. He was over it already and had not showed any signs of resentment towards her or her son, Mathew. She was grateful he could sacrifice his spare time to stop by and see the young man.

The profession she once adored as a young woman no longer ignited her soul as before. The justice system was so corrupt whoever had the means always had his or her way. Clienteles persistently pestered her around. Some coerced her to take up cases when they had actually committed gross crimes such as rape, violent robbery and in some isolated cases, murder! Others had threatened her should they lose their cases.

At the national frontier, looting of public coffers with awesome abandon was the order of the day. Her Majesty's riffles and soldiers were ever on high alert safeguarding the national thieves just as was the case during Moi's oppressive and tyrannical regime. Whilst the big men and women were passing some good time in the Big Table, strife and enmity was gradually gripping the country, and Mungiki menace was spreading at an ease that baffled many across Nairobi and Central Provinces. Helpless mothers were crying for help and would-be vigorous leaders were being butchered in most parts of the country.

Multitudes had no homes in Budalangi after the perennial floods wreaked havoc. Thousands of other Kenyans out there were perishing just because they could not afford cheap malaria drugs.

Kenyans were suffering. The leadership was slowly killing its people—Mount Elgon was burning—Kenya was slowly burning!

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A number of David's relatives had fled to the city by mid-2004; Wairimu coldly welcomed them and made it known that their stay must not be eternal! Wilson too was playing host to a number of school-going relations whom he gladly enrolled in their private school.

Some were camping in Machewa where Chemos was already overwhelmed by their un-ceremonial influx and the subsequent catering she had to handle all by herself. Maria had married Mr.

Ndege a year earlier and was living with him at Lukhome center, almost five kilometers away from Machewa. David had to convince her husband to allow her to help his mother occasionally to take good care of their relatives, mostly young men between the ages of thirteen to early twenties. Soon, the tiny five-acre land was dotted with hurriedly erected huts housing these young men.

Life in Machewa was not easy. Some returned back home and had no choice other than to join their peers. Those who stayed back, some of whom had left wives and kids behind, would later receive chilling threats. They half-heartedly obeyed. In the end, only three of David's stepbrothers stayed behind. Two were just about to sit for their Primary Education final examination and one was a form two student. They enrolled at Machewa Primary and Secondary School respectively and hoped for the best.

David had learned from his father, who was privy to the genesis of such untimely exodus, that some well-known local politicians and aggrieved Bok men had started recruiting young men. As far as the goals and aims of such a venture were concerned, no one was aware yet. Many clueless young men heed the calls, packed their few belongings, dropped out of school; others left behind children and their newly married wives and joined the ever-growing number of would-be militia whose objectives remained mysterious as the identities of its architects.

After the 1989 government evictions, Meto, Joram and other representatives made futile petitions to Moi's government, which

blatantly halted and annulled the Chebyuk Settlement Scheme four years later. However, as a political reward for their loyalty to Jogoo, Moi's government initiated a third phase of the settlement scheme intended to benefit both the Ndorobo and the Bok. As was the case in 1989, the exercise was marred with corruption and irregularities forcing the government to abandon it...again!

With an ever-expanding population, the number of the landless doubled and even tripled. With an indecisive administration in place, Meto and other Ndorobo men took matters on their own hands and subdivided the available plots to them with blatant impunity.

Soon, Bok men joined the party. Mild, isolated, and largely unreported clashes erupted leaving four of Meto's close friends dead. Cattle raids became a common phenomenon with 1996 being the worst. 720 cattle and 20 donkeys ended up in the hands of rustlers reportedly with Ugandan smell and looks that year. Some reportedly turned up in Cheptais months later! Some blamed The FERA Movement whose members were from the Bok Sabaot sub tribe

In 1997, Joseph Kimkung floored the long-standing legislator, Wilberforce Kisiero. Secretly, Bok elders and local politicians were overseeing the issuance of land allotment letters without the consultations of Mosop elders. Come 2002 general elections, the land issue, in addition to the anti-KANU sentiments and the help of his driver, friend, and advisor Fred Chesebe Kapondi, helped John Bomet Serut to oust one Joseph Kimkung who had appeared invincible. Joe Kimkung was a staunch supporter of Moi and KANU'S point man in the western frontier that was widely viewed as hostile to the ruling regime.

John Bomet Serut, formerly a prison warder and a clerical officer at the ministry of lands, pledged to initiate Nyumba Kwa Nyumba land allocation policy if elected. The electorate and politicians opposing the sitting area legislator had every reason to blame him for idly sitting by and not doing enough to resolve the Chebyuk Settlement Scheme.

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Meto had heard the news of the plot meant to exterminate and annihilate members of his community. He headed deep into the jungle and informed his relations and tribesmen of the impending danger. Soon, with the help of others, he secretly organized and

funded meetings aimed at coming up with tangible plans of responding accordingly should they be attacked. He had maintained his links with their friends across the border that could easily avail the much-needed firearms. Nevertheless, he operated discreetly, all the while keeping Helen and her two teaching younger siblings in darkness for as long as it could take.

In Chebyuk Centre, a house belonging to a Bok man was set ablaze. In Kipsukurok a month later, another one was set ablaze in broad daylight. Meto had instructed his boys to test the waters. An immediate response never came.

The area MP, reading the signs of danger, intervened. At least no other house was touched for months thereafter.

The government had just kicked off the Chebyuk Settlement Scheme Phase Three with the help of village elders such as Meto, Joram, Emia Location chief and Sub-chief, representatives from the Ndorobo and the Bok communities among others. Already, the Ndorobo and a handful of Bok men and women occupied the plots available.

Notable beneficiaries such as Mzee Jason Psongoywo, Wycliffe Kirui Komon Matakwei, Patrick Komon, Benson Chesikaki, Mzee Joram, and Mzee Meto among others were reluctant to participate in the ongoing resettlement exercise. Some like Wycliffe openly defied the administrators tasked with re-surveying the plots and identifying genuine would-be beneficiaries.

A form two dropout, Matakwei had channeled all his energy to farming and their extensive land quickly turned him into a village bourgeoisie. His spirit of hard work extended beyond the confines of his farm for he doubled as church elder at a local Seventh Day Adventist Sabbath School. His humble lifestyle made it impossible to dare imagine him capable of leading an entire sub tribe in a murderous campaign, and especially so given the fact that he was a mere form two graduate!

In the cover of darkness, Wycliffe, while in the company of other discontented Bok men, occasionally held meetings, and kept strategizing on their next move. On multiple occasions, he shared his frustrations with Salome, his wife, who had no clue that the important meetings his husband claimed he was attending almost every night were designed to maim, murder and rape fellow Sabaots!

Salome had lived almost all her adult life spreading the gospel. She was a devote Christian; calm in nature, kind-hearted, submissive, trustworthy and not very inquisitive. She had since converted her beloved husband who was now a church elder.

“I am not happy with how they are handling Phase 3...” He would always lament.

“It is not up you to decide how the government plans to carry out its plans, Komon... There are authorities who would step in should things turn ugly... besides, the best way to eat an elephant in your path is cut him up into little pieces...” She would answer him back.

“Which government has the right of taking away our livelihoods? Anyway, he that digs up a grave for his enemy may be digging it for himself!”

“They do mean well, my husband!”

“You are so blind, Salome... Where will we go?”

“What else can we do?”

“Something must be done! Nobody is going back to Cheptais empty handed!”

“Well, are you sure we will lose everything if we participate in the re-allocation?”

“What a question... how do you easily forget that all these land was illegally acquired?”

“I know but everybody got it for free too... sure the government will not be that cruel...”

“I will not take part and nobody will take away my land from me! I swear by the name of my ancestors!”

“God will intervene, worry less... do not lose your faith in him just yet, Komon!”

“If your God was that much kind, we would not be having this conversation in the first place! I better return to our original home in a coffin!” He was sure participating in the exercise would prove suicidal. He had to act and find a sure way out... and the sooner the better!

After unsuccessfully trying to seek the spiritual blessings for his bludgeoned army from a Kamaraat clan elder dozens of miles away in Chesito, Mzee Jason Psongoywo volunteered to step in. He was from the revered Kapchayeeek clan. Meanwhile, Meto had managed to convince an elder from their Kapsaguut clan, which they

shared with the Sangulu extended family. The rift between the two was now wider and deeper than ever before. In silence, they all waited, in secret, they all planned.

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After the Constitutional Referendum in 2005, 'NO' having won, Mr. Serut knew he will lose the 2007 general elections. He had to act swiftly. Government was on his lesson plan. He flexed his muscles, the enemies felt cornered, cringed back, and he was almost the victor! He subsequently used the ongoing Chebyuk Settlement Scheme Phase III as a weapon of coercing electorates, and blackmailing those carried away by the Orange Democratic Movement.

Meanwhile, those from Bok who took part in the exercise, and unfortunately missed plots would join arms with their compatriots hiding and waiting deep in the jungle. The dirt and filth that would spring forth extensive killings and massive displacement, begun taking a definite shape!

Problems mounted up with corrupt chiefs who excluded names of preferred beneficiaries widely regarded as loyalists. A number of shortlisted candidates mysteriously even never benefited in the end when a considerable number of perceived enemies, and betrayers ironically ended up with more than one plot each! Most of such unlucky 'loyalists' complained though nobody listened and eventually, a good number of them too, switched sides and supported the noble course deep in the forest.

Joram and almost his all grown up sons surprisingly lost all their land parcels in Chepkurkur to their Ndorobo counterparts.

Joram had just retired as a village elder due to his advanced age. He was now a slow-footed old man whose words were barely audible. His left ear had almost ceased functioning and he had problem remembering faces and names of people.

With nowhere to go, most of his sons too joined the army in the forest. Joram, his 3 younger wives and their little children remained behind. Meto and his neighbors who had illegally allocated themselves land in Chepkurkur suffered the same fate. They re-occupied their original farm in Chewangoi that was under the watchful eye of Kipyego. Chewangoi was cold and deserted for unknown reasons. The old, women, girls, and infants now inhabited it.

Helen had heard the rumors. She visited once and unsuccessfully begged her father to leave immediately! She had just bought a sizable land in Machewa where she was putting up a house. He refused.

“I will die here, Chebet... Yes, here in the promised land of your people!”

“How will it benefit anyone of you in case you die?”

“You! Your son, Mathew will inherit it once the battle is won!”

“Which battle, father?” She asked, feigning innocence.

“Well, I can see your informants are not being very candid, Mmh!”

“Nobody has ever mentioned to me that there is going to be a battle of any sort up here!”

“We have always been at war... it might not have resulted to physical injuries yes but truth is, our people have been waging a severe psychological war with your bastard’s people!” She had not seen her father in such a foul mood.

She knew he was not happy that David abandoned her. It was a shameful thing for a woman to bring up a child on her own yet she thought it was unnecessary to torment her and call her son names.

She wanted to tell her father that Mathew was not a bastard. He had a caring and a loving father who was paying his fee and accommodating him even as they were speaking.

They were sitting under a grown Elgon Teak that once served as a landmark that separated their land with that of Joram. Between them, was an untouched gourd of Mursik and two empty plastic cups... It was late in the evening and they could hear the bubbling waters of River Emia and River Teremi. She could hardly see any signs of life beyond their compound. Joram was not around and she had met with two of his younger wives who had welcomed her cordially earlier in the day.

Meto was now a frail, forgetful yet a strong-willed man. His grey and kinky hair showed every sign of aging. He was wearing a baggy white shirt and a black trouser she had bought him a month earlier. It was never easy confronting her father. Years had not succeeded in withering the stubbornness in him. He always wore that stern face of a typical wife-beater and never heeds anything coming out of the mouth of a woman! She had lived hating and loving him by unequal measures!

Her Ma' had since gone back to Chepkube. A strange illness had confined her to her bed and neighbors had blamed her co-wives who were reportedly eager to hasten her death. Cherop had been living alone in her hurt. On multiple occasions, Helen had requested her to move in with her. She had always postponed her moving until the strange illness grounded her. Helen was still waiting to hear she was ready to live with her.

Wilson had warned her that something bad might happen to his father's people should they not move. She had called David to confirm and he too had had the same story.

"I know it hurts to hear your own flesh and blood being insulted!"

"Well, one can say it hurts..."

