

*THE AFRICAN SUNRISE*

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## DECLARATION

This research project is my original work and has not been presented for a degree in any other university for examination.



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Date: 27/10/2021

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## **DEDICATION**

To all those who come from humble beginnings- they know what it is to be without a basic education and to the original slum dwellers who undergo untold suffering, may your dark days come to light.

Special dedication also goes to the young men who are trying to come to terms with the new world order of women emancipation and mostly to all those who inspired the writing of this work.

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## ABSTRACT

In this project, I worked on a creative writing in the form of a novella, which I gave the title *The African Sunrise*. There is need to address the challenges that are facing the boy child in our modern society such as it is being done for the girl child so that the boy child is not found lagging behind in future. My research findings indicated that activists, NGOs and the government are giving most attention to the girl child forgetting that there is a higher chance for boys to be influenced into drugs, to drop out of school, to be influenced into crime and to be imprisoned. This novella reflects the lives of young boys and the challenges that they face as they grow up especially in the lower class citizens such as drug abuse, alcoholism and petty crime, among others. This creative writing aimed at giving hope to the youth that no matter what problems they may encounter, there is hope in the end and that there is room for correction of delinquent behaviour.

## INTRODUCTION

In this project, I worked on a creative work in the form of a novella. I have explored among others, the idea of coming of age, family and disillusionment, which I brought out through some of the characters whom I developed to be the performers of the various roles in this fictional work. For example, the idea of growing up was portrayed in characters like Kiori, Chillie, Dan, Mwai, and Kambodia. “Creating characters is arguably the single-most important part of novel writing. At the very least, knowing how to create a character is as important as plotting a novel” (Chapman).

The working titles for my fictional novella were *The African Sunset* and *The African Sunrise*. I later settled on *The African Sunrise* to be the actual title for the novella as I intended to bring out the disillusioned lifestyles experienced by the characters and the rays of hope that shine for those who change and behave according to the societal expectations. I developed these characters to portray the reality of things as they are in our contemporary society in an African setting for people who do not have “tall cousins” to help them secure good jobs but at the end, they make it in life. Therefore, the road of life was broken but at the end of the unadorned lifestyles, the characters were able to realize their goals in life, and so this was like a metaphorical title for my novella.

My motivation to writing a novella was my interest in writing from my observation of the society, my imagination and my aspiration to put into writing my thoughts so that I can enlighten the society through the exploration of some moral truths.

I was aiming at giving hope to the youth; that no matter how bad the situation may seem to be, there is some light at the end of the tunnel. I have introduced fictional characters and fictional settings that enabled me put across this thematic concern as these were my vehicles through which I conveyed my themes. As Bonnie Calhoun observes in her ‘writing tips’ blog spot:

Every issue conceals a bigger issue. At the heart of every big issue is a dilemma that has no answer. While it may sound downbeat to introduce these elements into your story, in fact they will amplify the problem at hand. The ripples that they send outward in your readers minds are, in essence, your novel's deepest issues, or to put in another way, it's theme at work!( lesson 33).

I have portrayed the theme of family, in terms of improvisation and neglect of parental responsibilities through depicting children who do not have enough family time with their parents due to their engagement in work and other duties. For example, as it is seen in the character of Cleopas, who did not have enough time to spend with his family. Due to this, his son Kiori grew up with both negative and positive influences from his peers as I narrated in the instances when he went to live with his father in the city and when he joined a boarding school where grew out of his parents' sight. Disillusionment and hope also featured as a major thematic concern, which was evident through Cleopas and his son. "A strong, well-defined theme enables the reader to see the deeper meaning in your story and the intention behind your own motivation for writing it" (Faulkner et al).

In this creative writing, I have also explored the characters' aspiration and goals. These motivations drove the characters to act in certain ways or made them do what they did, for example, Kiori who set his goal to become successful becomes a Genetics engineer.

In a report on the challenges facing the boy child, the chairperson, Winfred Osimbo Lichuma, of the National Gender and Equality Commission, says:

The general perception in all counties was that the boy child faces challenges that tend to hinder his enjoyment of opportunities for progress especially in education. The assessment identified the key drivers of exclusion of the boy child to include issues related to homes and families, socialization process, cultural and traditional factors. The assessment makes key recommendations on how drivers of exclusion of the boy child can be addressed so that both the boy child and the girl child enjoy equal opportunities in society. This will require concerted efforts and effective collaboration between the national and county governments and all other stakeholders if gender parity is to be achieved. (The Status of the Boy Child iii)

It is also clear that a large number of boys have been neglected.

Majority (92%) of the respondents agreed that the boy child is lagging in the gender equality agenda whereas 8% disagreed. According to the respondents, the boy is lagging behind because there has been over-focus on the girl child by the Government and NGOs in terms of programmes and interventions to empower the girl child. One concerned parent in Embu said: 'You have concentrated on the girl child to the extent that the boy child has been

turned into an avocado . . . we now educate our girls for outsiders to marry because there is no boy here to marry them.’ (The Status of the Boy Child 17)

The challenges of the boy child are outlined as peer pressure, drug and substance abuse, poverty, family related issues, cultural beliefs and practices and early marriages where in some communities the boys are forced to marry when they impregnate a girl (The Status of the Boy Child 18-23).

County Governments should support national initiatives to address the plight of the child. They should, build a strong foundation through Early Childhood Development, create awareness of rights of the child at grass-root levels and enforce parental responsibility on education and well-being of the child and develop pro-family policies to strengthen the family unit as the right environment to nurture children. (The Status of the Boy Child 26-27)

## **STATEMENT OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM**

I addressed the issues of unemployment, the danger of getting into drugs and other delinquent behavior due to lack of hope and guidance from adults and peer pressure through various characters such as Kiori and his friends, hence I brought to the fore the challenges of growing up faced by boys especially within the lower class citizens of any nation. The society seems to have forgotten the boy child and focuses mostly on the challenges facing the girl child forgetting that the boy child is more likely to be influenced into drugs, more likely to drop out of school and more likely to be imprisoned. Very little is being done to mould the boy child into an ideal man; therefore, in writing this work, I was aiming at highlighting some of the problems that boys face and to give them hope that they have room for