"His people are planning to exterminate our people so they can take everything!"

"That is not true, father!"

"They have always been on our necks...and now we have to share the spoils 50:50, Mmh? The whole land was originally ours, remember?"

"Where do you want them to go? They too need the land, father!"

"They have enough room back in Cheptais, Sasuri, Chepkube, and Chebwek...the moorland and all other adjacent areas are now a National Game Reserve and you and I know what that means!"

"Well, I almost forgot that..."

"We have nowhere to go and that is why they are planning to finish us!"

"Nobody is going to exterminate anybody, father...how can you say such things?"

"You have no idea how ungrateful and treacherous your son's father and their people are!"

"Father, but we have lived like brothers and sisters with them all these years..."

"Your generation is so naïve and blind...you hate truth, you hate justice, you just want your freedom, ah...freedom to strut half-naked, fornicate, and run away from our old ways of life. What a waste!"

“Truth is we are all brothers and sisters...and brothers and sisters are not supposed to be planning how to kill each other!”

“Truth is your mother’s relatives and our so-called brothers and sisters are useless monkeys that deserve to die and their dead bodies eaten by vultures!”

“All I want is for you people to be safe, that’s all!”

“We have never; will never be safe anywhere else apart from our land!”

“This is not the only place one can live, father...I have enough money to buy you land elsewhere!”

“I will appreciate it so much if you were to buy your father land here!”

“Suppose they harm you, father? I am not ready to be an orphan!”

“You better live as an orphan other than allow those savages spit their phlegm on our faces and get away with it”.

“Father, I beg you...come with me please!”

“Child, you have heard me...I am not going anywhere!”  
She had left, disappointed and angry with her stubborn father.

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Cheptoror area chief was the first to succumb to the wrath of the newly established Sabaot Land Defense Force. Komon's extended family having succumbed to a major loss, produced a sizeable number of would- be militiamen. Once the ensuing battle is over, every militia was sure to get at least fifty acres of virgin land at the disputed settlement scheme. For such an illusion to be a reality, they needed to wipe out the entire Ndorobo sub tribe, destroy their properties, and steal their animals as well!

In late 2005, implementation of a chilling order from a commandant whose name was not only revered but also feared, begun. SLDF rounded up more school going boys and girls and took them deep into the jungle for further instructions. The boys trained in military warfare and the girls served as temporally wives for the senior militias. Additional military hardware exchanged hands, others crossed over from the loose Uganda –Kenya border.

Meto had instructed his boys to prepare for a showdown. Those trapped and sandwiched by the enemy had nowhere to go – yet, the guns and machetes lay waiting for them. Some fled. Those who were not fortunate enough would later on be tracked down,

brutally murdered with sledgehammers, machetes, or summarily executed and their bodies thrown at either River Emia or Teremi.

Under the dreadful watch of Wycliffe Matakwei Kirui Komon, the Sabaot Land Defense Force grew beyond control. David Sigei offered his best training. Elias Bera oversaw financial matters, and soon, sponsors were in their hundreds. Civil servants such as teachers had to part with something or else face the music.

Extortions, blackmail, and blatant looting were other means of financing the ever-growing militia.

From Chebwek, Cheptais to Suam in Endebes- the force was like a live wire!

By mid-2006, the vigor of the force had seen hundreds of lives lost and properties worth millions of shillings, destroyed!

Houses were torched, Tororo alongside Kopsiro, wantonly destroyed. The slopes witnessed uncountable beheadings and untold sufferings. Animals such as goats and stray mongrels suffered a similar fate. Some lost their hind or rear limbs. The director of the horror movie heaved with ecstasy at the sight, and ordered even more bloodshed!

There was no way to survive...gunshots were heard all over. Critical business premise reduced to mere ashes. Thousands ran for their dear lives. Raiders from both camps would take off with what their might could allow them to carry, rape helpless elderly women left behind, and took away their daughters and granddaughters.

Whatever happened to them, no one will ever get to know! Vigorous fields that were once the cradle of farming, slowly turned idle. Well-established small town centers became ideal battlefields. Schools became hideouts and subsequent sites of irreparable damage and loss of both lives and properties.

Beyond the impenetrable forest yonder, the enemy kept planning how best to avenge. By this time, Meto had slither unnoticed to join the Moorland Defense Forces beyond Chebyuk Centre. He offered his wisest counsel and blessings for the young men who were determined to give their all!

The now cruel Sabaot Land Defense Force militiamen took more lives. The Ndorobo suffered heavy casualties. They cringed back in what was widely viewed as a tactical retreat. Matakwei's boys were willing to fight to death...and to the last man standing.

More and more heeded his call. More were blessed by Mzee Psongoywo; more took the oath with such great enthusiasm.

The killings continued! The horror movie continued! Moorland Defense Forces responded weeks later. They launched a retaliatory attack one unexpected night armed with brand new AK-47's, G3-rifles, razor-sharp machetes, China made cheap Pangas and all manner of crude weaponry. Their informant had assured them that a bulk of SLDF militia were partying at one of their leader's compound in Chelebei to celebrate a previous night of successful butchering and cattle raids in households belonging to the Bukusu. They were aware that just a handful were wide-awake securing the village. More so, most of those alert and in their right positions were drunk.

Their grand entry was unstoppable. The resistance that confronted them was less than they had anticipated. After a brief exchange of fire with a few guards stationed along the banks of River Emia, they managed to round up a sizable number of Chewangoi residents alongside a huge herd of cattle and matched them towards their hideout in the cover of the darkness. Among those captured were Joram, his three wives, six grandchildren, four daughters and a six-month-old great granddaughter.

After hours of a frightening journey through the thicket, their captors announced they could now rest their tired feet. No one could tell where he or she was. A thick blanket of clouds covered the moon. They could hear owls hooting hysterically and from the cooing of pigeons hiding on their nests in the surrounding thicket, they could tell it was almost dawning.

Their armed captors ordered them all to lie face down on a cleared field covered with frozen, dewy grass. There was ten elderly men, almost the age of Joram, about fifteen elderly women, twenty young women, thirty young girls, forty little children and four suckling babies. After what appeared to be an eternity, they heard shuffling of feet accompanied with murmurs. It was hard to tell what was going on. Then they heard the unmistakable voice of Meto.

“Welcome to your new home!” He announced while clapping his hands then with a wicked sneer he continued, “Well, well, well...finally we can avenge what your sons have been doing all these months!

They have raped our women, killed our children and took away everything from us, is that not so, Joram?”

He walked towards where the lifeless and motionless body of Joram lay. He poked the half-bare back of the old man with the butt of his AK-47 and repeated his last remark emphatically. The wrinkled back covered with a white, old, and tattered vest showed no signs of life. Joram had been wearing tiny underwear and a vest only when their captors forcefully roughed them all up. Some of his peers who had struggled to free themselves had nothing on completely. As a punishment, their captors tied their hands on their backs and had their nightdresses removed in front of their wives, children, and grandchildren!

Afraid, cowed, cajoled and confused, they obeyed every single command on their way to a place unknown. The endless moos of the cattle, melodious jingles made by tiny bells tied round the necks of some cows and bulls, and the constant gunshots from a distant fired by a few guards who were pursuing their captives, swallowed the shrill cries of little babies and soft sobs of their traumatized mothers. By the time the partying boys in Chelebei got wind of what had happened, the triumphant contingent of the Moorland Defense Forces had crossed the red line into safety.

Joram’s asthma had worsened with his advanced age and he barely slept without at least two puffs from the magical inhaler David had bought him. The cold in the jungle was overwhelming and his wheezing had started immediately their captives made them to lie die. He had no energy left for his lungs to force the air in and out his breathing system and he had fainted as a result.

Meto was disappointed his long-time friend was not listening. He poked his half-bare back again, though a little harder than before. Joram did not respond. He had been looking forward to this day.

Earlier in the week, Ndiema had led his bloodthirsty platoon to his very own backyard. They killed Cheptot, Kipyego and their mother in cold blood. She was seriously ill and had just arrived from Chepkube.

While at Chepkube, Cherop was harassed and tormented until she divulged information regarding their whereabouts. Ndiema and his men had then used her as bait and that is how she eventually led the enemy to Meto’s hideout. Fortunately, he was not around by that time.

“Joram, my brother, are you hearing me?” He shouted and jabbed the motionless body fiercely with the ugly butt of his gun.

The lack of response stirred his fury even further. Babies were crying and clinging on the backs of their mothers. Some had not suckled the whole night. The cries reminded him of his slain relations. There was no way he could let them live after losing so much.

He ordered one of his boys to untie the old man. Upon turning the motionless body that was colder than usual, Meto noticed the unmistakable froth on the edges of Joram’s mouth. He shuddered. An enormous wave of repugnance made his heart grow weaker. He almost felt human but then remembered he had a mission to accomplish. He closed his eyes and fired a volley of bullet at the lifeless body!

He was angry that Joram had chosen to die so prematurely. He wanted him to witness every single minute of the agony he had planned to inflict on his wives and children. The cries of the babies became even intense and this infuriated him further. He ignored the silent sobs and secret pleas of mercy. His ancestor’s madness had now overwhelmed him.

“Kill them all! Children of rats are rats!” He ordered and hurriedly left.

What followed is unprintable here. In the end, his boys wrestled life out of all those helpless souls. They felt greatly relieved and waited for yet another day of harvesting.

By the end of the following day, news had already reached David that he no longer had a father and that many of his stepsisters, stepbrothers and three stepmothers were no more. He called Helen and broke the sad news to her. Confused, angry, ashamed of her father, worried, fearful and dumbfounded; she collapsed and was rushed to Cherang’any Nursing Hospital.

More raids followed...More deaths...More beheadings...Even more raping. Hundreds fled. Dozens retreated beyond Laboot. A few made it beyond Gitwamba to their relatives. Days or weeks later, they too would fall victim to the raging anger and rejuvenated vengeance of Matakwei’s boys. They hunted them down, mercilessly butchered them, and had their wives and daughters defiled and gang-raped then slaughtered too.

Meto was now their number one target. They will not rest until they deliver his skull to Matakwei on a fresh leaf of a banana tree!

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In November 13, 2006, Prophet, Dr. Owuor having predicted imminent bloodshed while touring Kapsokwony, Mr. Serut cried foul. Addressing the press in Kimobo, he downplayed the Prophet's sentiments and urged the government to ensure genuine beneficiaries are re- allocated land. He claimed that there were many illegal settlers at the scheme, which was not a lie. Invaders were now occupying the disputed plots. Criminals were hiding there, killing innocent people to scare away the genuine beneficiaries, or so further claimed the legislator. Those who knew the reality on the ground accused him of failing to restore peace in the area thanks to his partisan politics.

Political incitements had no doubt led to the skirmishes that had already left more than fifty people dead in less than three months. Another chief in Kopsiro division alongside his beloved and innocent daughter lost their lives. No doubt, he had a hand in the disputed Chebyuk Settlement Scheme Phase III.

Helen was now a regular visitor to the district's government psychiatrist. David has called to reassure her that she had reason to be worried. It was not her fault yes yet somehow she felt responsible. She had underestimated the treachery of her father. It was ironical that she had lived convinced she knew her father inside outside when apparently, it appeared she did not know a single thing about him.

It was also hard to believe that someone like Ndiema could have enough courage of taking away the life of someone who had treated him as her own son almost all his life. It was hard to understand how normal people who had lived side by side could one day just decide to slaughter each other over something so trivial and meaningless. What was land compared with the life of a human being? What could be more than goodwill and togetherness?

Chemos, Maria, David, and Wilson mourned their relatives for days on end. In silence, they wondered when it would be over. Everyone was tired. With no grave for the future generations to see, with no body to burry, with no witness to attest to such horrendous murders, coping emotionally was exceptionally hard. Yet they had no otherwise!

Mathew was in his third and critical form and had heard about the clashes even though they were yet to break the sad news of his relations' demises to him. The school routine proved helpful and there was no enough time to understand the gravity of the horrors that had engulfed his people. Mother had stressed he must stay in Nairobi when schools would be closed. Wairimu, having known what his parents were going through, was not keen on being hard on him.

The TV was full of Mount Elgon news every evening and so much talks about the presidential hopefuls' polls. He was not interested in politics and he had been to Mount Elgon only once as a child to see his maternal grandparents and paternal grandfather.

Grandmother would always mention a village here and there midway her electrifying narratives that he later learnt existed in Mount Elgon. He once overheard his mother's conversation with his father and overheard her complaining that Meto, his maternal grandfather, had not stopped calling him a bastard! Therefore, he had resented anything related with Mount Elgon.

Shiro was fun to hang around with and he enjoyed teaching her how to ride her new bicycle. He would occasionally lift her up beyond the lowest branches of their Mango tree and tease her to come down on her own. Sometimes, he would walk her through her assignments and share with her some of the stories grandmother had narrated to him many years back. Unlike his father, Wairimu always gave him extra coins whenever he went to the grocery. He did not miss his mother that much though he really missed his affectionate grandmother.

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Helen was following the news in the papers. Already a number of her friends were playing host to fleeing youths from the slopes. Three of her younger cousins whom she had been paying fees for had managed to make it safely to her new home in Machewa.

Chemos proved instrumental in making them feel at home away from home. Moreover, the papers claimed that thousands of others were on the run to wherever they might find peace.

The next thing, shops were raided in Kipsigon center. Razing down of even more houses followed suit. Women and children were rounded up and taken to hell knows where deep in the forest, never

to return! A number of school-going girls were gang-raped, tortured, and then brutally murdered!

A dog's life for the people had just dawned. In the vision, Prophet, Dr. Owuor had seen a huge python breathing fire in a cave. Men, women, and children were running for their lives. In Kapsokwony Boys' grounds, he had repeatedly implored people to repent.

Well, that was now a bygone. There they were, in the midst of a war and a massive destruction... Jackson Psongoywo gave more of his blessings to the- would -be militia; and so did the Sangulu.

The dark moments were there to stay. Helen spent most of her spare time in prayers. She found casual jobs for others in Kitale. She hoped things would cool down. She prayed for God to intervene and restore peace. Peace was what the slopes needed, nothing else but peace.

Friday, April 6<sup>th</sup>, 2007: more raids, more lives were lost, properties worthy millions destroyed... and Mzee Tenderesi crudely murdered at Makutano village, just a few kilometers away from a police post. Meto unleashed his wounded boys and even more lives were lost.

Weeks later, Mzee Saulo, a village elder at Chewangoi was mercilessly butchered and his brains strewn all over. The dutiful militiamen chopped off his head, and the skull stashed in a paper bag! Some quenched their thirst with mugs of his fresh blood! The poor man was on a hit list thanks to his role during the controversial plots allotments. When his day came calling, he had nowhere to run.

The sight saw hundreds of Chewangoi residents flee their homes, never to return forever! Indeed, more such shocking deaths followed, occasioned by the ever-chilling orders of the dreaded commandant.

That was their mission; redeeming their ancestral land by hooks or crook! With time, as Meto and his Moorland Defense Forces retreated thanks to an ever mounting number of casualties, dwindling rounds of ammunition and a waning spirit to keep fighting an enemy that outnumbered them, the land issue was totally forgotten.

The neighboring Bukusu community who had been encroaching on their land became the next target. They soon launched widespread cattle raids, torched houses in Kikai, Chelebei

and lower Kapketeny areas and imposed fines on households belonging to the Bukusu living among them. The savagery did not stop there. Up the slopes, drunkards lost their ears and lips, chopped off with blunt knives. Perceived betrayers lost their lives as retribution.

Everyone suffered depending on the gravity of his or her sins. Fully-fledged administrative centers were in operation. Beheadings and thorough canning became effective means of punishing offenders who broke the strict code of conduct. People resorted to lynching suspected witches and wizards and their remains burned to ashes especially in Sasuri, Chebwek, Chepkube, Chewangoi, Chelebei, and Kopsiro villages.

Mount Elgon wailed. Mount Elgon mourned, yet the bloodshed continued. The cold blood killing went on nevertheless! Still, there was enough land to consume the rotting bodies. There were more than enough waters to wash down the corpses of others. There were enough tears still to shed as they mourn the departed. There were enough bullets to take more lives. There was enough room for vengeance and retaliation. There were enough battlegrounds for the two worrying sub tribes to settle their scores. There was enough time for the government to wait before it could act. After all, they were just a minority already bound to embrace the opposition.

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In his house in Nairobi, David too was following what was happening back at home. He had paid his share of the mandatory fine via M-Pesa to a registered Safaricom line. Every household was required to pay protection fee and part with a cow or a bull every now and then to dispel the anxiety in the stomachs of the hungry boys fighting for the land.

At the national arena, O.D.M was sending shivers all over. Onyango called almost every hour to update David on the latest polls, which were largely in favor of Raila. They both knew it was only a matter of time...

Kenyans were a proud lot, more so, for having graduated to a level where they could put every man and woman to task on pure performance. However, that proverbial Goliath tormenting the country every electioneering period seemed to have never died.

Negative Ethnicity was alive and kicking! Secretly, David was yearning for a day when a God- sent David would swing the sling and put to an eternal end to that Goliath!

Some media outlets openly campaigned for the incumbent whereas others appeared to be rallying their audiences behind Raila. Respected church leaders openly urged their followers to vote for the incumbent!

Back in 2002, such things were unheard of. Kenyans and not Kikuyu or the Akamba had voted for Kibaki. The church and the media was one: united against Moi, then widely seen as an epitome of autocracy. For once, David was proud to be a Kenyan. Raila had backed Mr. Emilio Mwai Kibaki who is not from his Luo tribe.

Kenyans had no problem either with the Uhuru Kenyatta because he was a Kikuyu.

In fact, Kibaki had the best chance of ending tribalism, negative ethnicity, corruption and other social injustices. He did not and David was sure Kenyans were going to punish him accordingly!

Many were of the opinion that the headship of the land had been distributing the national cake disproportionately towards its own. Therefore, betrayed Kenyans were now nursing animosities against their brothers from Mount Kenya. Such perceptions had already created deep divisions – fissures that will inevitably create cracks. Such cracks were bound to destroy the country's unity fabric forever.

As a student, both in High School and Campus, David did not know his classmates as Luo, Kalenjin, Kamba, Miji-Kenda, Luhya, Somali, or Kikuyu. He saw them as God's perfect works of creativity that happen not to share his tribe. Sometimes, he even forgot that he was a Kalenjin. They were still good friends with many with the exception of a few who had retreated to their ethnic cocoons immediately the polls started dancing to an unexpected tune!

More so, news of dead militia groups such as the Baghdad Boys, the Kamjesh aka Jeshi la Mzee, Mungiki, Kosovo, Taliban, and Chinkororo among others resurfacing again were all over.

Ironically, the government seemed unperturbed. As if that is not enough, thence athletic and strong security personnel had since spent more time in hotels and pubs...they were now proud owners of massive tummies and cannot even run with their guns! Such was the case in April 1 2007 when the dreadful Sabaot Land Defense Force

militiamen, in their hundreds, threw a cordon round the District Commissioner's residence and police station in Kapsokwony.

The security personnel appeared helpless as the gangsters threatened to tear the entire town apart. The militia stormed into three homes, flushed out people, and five of them fed with pure lead. The police gunned down a sixth accidentally; almost ten hours after the boys had retreated to the nearby forest in Kaberwa, having been felled by the militiamen during their flight. Apart from the single case, police harmed no more yet the attackers held the entire district hostage for hours.

True, the fighters were being guided by strong seers whose thirst to see blood flowing like the waters of river Teremi, could hardly be quenched! Matakwei was in command of more than thirty-five thousand boys deep in the forest: armed with AK-47's, machetes, spears, bows and poisoned arrows and more than ready to take more lives when he gives an order.

After the Kapsokwony raid, Michuki, then Minister for Security, finally broke his ear-splitting silence. No doubt, the situation in Mount Elgon was fast proving a security nightmare and it was time the government intervened. He blamed the leaders of the region who were obviously speaking falsehoods and spreading malicious rumor, and that his clever plans will work miracles sooner than later.

What started as rag tag army was slowly revolutionizing into a sophisticated guerrilla outfit. It was sending the government security personnel into desperation as they chase shadows of invincible enemies. It was well equipped, even better than the Administration Police, fully backed by intimidated residents and with supernatural powers bound to confound the enemy. SLDF was keen to convert Mount Elgon into killing fields and ponds of raw blood!

Victims received text messages and handwritten letters bearing the name and signature of Wycliffe Kirui Komon Matakwei hours before they were brought down to their feet, to their horrendous demise, to their untimely and painful death! It was strictly forbidden by the bloodthirsty militia for the wounded to seek any medical help and those who dared literally signed their death certificates.

By June 2007, SLDF had slaughtered dozens of innocent people. Both the police and Mungiki sect members had killed more than 112 people. The successive months were undeniably the most violent in the history of the peace-loving nation. Dozens of members of the public turned up beheaded. Tens of police officers lost their lives, and the general elections were just around the corner.

Authorities arrested Kapondi just a few months before the general elections of 2007. The Webuye Law Court charged him for robbery with violence and for promoting war like activities in the slopes of Mount Elgon. By this time, SLDF had killed nearly two thirds of Mr. John Bomet Serut's relatives around Kimobo.

After the mysterious death of Absalom almost a year earlier, formerly Chief Campaigner of Serut, a protégé and a staunch supporter of Kapondi, the once flowery relationship between Kapondi and Serut ended and the two could hardly see eye to eye. Having floored Serut during the NO/YES referendum campaigns and openly fronted by the SLDF militia, Kapondi became a de facto threat and his arrest was a major political score for Serut.

On the ground, matters even got worse. More beheadings followed. More raids...More chaos. More skirmishes...Maiming, torture, looting, raping, and extortion. More of Serut's relatives lost their all (their lives included of course). More clashes erupted.

The government folded its hands! It just watched with sturbon indifference!

## Chapter 12

"If we are forced, at every hour, to watch or listen to horrible events, this constant stream of ghastly impressions will deprive even the most delicate among us of all respect for humanity!" —*Cicero*  
(*Marcus Tullius*), Roman orator, philosopher and statesman

David, Onyango, Kerubo, and even Helen were sure Mr. Amollo Raila Odinga would carry the day...and so were a majority of Kenyans.

On 1 September 2007, the front page of The Daily Nation and Standard Newspapers published an article on graft of its own kind. The bombshell that unexpectedly greeted an increasingly impatient nation, was all about the much-awaited Kroll Associates Report. The report indicted the regime of Moi with corruption of an unimaginable scale!

The headship of the land had surprisingly received the earth shaking report back in 2004. Surprisingly, the government took no action whatsoever. Technically, there were zero arrests of suspects mentioned therein...No police interrogations – nothing at all!

Moi had since endorsed Kibaki's re-election, and his political orphan, Uhuru Muigai Kenyatta, had ditched ODM in favor of PNU Alliance.... Talk of birds of a feather! People kept guessing as to why the government that was elected on a zero percent tolerance on corruption literally 'let loose the noose' from what would have been their major hunt.

On 2 September, the press demonized Raila; the guns, in their larger numbers and with unusual ferocity, all pointed to him. Recall that there had been no single comment from the headship about the report and not even a single article about the same appeared on the dailies. Ironically, Professor Mutua Makau, a self-proclaimed fighter for human rights, wrote an article for the Nation Newspaper whose contents breathed heavy dirt that David had never, for all his life seen published.

Somewhere along the article, he had described Amollo Odinga as "*a leader with a mean and a hungry look...Kenyans were wondering what use he would put the state power to!*"

During the very same weekend, Mr. Chris Murungaru had charged that Raila's camp was funning ethnic divisions in a bid to unite the country against Central Kenya. Overt backstabbing, name-calling, malicious and unfounded propaganda became the order of the day prior to the elections.

Back at home, Meto's hunt had been intensified. David received briefings every day and in exchange, he had to part with something. As days went by, he decided to approach Helen to see if she could be of any help. A date was set aside and adequate preparations made in advance. The boys, led by Ndiema, assured him they will just arrest her father and then hand him over to the authorities. He believed them and so did she. On the election date, they exercised their constitutional right and voted peacefully.

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The London Daily Newspaper described Kibaki as the greatest thief in Kenya! The New York Times claimed the elections were a Kibaki's coup. Moreover, the country's press appeared unanimous in one thing: disagreeing, with each reading from a different script depending on their owners' allegiance.

*We want justice! Kenya has spoken* became a temporal national slogan.

The opposition announced it will declare Mr. Raila the people's president.

"If Raila does this, he will be attempting a coup and he will get what he deserves," said Ngari Gituku, a representative for the Party of National Unity, the party of the then declared winner of the dubious and flawed elections, Mr. Mwai Emilio Kibaki.

On Friday, Raila was much ahead of the incumbent (Onyango was sure for once that Tinga would finally clinch the presidency and so were many others across the country). The gap kept dwindling and by Saturday, it was clear it was clear which direction the victory was swinging. The incumbent's party had already lost a considerable number of parliamentary seats countrywide. Then came those infamous delays and subsequent open, nasty and ugly confrontations between Martha Karua, the only man in Kibaki's hard-liners' line up, and James Orengo.

The duet knew that Wairimu, wherever she was, was really enjoying herself and having some good time. Naturally, at least as far as Onyango was concerned, she was supporting the incumbent

for obvious reasons. She had travelled to her rural home on the eve of the election and David was expecting her back before the opening of schools. Surprisingly, he missed Shiro despise her being a constant nuisance whenever around. Had it not been for Onyango, staying alone in his big house would have really been boring.

David and Onyango (Onyango had been pitching camp in David's house for hours on end) watched in horror and disbelief when soldiers armed with assault rifles started lining up the walls of the tallying center headquarters when Mr. Samuel Kivuitu was just about to announce the victor. Orenge, Nyong'o, Ruto, Kosgei, Balala, Mudavadi, Mutula Kilonzo and other ODM bigwigs fronted by a handful of diehard opposition supporters started shouting as the visibly worn out western countries' ambassadors watched helplessly. As chaos descended, chairs being tossed over, opposition supporters shouting, "We want justice! Kenyans have spoken!" the armed soldiers hurriedly escorted Kivuitu outside.

A few hours later, via the public broadcaster KBC, the visibly confused electoral commissioner declared Kibaki the victor with 4,584,721 votes against Raila's 4,352,993. Onyango left David's house dejected and swearing he would not sit idly by and watch Tinga being humiliated like that. His body, riddled with bullets, turned up the next day dangling on a branch of a tree at Uhuru Gardens. David learnt of his tragic death a week later through a colleague who had seen the body at the heavily guarded park.

The world watched. People waited. The hours ticked by. Exactly seventy-two hours later, following the unceremonious announcement of the presidential elections: mother Kenya descended into chaos. A war, tribal in nature, was underway.

Dozens of hundreds of youths flocked out of their hideouts in slums such as Kibera and Mathare hurling stones, smashing vehicles, going house-to-house looking for Kibaki's tribesmen to vent their anger on them. Soldiers poured out to the streets to fight them as Kikuyu men, women and children hurriedly loaded their belongings to whichever means of transport they could find to escape the wrath of the charging youths.

The Ministry of Communication, headed by Mr. Samuel Pogishio, outlawed all live news coverage via multiple media with the exception of the impartial Public Broadcaster, KBC. Without independent, partial, accurate, fair, and authoritative news coverage,

it was not easy to tell the gravity of the chaos, the magnitude of the negative ethnicity energy that was fast threatening to tear the entire nation apart, and the degree of the tribal clashes that were fast spreading across the country.

“The only thing the president wants to do is to heal this nation, and the media is not part of that process. The media has been propagating hate,” Mr. Gituku said.

With the Holy Bible held firmly in his right hand, Mr. Kibaki Emilio Mwai took the oath of office for the second late in the evening as the tribal war raged on.

“We have demonstrated to the world we are politically mature,” he said.

He described the election exercise as honest, orderly, and credible!

Benson Chesikaki won Emia Ward seat with a landslide and so did Nathan Wasama. The latter took oath of office secretly and silently as the councilor elect of Sasuri ward (the home village of

Fred Chesebe Kapondi). As widely anticipated, Kapondi too won the Mount Elgon Constituency parliamentary seat with a landslide...the boys deep in the jungle celebrated with even more raids, beheadings, raping, extortion, threats and all manner of evil.

Kapondi's nomination as ODM candidate while in custody send shivers across the Sabaot land. On December 13, 2007, after the prosecution failed to nail him thanks to alleged disappearances of witnesses and widespread cases of key witnesses recanting their testimonies, acquittal was inevitable. With overt backing from the SLDF, there was no way the incumbent could floor him.

On the national arena, trauma embraced every soul. Mother Kenya, considered one of the most stable and economically developed states in Africa, was on the verge of tearing apart. In almost every corner of the republic, neighbor turned against neighbor. Machetes and Pangas became weapons of choice for settling old scores.

Across the awesome land, beyond the spell binding and beautiful highlands, rapes, mutilations, and communal violence gripped the country with such awesome might. Separation became a painful reality for neighbors and friends who had peacefully lived side by side for many years. Parents and their children lost contact

with each other, disunity embraced many couples, and thousands lost what they had called home all their miserable lives here on earth.

Communities lost trust it had on each other. Marriages were forcibly broken. A robust economy was hence dealt a severe body blow; it will take years, blood and sweat to recover.

SLDF sympathizers allied to the opposition floored down Gitwamba center killing and injuring many Kikuyu who had lived harmoniously with their Sabaoth hosts since the late 1960s. Fleeing was the only way out for the survivors.

The raids, raping, torching, and butchering intensified in Mount Elgon. Walls grew ears, so did pots!

Kerubo was trapped in-between Narok and Kisii. A kind-hearted Maasai widow took her in alongside other two (both of whom were Kikuyu). Though completely unknown to them, Sein treated them kindly as they waited for the dust to settle.

Mahiu Mahiu-Narok-Kisii-Kisumu route remained impassable for the better part of January. Just a few days earlier, Kerubo had heard via Egesa FM of the burning alive of dozens of Kisii men, women and children fleeing from machete-wielding Kalenjin Warriors. A few made it beyond her home village in Suneka.

Helen never voted. Holed up in her Machewa home, she helped Chemos with the new expected visitors following increased tensions and chaos in Mount Elgon. Others fled to as far as Tororo in Eastern Uganda. She was also secretly housing a Kikuyu man who had lost his all in Gitwamba and had nowhere to go.

There was no time spared to offer descend burials. There was no time to mourn your beloved. Mother Kenya was burning. Mount Elgon was still burning, yet the headship of the land watched only...it just watched and did nothing in return!

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Still, people laughed, others cried. Some married. As a man with sweet food before him, nobody expected the powers that were to fathom the bitterness of famine!

David was getting used to the drama. Nothing was exciting anymore. His past envy for Onyango was much alive now. Perhaps the man was passing some good time in the hereafter. So much was happening...So much for his soul to bear.

Learning institutions across the country had to open its gates to tens of thousands of hopeless students very late, and Shiro had no otherwise other than wait for another very long week. David always prayed for his kids not to succumb to the overwhelming wave of disillusionment. Wairimu was yet to return from her rural home in Runyenjes. She had gone back to her rural village to vote and had heard of the chaos targeting the people from her community.

He hated politics. He hated politicians. He hated religious leaders. He hated Christians. He hated Muslims. He hated atheists. He hated news people. He hated PNU. He hated ODM. He hated all the hypocrisies, lies, betrayals, tribalism, negative ethnicity, propaganda, and the insatiable appetite for absolute power exhibited by those who were busy defiling their innocence. He hated all the blind, selfish, and misguided defenders of a clearly stolen election whose sly eyes shone in the dailies with betraying glimmers. He hated himself for believing so much in a system that had disappointed him.

Wilson and Mrs. Kwatenge were lucky. Milimani estate was highly secured and so were most parts of Nakuru town. However, the situation was worse in the adjacent areas such as Njoro and Molo. In Naivasha, suspected Mungiki adherents, allegedly wearing military uniforms, literally hunted down ODM supporters from house to house. Many opposition supporters, mostly from Raila's Luo tribe, bore the heaviest brand of the retribution. The ruthless gang of hired mercenaries paraded and reportedly forcibly circumcised both the young and the old with blunt metals as the crowds cheered wildly.

Happy New Year celebrations became meaningful on 28 February 2008.

Ululations, hosannas, cheers, and hoots rented the air all over Nairobi as Mr. Amollo Odinga took the oath of office as the Second Prime Minister of the Republic of Kenya. As they say, half a loaf is just as good...

Now it was time for soul searching, time for the old, the young, men, women, adults, children...to steer the divided nation forward. It was time to learn how to love again, how to share, how to cope with ugly realities of tribal animosities and negative energies.

Shaken, shocked and yet still resilient, Chemos silently wished that never again were Kenyans going to find themselves in

the murderous situation that prevailed in the first few months of that year. She asked God to forgive His children and ensure that never again were Kenyans going to ‘meekly heed’ hateful preaching from shrewd politicians who only love the world for their tummies.

Yes, indeed... It was time Kenyans re-discovered their uniqueness and massive potential engulfed in their diversity. It was time for Kenyans to move forward meaningfully – set the unwinding path straight than ever before and return to God. A nation without God is like an orphaned child who must never celebrate after a heavy breakfast!

It did not matter the number of ministries (a lid of massive shame in the Kenyan chapters). It did not matter the mysterious ministries of beautifying what and what! There was no problem with the additional, eager pockets to stuff more millions from the public till. What was important was that people could live together again.

Most important was that, just as before, Kenyans could start living like brothers and sisters for victory is achieved by he who forgives!

Some days later, when Helen had thought it was all over now, Embakasi residents in Kisawai witnessed a horrific murder. SLDF militia beheaded a pregnant woman, and the fetus she was carrying forcibly removed, and then hacked to death! Everybody was stunned. Once again, Matakwei’s boys had carried out their ruthless, insensitive, barbaric, archaic, and unjustifiable murders.

It was now or never!

The government stepped in. Having lost the Mount Elgon seat to its bitter rival, it had every reason to retaliate. On Monday, 9 March 2008, the government launched an operation dubbed Okoa Maisha to flush out the dreaded guerrilla outfit from their hideouts that now stretched beyond Mount Elgon. The military personnel headed west, heavily armed with massive weaponry, and set up a giant camp at Kapkoto and Banandega. They established other camps on the adjacent slopes of the now gloomy and ghostly area.

The Intelligence Service Unit (ISU) had initially launched investigations in the area. Disguised as students, a number enrolled in Cheptais Secondary School where they met with hundreds of militiamen. They obtained useful information including leads for a possible location of a hideout of Matakwei himself. Others served as

bartenders in Senator Bar in Cheptais where the boys wrestled the nightmares out after nights of killings and beheadings.

Daytime hours, the military personnel rounded men and youths. They either were members of S.D.L.F. or knew something tangible about the force. A useful source informed them of the frequent visits of Matakwei in Kaptoboi center. However, their trap never lured the most wanted pet in the region.

The spirited soldiers rounded up even more youths.

Summary executions, after hasty interrogations, were often the answer of the soldiers whose mandate was ironically to save lives. The military helicopters roamed the ghost forest, chasing the “invisible enemy of the people”. Kapkoto swelled with an ever-increasing number of SLDF suspects, some as old as 80 years. In the dead of the night, even more bodies fell from the roaring helicopters deep in the forest. In the line of duty, Matakwei’s boys reduced their numbers considerably.

Everyone wore a sullen and a solemn face in the slopes. Every female was worried- sure to lose their beloved anytime. One could read the signs in their foreheads. It was there all the time.

There was no permission or time to mourn your loved ones. People hurriedly throw dead bodies into three feet dug out holes and a few munches of soil thrown inside.

Other bodies remained abandoned in the vandalized houses where stray dogs soon found comfort!

You could wish it was not real- yet it was. It was happening every hour, every minute and in every corner of the slopes. The once fertile plots lay idle. Without food, the entire community will be a forgotten thing indeed! On 16 May 2008: at Mlango Nane cave, a battalion of KDF rounded up Wycliffe Matakwei Kirui Komon and after a fearsome exchange of gunfire, killed him!

Salome, visibly shocked, identified the unmistakable childhood mark in his head and confirmed that indeed, that body riddled with volleys of bullets and barely recognizable belonged to a man who used to be a caring and a loving husband.

The slopes breathed with sighs of heavy relief. The military personnel knew they were almost there. The operation Okoa Maisha went on. A Manhunt followed suit and on June 5 the same year, another key figure, Moses Chemwotei fell prey to the waiting arms of the law enforcers in Bungoma.

The operation depleted slopes of youthful figures in the weeks that superseded Matakwei's murder. Many like Ndiema and his cohorts ended up nursing their anger and frustrations in cells and remand prisons in Bungoma. Others, who had escaped to safer zones, were now working as guards and houseboys.

On July 14, Meto handed himself to security officials at Banandega. After screening, the KDF soldiers hurriedly whisked Meto to Webuye Law Court to face murder, forceful mass eviction, rape, arson, looting, and other charges.

A week later, to the relief of Helen and utter shock of everyone else, David intervened; he asked for permission to settle the case outside the court. He alerted Helen about his intentions and travelled home.

In front of Helen, Chemos, Wilson, Maria, and others, he announced his forgiveness.

"Nothing can undo what had to be done!" He said, hugged the visibly confused old, frail and shaking man and left... He knew that even the most beautiful flower withers in time and that nobody ever fights an evil disease with sweet medicine!

Meto was in tears as he watched David's towering figure disappear behind the fence of the compound. He swallowed hard, hugged his daughter, and sobbed violently. Just the other day, he could not see eye to eye with him. He had killed his father, relatives and friends. What was more, he had invested his time, energy, and almost entire life hating David, yet here he was letting him off the hook just like that: without a fight, without a struggle.

"It's all right, Pa'...everything is going to be all right!" Helen heard her shaken voice whispering.

Later that night, he explained his reasons to his equally confused and shocked mother, mentioned something about Wilson she did not understand and hurriedly left.

"Come in... I am all alone! Mwangi will be coming back tomorrow and guess what; he finally located the school they were last seen at...and thanks a lot for your forgiveness!" Helen said with a broad smile on her face while extending her right hand to relieve him of the briefcase he was carrying in his left hand.

They had chatted over the phone and he was carefully not to raise any alarm by keeping his mouth shut. He had no reason to see Mwangi as a potential rival. From their chats, he had come to know

he lived outside in a one bed roomed Mabati house and doubled as the houseboy.

“Thank you...and most welcome!” He whispered, trying to avoid her persecuting stare.

Those eyes had frightened, sometimes even overwhelmed him many a times. It was as if they literally make him naked before her. They were beautiful eyes and no doubt, a formidable fortress...sure they must have seen a lot; seen his tattered emotions, his many dilemmas and maybe, the humble beginnings of his end too.

“Make yourself comfortable...” She said and disappeared to another room, re-emerged after a few minutes then headed straight to the kitchen.

It was especially cold that night and was it not for the moon; it would have started raining again. For some reasons, David felt ashamed of himself. All these years, he had not thought of building his own house at home. It did not feel right for a woman like Helen to outsmart him in such a way. But then again there was that nagging dilemma whether to build it at Machewa or at Chebyuk. He was not prepared to plant a seed of unnecessary animosity between her parents. In the end, he had resorted to purchasing a plot at Mbotela and the three bed roomed house in it.

“Can I switch it over to KTN please?” He asked, afraid that the Citizen programs will dampen his mood.

“Go on...” Her melodious voice echoed from the kitchen.

She was wondering if it was the seemingly endless political discussions in Citizen or it was just his way of implicitly stamping his eroded manly authority.

The 9AM news had just ended. Already, there were jitters within the cycles of ODM who increasingly felt short-changed. PNU had naturally reserved all critical ministerial seats for its grand cheat and just like before, during and immediately after the 2007 stolen elections, Citizen was still biased. Even a fool could tell S.K. Macharia (the media mogul and owner of Royal Media Services, including Citizen), was flexing his tribal muscles in favor of the PNU unrepentant lieutenants. David was not surprised when his peer, Cardinal John Njue, overtly voiced his support for the incumbent.

After about thirty minutes, Helen returned to the sitting room

with a white tray, carrying a blue thermos and two white mugs. He silently watched her set the table as he tried hard to calm down his nerves.

“There we go...it has no sugar!” She said, pointing with her darting eyes to the edge of the table where a small plastic cup with sugar and teaspoons were.

“It's okay; I stopped using sugar all together...” He said, repositioning the plastic cup at the center of the table.

“Oh, when was that? Wonders shall never cease in this world, will they, Naibei?” She stuttered, not hiding the tinge of sarcasm in her tone.

“Last month...in fact, I also quit drinking! Dr. Ali said I was literally killing myself at a supersonic speed... anyway, who does not fear death, Mmh?”

“Hehehe, I thought you were beyond such fruits of fate!”  
“Stop that already, Helen...I had to. More so, I need some valuable time to spend with our son.”

“Oh, how kind of you! When did you start growing a heart up there in your stony chest?”

“Well, a devil that knows you can never devour you completely, or so they say.”

“Mmh, I see...”

“You and I know there is nothing to be seen, eh!”

“Really? You have no idea how much pain and suffering you have put me through...”

They were sitting opposite each other. The teacups remained untouched. He knew she won't be easy with him. He had tried hard to avoid this meeting. Dr. Ali was sure he would not last to see another Christmas! Fearing it will be too late to straighten things with one of his staunchest and sworn enemies, he had accepted to meet her. More so, for obvious reasons, he was increasingly becoming remorseful. Some part of him wanted his sorry-self gone in peace.

Helen had cut her hair short, just like she used to do many years back when she was still in Secondary School. It made her shed off some years and look even more beautiful. She knew he liked short hair and was aware of their quarrels with Wairimu over her obsessions with wigs and weaves. She was wearing a black miniskirt and a white t-shirt. On the other hand, David was still in his black

suit with the exception of the blue tie with white strips that matched with the blue shirt. He was slimmer, visibly worn out and repentant, or so Helen thought secretly. Nevertheless, she could not help the bulging resentment towards the man she had once adored.

His time will soon descend like an impromptu rainfall on a cloudless day. Then he will perhaps leave behind a history that will break many hearts. Had he a second chance, he thought bitterly, he would have set the record straight...but then again he was dying.

What he wanted the least were additional sleepless nights. He had come to know that discretion is the better part of valour. He reminded himself that he was not ready to face his dirty past once again...whatever happened had happened and revisiting it was equally unnecessary; yet the foul wind kept blowing in his direction no matter how hard he tried to deflect it.

Oh yes – had he a second chance indeed, David would have even this very minute, given his heart to Helen, to take away with her and do with it whatever she wanted. He would have made her his against all odds. He would have mastered the necessary skills to love, adore and cherish her. Will she forgive him really?

Nobody answered. Nobody talked.

All the same, it felt good being there with her. It was a night he knew he would hate to see its end. Had he not strayed, perhaps an army of happy kids would have been surrounding them right now.

Perhaps Meto would have spared his father's live. Life would be so full and who knows, Helen would even have tamed his insatiable appetite for the devil's urine ages ago.

He could barely hear the mongrels barking outside, the heart wrenching coos of an owl, merry swishing of tree branches.... The Wind was howling strangely, sending in wave after wave of invisible vanquish and valor that seemed to besiege them. Their feeble diligence could not possibly enable them to curb the situation at hand, or so it seemed.

When he finally gathered enough courage to address his childhood sweetheart, it was with a struggle, and his sight made Helen quite uneasy. He had planned for this day thoroughly and was ready for any eventuality!

“Another thing, Helen...Um, err...I wanted to say sorry, you know, sorry for everything, before I go!” He stammered, trying to find his words.

It was not easy to tell whether she was still engrossed in her reverie or not. He was feeling very uneasy himself too but he was prepared. He fished out his grey handkerchief and mobbed his shining forehead, and then continued.

“You might find it hard to forgive me, of that I am sure of...truth is, I deserve each and every single shred of your anger. I accept and fully acknowledge that whatever I did was not right, yet I will never forgive myself if I leave here tonight without saying sorry...”

Tears were almost coming out of his eyes. He uncomfortably looked around and an unkind silence greeted him. The sweating ceased a little. He knew he had to be brave. Then, he went on, ignoring the unkind silence.

“All I need from you now, is forgiveness. Please! Do forgive me. You must have surely realized that human beings are rich with flaws and helpless weaknesses. Sometimes, you can hurt when in the first place; you never intended to do so— am sorry for ever hurting your feelings, Chebet!”

David could not struggle anyone. He sobbed violently, the sobs shaking his soul terribly as a shocked Helen fed her eyes in utter bewilderment. She was already halfway through the tiresome journey of contemplating forgiveness. Still, she had a long way before even forgiving herself in the first place. What harm will be forgiving him do? Will she lose a thing really? Inside, she reasoned that maybe by giving in, in the end, she would forgive herself too.

“It’s okay...all is forgiven, and I love you! Besides, I owe you a lot...I was so blind; nobody ever told me that it was Pa’ who did those horrible things to your family...” She heard herself say; quietly, sadly and remorsefully.

“Are you serious?”

“Well, what do you think?”

“I-I, err, um...It’s just that...”

“It is all forgiven, Naibei...and forgotten too!” She reassured him, feigning a small smile.

From the corner of her right eye, she could see his face brightening up for what appeared to be a nanosecond. At a closer look a minute later, Helen realized the bright smile on his face had gone. She felt sorry for him, for her, for them, and for their son, Mathew.

David could not believe his ears. He crossed over just as she was about to rise up to clear the table and hugged her. It was then that Helen realized neither of them had touched their tea. Helen returned the hug, pressing her two mountains hard against his broad chest.

“Go find her, and if she is married, come call me your wife!”  
“Sure I will, Helen, sure I will...” He stammered between silent sobs that were shaking his body.

As fate would have it, they did it...again...only that there would be no other time, no other Mathew this time round!

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It was nearing eight months now and Wairimu had not even called. He was worried and determined to seek some tangible answers to his mounting worries. After passing through Wilson’s palatial home and explaining his intentions, he booked a matatu to Runyenjes and waited impatiently for the driver to hit the engine. It was too risky to drive all that stretch of distance alone. The Nyeri-Nyahururu route, usually an approximately 5 hour’s journey, was not yet safe for lone-rangers, more so if one was from a hostile tribe.

“Things have not cooled down, brother...” Wilson had tried to warn him.

“I know...” He said resolutely, “All the same, I have you, brother...and take good care of everything, please!”

“Sure I will, sure I will...journey mercies, brother!”

“Thank you and God bless you!”

Wilson bid him farewell all the while hoping all shall be well. Inside, it felt great to hear David mention God! More so, he was happy of a prospect of seeing them together with Helen...for many years perhaps.

It was very late the following day when he arrived at Runyenjes. Thanks to the numerous potholes and countless stops to drop then pick yet another passenger along the way, it had taken them almost 12 hours to arrive at their destiny.

The bodaboda driver who showed him the compound hidden in a tiny forest of banana trees became excessively inquisitive and wanted to know everything about him when he returned his greetings in Swahili.

“*Wii mwega!*” He had shot at him.

From his look, it was obvious it was greetings.

“*Mzuri sana kaka!*” He replied, trying in vain to feign a smile.

The middle-aged man eyed him suspiciously. He was anxious, angry, and not ready for such nonsense! The young man retreated hastily and said something that eluded his alert ears.

The tiny gate made of a recycled and corroded corrugated iron sheet was wide open. From what he could see inside the compound, there was no doubt in his mind it was a blatant misplacement. There were clear signs of affluence from everything inside that compound. Directly in front of him stood a massive and an incomplete house...there were mounds of freshly dug soils surrounding the structure, a wheelbarrow with remnants of cement on its surface and a giant Septic Water Tank. Constructors seemed to have prematurely halted their work halfway. On his left was a T-shaped beautiful house.

Wairimu had seen him coming. She hardly moved about for fears of being ‘disciplined’ again.

He heard some commotions inside and made his way in the direction of the front door. After a few seconds, the metal brown metal door was flaked open and there she was...

“Quick! Come in! Has anyone seen you?” He followed the direction of her index finger motioning him to a massive as she struggled to close the door behind her. It was about six in the evening and the hens were just beginning to roost.

“Yeah, why? Must I hide when I am coming to see my wife and daughter?” He thundered, eyeing her quizzically.

He could tell she had lost a lot of meat. Her eyes looked even much smaller, distant, and covered with a thick wave of incomprehensible fear. He was annoyed and had no time to waste.

He reminded himself was here for one thing only, get a confirmation she was no longer his wife and then he could disappear to start a new life with Helen.

“We are in trouble...big trouble, I tell you!” She sank down on the sofa beside him. He silently sat next to her on the expensive leather sofa. She hugged him and he could tell something was not right from her heart beat rate.

“What trouble is more than your whole eight-month long ear-splitting silence, Mmh?”

“D-a-r-l-i-n-g, you know I am the last person capable of doing such a thing to you, right?”

“Oh, really? You and I know I am no prophet blessed with intuitions of deciphering such uncharacteristic behavior, right, Sheila?”

“B-u-t, b-u-t, surely...”

“Save your butts, d-a-r-l-i-n-g! How do I even tell you are not another man’s wife, ah? I want my daughter and I am out of here...out of your life, for good, Sheila!”

She could tell he was angry, very angry, and disappointed...v-e-e-r-y disappointed indeed. She had no energy left to argue. By calming down herself, and successfully resisting the burning urge of raising her voice, Wairimu knew logic was bound to tame David’s irrational outbursts.

“Where is she?”

“Safe...in safe hands, in the city!”

“Why have you done all these to me, Wairimu? Is that how you repay someone who lived loving you all his life, gave up his all, and sacrificed so much for you?”

“They LITERALLY barred me from returning to the city...to you! Do not be stupid, David! I will never betray you and you know that! They raped and killed your mother in-law when she refused to give them the directions to our home in the city. I too, was repeatedly raped and beaten up ...as to why they spared my life, only God knows. In panic, Shiro ran outside and from what I heard later, a friend who secretly smuggled her back to the city rescued her.

Without any means of communication, it was hard immediately to find out where and how they were...” Wairimu broke down to tears.

David joined her!

In silence, they sobbed for close to ten whole minutes. “You should have called or at least texted, my love!” He whispered remorsefully.

This was not what he had expected. Was his daughter safe? Will he see her soon? Suppose that Good-Samaritan turned up to be a cheat as they always do, who will rescue his daughter...Shiro must be in safe hands, he had to be positive otherwise he will dye thinking about his inability of protecting her. He always promised he would protect her.

“David, darling, you do not understand the gravity of the situation at hand, do you?”

“I do not even know what to think about, Sheila...what about my daughter, our daughter, your daughter?”

“She will make it, trust me...she is in safe hands, my dear!”

“I really hope so, I really hope so...”

“I am serving a ‘house arrest’ sentence here, David... They had heard about my marrying you, and when I came to vote, they wanted to know why! I told them because I loved you!”

“How could they?”

He was lost for words to describe his detest and anger against whoever did all those things to her wife and her mother.

His phone vibrated. He pressed the power button and checked the message. It was from Helen. What will he tell her now?

“Hi, I hope you arrived safely...all the best and see you soonest!” His hands were trembling slightly.

He was now literally shaking violently and sweating simultaneously from head to toe. It was hard to think straight given the overwhelming fear of the unknown that had descended over him.

“Hi there, sure I did...I will surely see you if our joint prayers get answered!” He replied with a little difficulty.

This was his time to experience a miracle, if really there was ever any in the first place.

“I know they will be here soon...”

“Who?” He asked, looking confused and lost into a mysterious reverie.

“Who else? They must have seen you coming...they have ears and eyes all over...” She had not finished her last word when they heard sirens of motorbikes followed by shuffling feet then a heavy bang. It took them time to realize the bang was coming from the door.

“We know your foreign husband is here! Open the door now!” A husky voice ordered.

David was shaking like the leaf of a banana tree on a windy day. His bowels had given way without him noticing. He remembered Wilson’s words and cursed himself silently.

“What will we do, my love?” Wairimu hugged him harder. “We will wait...there is nothing we can do! Just know that I love

you until no end, okay?” David nodded his tired head. “I have always loved you and will always love you, Wairimu!”

“I know...and I am sorry if I did not work hard enough to tell you. Now you know...!” Wairimu ignored the strong smell of petrol and hugged David some more.

He returned the hug with equal strength.

“Till death do us part, remember?” She whispered timidly.

“Yes, my love, I remember swearing...in times of health, in times of sickness, in riches and in poverty...to love, to cherish...until death do us part, I David do hereby take you to be my lawfully wedded wife...!”

Whilst they were murmuring to each other and hugging, an army of bloodthirsty youths in their dozens had rounded up the entire compound ready to thwart any attempts aimed at saving David and Wairimu. Their leader then carefully used a Kiberiti stick to light the edge of the tiny rubber-made thread.

They watched with ecstasy as the walls of the house rapidly caught fire. The painful cries of the two were swallowed by the thick smoke and overwhelming heat. Wild jeers, and traditional war songs rent the air. Jittery neighbors started trickling in...some snuggled even closer to dispel cold.

“Save yourselves traitors!”

“Save yourselves traitors!”

They taunted, chanted, and shouted as the massive flickers lighted the skies of Runyenjes!

## Epilogue

"Great occasions do not make heroes or cowards; they simply unveil them to the eyes. Silently and imperceptibly, as we wake or sleep, we grow strong or we grow weak, and at last some crisis shows us what we have become." — *Bishop Westcott*

My name is Mathew...they also call me David junior. This has been their story, our story, and your story. I am sure you will not mind knowing, even if just a tiny, whiny, little bit about your narrator, or will you?

I just turned twenty-six years old. During my birthday party, Wilson gave me a carefully wrapped gift. It turned out to be an exercise book with the following words written on its first page: The UglyBeautiful Tale of a Stupid, Stupid Heart. There was also a small note on the next page written with a different handwriting. It read:

*"Your father loved you and you know if he were alive, he would have allowed you to follow your heart...to write, be a journalist and a social activist even.*

*Make his dream come true. Write your heart out and tell the world about the tragedies that befall him. Should you need any additional information, you have my number!*

*Kind Regards,  
Wilson."*

That is how I came to write this novel. Like Portia in the William Shakespeare's Merchant of Venice, the will of a living son was curbed by that of his dead father! I knew too well that where the rooster crows there is a village...It is a real family that eats the same cornmeal, isn't that so? I had a lot to do...but what else could be better than starting with a real meal? I had to write my heart out indeed!

This is now my second year in university as I pursue a second Bachelor's Degree in something I always wanted to pursue since when I was a child. It is ironical that Helen, my dearly beloved mother, was the one who insisted I must do a course of her own choosing, and after spending four torturous years juggling with tough calculations; I handed the degree certificate to her, and

incessantly begged for permission to be allowed to follow my heart. She half-heartedly agreed!

Mother has since quit her job as a lawyer, and now manages her multiple boutiques, and rental houses spread across several towns in Western Kenya. She wanted to help people get justice but it seemed she would inevitably live aiding guilty offenders evade justice instead! The business of justice was like any other business: profits were central and the only motivating factor. Nobody cared about honesty, sincerity, truth and such like virtues.

After years of mourning, secretly shedding tears, haplessly sulking and endlessly cursing, she decided to move on. The mysterious man he once sheltered many years back in her house for over a month, whom to my father he will forever remain a houseboy, is now my step father. His name is Mwangi. He is working hard to fit into the massive shoes left behind by the late David Naibei. I now have two younger, handsome, dexterous, and hardworking stepbrothers, Wairegi and Njuguna, and one beautiful, elegant, dainty, and fascinating stepsister, Waithera. Mwangi discovered them some years ago in Eldoret seeking refuge in one of the camps designated for internally displaced persons (IDPs).

For about eight years, after the death of my father and my stepmother, I lived my entire life trying to find the answers to the many questions that mother, Chemos, Wilson and Maria could not frankly answer. I am still searching...and Wilson is always a call away.

On 8 February 2015, Susan called me at about 9:30 PM after dozens of futile attempts to reach her sister's cell phone number.

"Hello, have you not heard or seen over the social media?" She blurted out, trying not to betray the bitterness in her voice.

"Heard about what?" I shot back trying to sound as honest as possible.

I had seen the numerous RIP comments on Emmy's Facebook wall from her closest friends well known to me. My calling her number countless of times were enough prove the reality had not yet dawned on me. It was not possible that Emmy was dead!

"She passed away today...!" Susan impatiently fired back from the other end.

I hanged the phone and waited...I waited for someone to call, and perhaps reassure me that the whole thing was just a bad

nightmare that will go away soon. I dreamily stared to the vast emptiness...I asked why! Nobody answered back!

I gazed dizzily at the massive sheet of cobweb that idly relaxed on one corner of my bedroom roof...my gaze wandered elsewhere, and I saw her bright face smiling joyfully to me. I felt some strange contrition on my belly and a sudden bout of coldness in my faint heart. An embrace of quietness gripped my entire being as I fought hard to remember, the icy yesteryears, the warm embrace of Emmy, which disturbingly became vivid.

It was a cold night but I knew I was sweating profusely from head to toe. For how long, I cannot remember, I stood in the middle of my empty, silent, sardonic bedroom wishing I were dreaming.

We had just talked the other night and I remember her mentioning something about having met my brother, Dan, and her passing through our home in Machewa village.

“He seems right in his mind and he even recognized me...” She said from the other end of the line.

“Hehehe, really? Let’s hope he gets even much better...” I replied, musing over her words.

Dan has been battling with nauseating withdrawal symptoms...some people, with my exception; believe he is mad thanks to years of consuming bhang. I remember mentioning something about her being a caring mother someday, and she chuckled over the phone.

“Hehehe, how can you be so sure?” She asked, her melodious voice sending tremors all over my tingling body.

“I just know!” I said.

After what appeared to be an eternity, I sat down on the edge of my bed, logged into my laptop, and opened the folder containing her latest photos. I clicked on one, and there she was, broadly smiling back at me. She was wearing a red blouse and a black skirt. She was about 5’1 feet tall, chocolate in color, beautiful and simply incapable of dying! She rarely used makeup, and her short hair exaggerated her stunning beauty.

We had been secret lovers since my sixth class in primary, long before we even discoverer our shared obsessions for each other. Love is a despot who spares no one...She taught me how to love. I loved her back, and there was no doubt she was going to be the

mother of my children. That there was going to be no future any longer with Emmy, was too much to bear...

It was late July 2014, when Emmy and I last met. Her stare seemed unfriendly, far removed, maybe, from fanciful ideas; the scary pair of her eyes, moved with what I thought faked uncertainty, unsure in its horns of dilemma. I heard from the echo of silence that she was not herself.

She had just enrolled for her Postgraduate Degree Classes at the Catholic University of East Africa, Eldoret Campus. Before her, was a vast world of opportunities, a promising future that kept smiling back at her, and a selfish boyfriend who only loved the world for his enormous ego! I could tell from her unfriendly stare that not all was well. A day earlier, I had liked and commented on a photo belonging to one of our friends. Not that it was my first time to do such a thing; the raunchy language I had used that was the problem.

“When did you last commend on any of my photos, Mmh?” She thundered, piercing through my entire being with her persecuting stare.

“They are just words, for heaven’s sake!” I said; quietly, sadly, defensively...almost wistfully.

“Gorgeous, exquisite, beautiful...irresistible impeccable antecedents!” She repeated the comment with an unmistakable tinge of sarcasm in her angry voice.

“B-u-t, b-u-t, I love you, Emmy! You and I know I never meant any of those words!” I replied, feigning innocence.

“Love does not rest with words...it is the deeds that counts!” She said, dreamily staring into the roof, almost sadly, reflectively yet reprovingly.

We were sitting on opposite sides of a mahogany table; separated by an invincible wall...For long I pondered, liked all the same, for hours that I wondered, where exactly laid the game.

“It isn’t the sweet smell of a fresh rose; not an overnight adventure or a ruthless break in into the untamed innocence of the other...” She said, swinging her head towards my direction then after a long pause, continued, “It isn’t the huge words, painted with abstract desires, filthy aspirations, hidden in the claws of admirations. Indeed, it is more than a wide smile that comes from the

most secretive parts of our stupid heart, and the faint pulse that is bound to be committed in a cruel game it knows not its unfair rules!”

I was no fool not to realize it was now or never. I loved her. I wanted her. I was not prepared to watch her walk away from what we had both worked so hard for...not just yet. I feared that the apparently unfathomable emotions might blindfold her...that she might then settle for the very less-taken road, and leave me stranded in the crossroad.

I feared she might set sail towards that place unknown to either one of us, armed with female chauvinism, an enormous anger, and learn the lessons meant for her ultimate survival. Here comes a mushrooming, an undiscovered planet, whose sweet girls are freedom thirsty!

Blindfolded, I honestly dreaded, she might lead the way, well-armed with shattered tenets, debris of her inner-self, and wholesome filth of her huge following online... hungry and freedom-thirsty...perhaps subserviently, unwavering to dig deep inside her bitter ambitions of striking back hard!

I feared that far and wide she might sojourn, sidestepping the counsel of those she will regard as enemies of progress; pieces of rotten cabbages, cheap bananas, successful failures.... Maybe she will hardly play it safely; blindfolded, she may stagger along the joyous way, embrace the beautiful, awesome, red roses so, they will call her “Sweet Rosy”.

Every hour, every minute, they will sing her wonderful name, and make her wear a golden ring, perched with obscenities, and maybe, blindfolded, she might succumb to the dirt, the filth of those icy nails, and sadly, she might end up into that dungeon coated with pitch darkness, I will never see her again!

She had to know. I had to let it out. She had to know how much I would love to light a smile on her sad face. She had to know how much I wanted to be a tender pillar so she would lean on for comfort. She had to know how much willing, and ready I was to loosen the firm grip of the swaying storms that normally comes with daily challenges, struggles of the moment, and worries of the misty tomorrow...and how much I would love to say sorry for making her shelter a cruel burden placed on her shoulders for no good reason.

I might never understand why those words could not find enough courage to escape my mouth. Unknowingly, unthinkingly, I

chose not to hearken to the voice of reason. That very same day, for the third time, we broke up with Emmy. I remember her sobbing uncontrollably as she frantically waved her hand... I remember silently cursing myself under my breath. I remember the burning anger in my eyes; how that very same anger violently whirled in my throat and the long, lonely, sad journey back to Nairobi that night.

I knew we broke up not because we hated each other. I knew that one way or the other, we would be back together... again!

Inside, I wished I had a chance of reminding Emmy that never will the beating cease for her... I went back to Juja heartbroken yet feigning indifference; to a peaceful world I had created... many a night and many a day thereafter, I kept wondering why she hadn't asked. Why had she not asked me why... why the huge smile from my heart, why the bliss, the secret peace whose slap came so strong; why the bitterness, torture and the eternal reproaches from an unforgiving bluff of fate?

**(To be continued in a forthcoming Sequel)**

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I have since learnt that my dearly beloved grandmother shares her clan with that of the late Wycliffe Kirui Komon Matakwei! I do not blame her for withholding some things from me. I have no doubt (just like the rest); she means no harm and perhaps all she wanted was to protect me. Unfortunately, she now has breast cancer and she is always in and out of hospital. The good thing is, though they will never know, she now knows what killed Nang'uni and Teng'an.

Kerubo is still alive and kicking; healthier, active than ever before and is continuing to save lives of thousands of vulnerable young men and women thanks to his Non-Governmental Organization. She never lacks sponsors and the government trusts her short hands. She is a living testimony that HIV and AIDS is never the end of the road! There is still hope if you choose to refuse to succumb to the dirt and filth associated with the inevitable stigmatization. Antiretroviral Treatment is not a mere hoax; it works, it is working for Kerubo and it will no doubt work for you! Perhaps you must have heard of her private radio station wholly dedicated to educating the masses about the scourge that continues plaguing our economy.

Shiro now lives with us in Machewa. Wanyoike, the mysterious uncle, turned out to be Wairimu's biological father and he visits occasionally to say Jambo to her granddaughter!

Technically, I am Wairimu's guardian-angel, and we love each other a lot. She is still such a sweet company and although we might never get a chance of teaching each other how to ride a bicycle, we have a lot to share and learn from each other. Her performance in academics has never been great yes but she is such a gifted actor and she will hit your screens at the soonest opportune possible in a documentary titled If You Must Steal, Just Steal a little directed by non-other than Mwanaisha!

Father did not leave me empty handed. After months of Wairimu's absence, he contacted his lawyer and changed his will. The fortune he left behind is helping a team of fifty and I help restore hope to a number of victims of 2007-2008 Post-Election Violence and 2004-2008 SLDF murderous regime.

Ironically, almost ten years down the line, IDPs camps are still in existence and the government is yet to resettle thousands of homeless people. The last time I checked on the news, opposition leaders were complaining that the government was keen to compensate IDPs from Central Kenya (who have been allegedly receiving in excess of Kshs 400,000/= per household compared with others who continue receiving Kshs 10,000/= per household). I have no doubt in my mind that the very same politicians will use IDPs resettlement as a guise of hoodwinking, indoctrinating and persuading Kenyans come the next general elections!

Even though many people still fear and hate her, Salome Matakwei has never stopped preaching peace across Mount Elgon. She has since founded multiple self-help groups meant to aid her fellow widows engage in income generating activities such as livestock and chicken keeping. She also lives with a number of orphaned children thanks to her husband's slaughtering campaign. To them, she is both a mother and a father!

Sabaots and their neighbors Bukusu are back together, this time under Bungoma County, just as was the case in the 60s and 70s. There is relative calm and I hope nobody has some evil plans of planting fresh seeds of animosity between these two communities.

An angry mob lynched my maternal grandfather, Meto, last year in Chepkurkur center allegedly for sheltering cattle rustlers who

had been harassing them for weeks on end. Of course, that is not why they lynched him. The little orphaned children who witnessed his boys slaughtering their parents' years earlier had been waiting patiently for their turn to hit back.

Ndiema and hundreds of other former SLDF militias walked scot free out of jail years ago and they are now eking out a living in Chepkurkur where some of them received tiny plots of land. To date, Chebyuk Settlement Scheme beneficiaries are yet to be given Title Deeds and the powers that be are still dragging their heavy feet; unsure perhaps how to deal with such an emotive issue once and for all.

Wilson has since expanded his business empire. As many other longtime beneficiaries of state-sanctioned thieving during both Moi and Mzee Kenyatta's eras, he continues enjoying overt state-protection. He now seats on six boards of schools as the chairperson and they are planning to establish a college for children gifted in Arts such as song writing, playwriting, acting, singing and so on and so forth. He is still happily married to Wakesho and acts as the right hand man for Mrs. Kwatenge. Kenya Farmers Association is yet to be re-established and so is the Rift Valley Railways.

Life in Chebyuk is back to normal though the scars are still visible. A person mysteriously disappearing is now a common occurrence in Chebyuk and its environs. Rumors of retributive deaths and existence of guns are still rife. Still, many people believe politicians are secretly arming the remnants of the SLDF so they could use them at a convenient time.

Raila is still in opposition and with one more final chance to make his lifetime dream come true in 2017, having narrowly missed the presidency victory in 2013. I am afraid he might win...just as was the case back in 2007; sad thing is, again, he won't be allowed to step his feet into State House! Why? Kenyans are not yet ready for accountable, responsible men and women of integrity! We want thieves! Seasoned hypocrites, cheats, drug barons...

You probably know that the Only Man in Kibaki's 2007-2012 reign in power, one Martha Karua and Kalonzo Musyoka, who unrepentantly betrayed Kenyans back then, are now political sweethearts with Raila! Talk of political incest and shameless prostitution Mmh.

Corruption, endemic in nature, is still the order of the day and so is negative ethnicity. Whether he will make it or not, only time will tell. The recommendations of the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission, chaired by Ambassador Bethuel Kiplagat, a rumored architect of political assassinations during the 24-year Moi's reign in power, just like many other Post-Election Violence reports, continue gathering dust in carefully guarded lockers.

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The infamous HAGUE SIX list was, to the 2007/2008 Post Election Violence victims, a welcomed culmination of their long postponed date with justice and in many respects, a perfect embodiment of the International Community's resolve to restore sanity and sobriety to Kenya's Political Landscape riddled with ceaseless tribal and ethnic squabbles. I was, and so were many others, hopeful that finally, the financiers and perpetrators of the wanton destruction of property worth billions, loss of hundreds of innocent lives, forceful evictions and breeders of unnecessary strife and enmity among peace-loving Kenyans were going to pay for their barbaric savagery.

It never occurred to me that our immense hopes will be this short-lived and sabotaged by the perennial enemies of justice. To the horror of those who bore the heaviest brand of the darkest chapters in Kenya's history, we were soon made to believe that the International Criminal Court chief prosecutor, Moreno Ocampo, had relied on allegedly shambolic and hurriedly engineered evidence to nail the six Kenyans who had since become instant celebrities across the country and all over the world.

Most shocking were the seemingly constant, insistent and vehement insinuations that the Western Powers were once again flexing their imperialists' muscles by dragging innocent African Leaders to a white court for out rightly undeserving and unfair trials.

For a moment, the world was treated to a soap opera that never was. Soon, no one was talking about the widely documented deaths and Internally Displaced Persons, some of whom are still nursing their wounds at NGO's Funded Camps.

The guns, in their unusual larger numbers and with exaggerated ferocity, were instead turned on perceived betrayers patiently yearning for the downfall of the then promising political

figurehead suspected to have played major roles in the communal violence. The vicious cycle of blame-game and finger pointing took center stage and as a people, we instead heaved with ecstasy and joined in the poisonous chorus our politicians were wittingly coercing us to sing.

Heated politics, then often marred with overt backstabbing and shameless hypocrisy, consequently killed the momentum of finally salvaging justice for the PEV victims from what was fast appearing an ugly, messy and unpredictable judicial process.

Ironically, a horde of the 2007/2008 PEV victims contributed to the inevitably premature abortion of justice thanks to their playing accomplices in the alleged witness-coaching drama. In effect, this alone dealt a severe body blow to the overall struggle to punish those who bore the heaviest responsibility in the contested post-election chaos and skirmishes.

With four key suspects off the hook and the remaining two almost proving to the world that there was no premeditated politically motivated communal violence in Kenya after the 2007/2008 contested presidential elections, it is no longer a secret that the only winner (again) will be the deeply enshrined culture of runaway impunity in our society. Thanks also to our tribal politics, it has been easy to strike compromises, however unlikely our cohorts have been and as a people, we have since conspired to turn a blind eye to the cries, subsequent penury, untold suffering and irredeemable losses our brothers and sisters suffered.

If we presume, the way we are hell bend to presume, that no one was responsible for the 2007/2008 PEV, are we therefore saying that what happened was a mere farce or simply one large, round lie? Did we not bury our brothers, sisters, fathers, children, mothers? aunts, nieces, nephews, uncles and in-laws? Are there no visible marks still of those skirmishes, chaos and mayhem that tore neighbors apart and separated happily married families? Before we blindly set sail to that little-known island of it never matter anyway, let us not forget that it is a round world we live in!

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Love is really a despot who spares nobody loitering along his path.... Is it not true that all paths lead to the same goal? Even immortals are not immune to fate, or are they? The man who waits for a perfect opportunity, it is said, will wait a life-time, isn't that so?

You will know who you love, but, you cannot truly know who loves you... sometimes, sometimes, you do not need to understand... just believe!

Freedom is not procured by a full enjoyment of what is desired, but by controlling that desire.... Isn't that what Epictetus, that ancient Greek philosopher said? I wanted to free my troubled soul, but not be enslaved by my secretly confined desires. I wanted to be burdened still; by the overwhelming desires of a stupid, stupid heart that kept beating for nothing in particular!

Like Lavater, and as any other virtuous man, I craved to one day ask: what do I owe to my times, to my country, to my neighbors, to my friends? By succumbing to the overwhelming echoes of my blind heart, I knew I might never ask those very crucial questions.... Time may not be that short, but is there not enough time for some courtesy?

After months of closing the doors of my heart to love, I finally met my potential rib almost six months ago. Rachel is her beautiful name; unsurprisingly, we met through Shiro. She is originally from Kiambu but after the 2007-2008 post-election violence, they moved back to their Matunda home. By the time you will be reading this book, perhaps she will be wearing an engagement ring!

It has been a short-long journey, a sad-happy encounter, a bittersweet experience and above all, a memorable relationship I will forget not...not even in the other world! Today, thanks to her kindness, I am no longer a believer of the long-held assertion that love is dead; a myth solely held true by the dying and the weak in spirit. I believe in love! I believe in her! Moreover, I love her...not because she is a Kikuyu, but just because I love her!

Whether knowingly or unknowingly, I must have embraced her with the fascinatingly complex story of the other me I had repeatedly wanted her to know. She had heard about the tragic story of David, and Wairimu...she knows all about the Late Emmy, and our once unshakeable love. She will agree with this same me that his has indeed been a riveting tale of a truly blind, a rather unmistakably carefree yet kindest of the hearts that will in many ways and in years to come I presume; amuse, anger, tickle and unfortunately make her shed a tear!

Fate had since seemingly decree that I should be an inevitable victim of the infamous Richard Mason's parting shot in the Novel the Drowning People which asserts that 'First Love Never Dies. It Kills'. Losing so many of my relatives back in Chebyuk, my father whom I loved so much alongside, my stepmother Wairimu whom I adored and revered, sometimes more than my very own mother, and sweet Emmy to the cruel fangs and ugly claws of death was disastrous, near fatal and an unforgettable experience. In every respect, they were my first love! Death did not take their lives alone; it took mine too! For many days after burying the charred remains of my parents, I was a walking dead!

Thanks to sweet Rachel, nevertheless, I am going to live to prove Richard Mason's hypothesis wrong and assert the fact that our stupid, stupid hearts are not always hell bend to kill us. I will live to prove that indeed, our stupid, stupid hearts can survive a horrendous and an ominous onslaught from a sadly short-lived first love.

Through my would-be second love, potential lovers will know that our stupid, stupid hearts are capable of enduring the sharpest of the pains...that they are, out of their own volition, willing, many a time, to let go the past. They can instead, at times; I suppose, opt to surge forward meaningfully and inspire hope in our young and promising lives.

Unthinkingly, and unknowingly, she has motivated, inspired and rejuvenated the other me in huge ways. Throughout our exceptional, outstanding and mutually befitting friendship with Rachel, there was, or so it seems, a disturbingly deep-seated wound whose severe pangs kept resurfacing when least expected. That wound was, for days and nights on end, the source of my gloomy, vague and tasteless life heavily characterized by tears, perpetual fear and ominous solitude. In a way, Rachel must have felt it and implicitly, unknowingly, unthinkingly perhaps, helped me see the other side of the coin with rekindled hope.

Partially, this writing is the only way I know how to share my innermost convictions and deepest affections for her. As to why, how and when it all started, is a mystery that I prefer leaving it for fate to decree...but one thing I am certain of, has always been sure of, and will live knowing is the fact that I will love her beyond the grave!

The sharp knife of an ever-unpredictable life together with the dirt, filth and ugliness of Richard Mason's insinuations might every now and then, in the not-so-distant future; reconsider their stance and instead, become spectators to our would-be bold love from its humble beginnings to its absent end.

## Afterword

“Our country must morally re-arm. We cannot run a country where virtue is vice and vice is virtue. We cannot live in a country where the looters of yester-years assume they have undergone a Pauline conversion because they are in opposition and oppose the Government of the day. Some of our richest men and women are to be found in politics and their creed is, thou shall reap what thou hath not sown.” —*Professor Patrick Loch Otieno Lumumba, speaking on the subject of Professionals and corruption at the Catholic University of East Africa (CUEA) Conference on 15<sup>th</sup> March, 2002.*

The reasons why I chose to write this book are many and varied. Most critical, however, is the fact that even after all that happened with the Sabaot and the country at large between 2004 and 2008, the powers that be are still reluctant to address social and historical injustices bedeviling our country, land included, once and for all. More so, tribalism is still rife and so is the seemingly never-ending negative ethnicity that unfortunately defines our political landscape. Almost half a century after Kenya’s independence, millions are still faced with perennial hunger, abject poverty, illiteracy and disease. State-sanctioned perpetual looting has returned to haunt Kenyans once again. As was the case with previous regimes, the authorities seem to be functioning under a manifesto titled *It is Our Time to Eat*. The sad news is that the sons and daughters of evil must steal yes and not only must they steal a little, but also steal repeatedly until there is nothing more to steal!

Allan E Masakhalia, in an article published in *Open Democracy* and titled *Focus on Tribalism in Kenya* opines that ‘tribalism in Kenya is responsible for underdevelopment, corruption, the rigging of elections and violence.’ So, what is the way forward? As far as Allan is concerned, ‘there is no point in addressing the ills bedeviling Kenya while ignoring the actual causes, since the major cause of tribalism in Kenya (and in Africa as a whole) today is the competition and confrontation over power and resources.’ In a

special feature aired by one of the local media, an alleged Al Shabab, the Somali based Islamic Militia Group, member openly attributed their success to the endemic corruption among our security officers. Human Rights Organizations and other independent nongovernmental organizations have repeatedly accused the very same security agency, ironically mandated by the Kenya Constitution 2010 to safeguard the lives and properties of Kenyans, of conspiring with the militias and thus implicitly adding impetus to their murderous campaigns.

During UhuRuto's first term in office, the Auditor-General's office unearthed heart-wrenching government spending flaws perpetrated by the ministry of Devolution and Special Programs.

According to the findings echoed by an independent Parliament's Committee on government spending:

- The ministry purchased 20 ballpoint pens for the Huduma Kenya secretariat at a cost of Sh174, 000 — translating to Sh8, 700 per pen.
- Ms. Waiguru ordered a complete overhaul of her Harambee House office – complete with new fittings that included a Sh1.8 million touch screen television.
- The ministry acquired Adobe In-design CS6 software at a cost of Sh1, 900,000. Corel Draw 13 software for the Huduma Kenya secretariat cost the taxpayers a whopping Sh3, 440,000.

As if that was not enough, just as the El Niño phenomenon started worrying weather forecasters and sending the whole nation into panic, as a response strategy, the government planned to spend Sh37.5 million to buy 1,000 bar soaps – which comes to Sh37,500 per piece. The point is, as a prophet of justice, truth and fairness, it is time we get out of the woods as a nation. The latest Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index 2013 launched by the global agency ranked Kenya at position 136 out of 177 countries and territories surveyed, with a score of 27 on a scale of 0 to 100. According to the Transparency International Agency, 'Poorly equipped schools, counterfeit medicine and elections decided by money are just some of the consequences of public sector corruption. Bribes and backroom deals do not just steal resources from the most vulnerable – they undermine justice and economic development, and destroy public trust in government and leaders.'

Furthermore, and ironically too, the government that was elected on the pretext of uniting Kenyans, four years down the line, has instead only succeeded in disuniting Kenyans! The UhuRuto's regime has indeed managed to alienate the Kalenjin-Kikuyu ruling dynasty more than any other regime since Kenya's independence. If justice has to be done, one in a million must rise up and denounce every merchant of impunity with fury and vehemence; without fear and favor. Many a man and a woman has time and again reiterated that Kenya forever remain BIGGER than any one mere mortal being nursed on its tender laps.... That the reverse eternally remains to be true is no surprise at all! You and I are responsible in a thousand and one ways! Afraid of the mighty and wealthy, cowed and cajoled, we've been led endlessly to the slaughter like meek sheep. Shy and giggling like amateurish lovers, we always whisper names of shameless Kenyans whose fathers and mothers stole our wealth with gusto (are still stealing even this very minute), killed those who dared to point an accusing finger at them, crippled those who walked shoulders high while denouncing their evil acts, and perhaps even threatened to slaughter your very own beloved grandmother! Kenya is a nation of ten multi-billionaire families and Forty Plus Million helpless beggars (indeed, courtesy of the masses ear-splitting silence and aloofness) .... We all know there can never be absolute peace without justice. Justice must be done to those wrongly deprived of their aboriginal lands, to those disenfranchised and treated as second-class citizens in our society, to those who lost relatives through assassination in cold blood, and to those who have continued suffering the manacles of segregation and marginalization for years on end.

With the ever increasing number of internet users, getting information on government corrupt dealings, classified secrets, unaddressed social historical injustices etc. is fast becoming much easier. Through multiple social media platforms, such information can easily be shared, and as such, the masses are slowly arming themselves with a third eye and a third ear! Coupled with soaring inflation rates, skyrocketing unemployment rates, hunger, deprivation, disillusionment and sheer desperation; on a prophetic gear, a revolt is inevitable!

Will there ever be a savior who will heal our bleeding nation?

Are we ever going to dance amidst jubilations that our very own have finally let us free? Are we ever going to treat each other as Kenyans, and not as Luos, Kikuyu, Kalenjins, Kambas, Luhyas, and Somalis and so on and so forth? We have learnt our lessons the hard way. Moreover, like the persecuted Jewish community after the holocaust during the Second World War that claimed the lives of six million innocent Jews, we must say never again! The elephant never gets tired of carrying its tusks. One person is thin porridge or gruel; two or three people are a handful of stiff cooked corn meal. Money may be sharper than a sword, but knowledge is far much better than riches! By coming and going, a bird weaves its nest. There is no bad patience...nevertheless, it is time we tell the man carrying us that he stinks!

## Crawling to my Death

It's been a JUBILEE of eternal waiting,  
Trudging up the thorny hills,  
Preparing for the CRAWLING COMPETITION FOR THE  
CRIPLED,

To commemorate our hard-worn independence,  
With emptiness in my stomach,  
A six-month pregnant wife and ten yawning children,  
Urging, psyching me up,  
“Don't give up, Pa', not just yet!”

The sun is especially hot,  
But am almost getting used to its taunting rays,  
The persecuting glare,  
And the wicked smile...  
A dozen miles now to go,  
A dozen miles to the finishing line,  
I can see MASTER frantically waving from the window of  
his Limousine,  
His healthy face beaming with excitement,  
I look behind me and there is no sign of any living thing.  
“Don't give up, not just yet!” I whisper and take yet another  
step forward.

One meter to the finishing line,  
I close the doors and windows of my mind,  
I Ignore the sharp pain in my torn limbs,  
Wave aside the piercing cry of my one-year little girl  
scratching her Kwashiorkor tummy,  
And push my old, frail, emaciated bag of bones forward.

“Congratulations!” MASTER says, “You have made your  
country proud!”  
He gives me a national flag, a copy of the constitution, and a  
photocopy of the National Patriotic Party Manifesto!

“Is that all”, I stutter, “Where is the ONE MILLION  
WINNER'S PRICE?”

Master bends, parts my sweat-drenched left shoulder, and  
whispers,

“This is Kenya, son! The organizers ate your prize!”

## About the Author

Levi Cheruo Cheptora was born on 2 February 1989 in Mount Elgon (Western Kenya) in a tiny village called Bondeni, around Kongit area. Not long after his birth, his parents walked their separate ways after a not-so-happy marriage that he would come to learn many years later was characterized by violence, drunkenness and negligence. He attended Machewa Primary School between 1995 and 2003 after which he later joined Nakuru High National School in 2004 and sat for the KCSE Examinations four years later in 2007.

After four tempestuous years of juggling with mathematics in Chiromo Campus, University of Nairobi, as a BSc. Math Major Student, Levi graduated on 23rd August 2013, and after working as a Loan Officer with Credit Platinum for a year, he eventually enrolled for yet another degree (this time a Bachelor's degree in Mass Communication) in late 2014 at the Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology. Levi is a passionate writer, a gifted poet, an accomplished lyricist, a recorded singer, and above all a freelance journalist based in Nairobi, Kenya.

So far, he has penned down close to eight titles, which are readily available and accessible online. These titles include *The Bitter Pills*, *Songs from my Soul*, *When they Only Love your Body and Others*, *A Million ways to make Money Online for Writers*, *A Sure Date with the Icy and Ugly Fangs of Fate: Failed Promises*, *The Greatest Thieves of Kenya*, *There is no Country Called Kenya*, and two upcoming titles:  
[1] A Swahili *Riwaya* titled 'Yajapo Yapokee'  
[2] An English Novella titled 'Married to my Shadow'

THE END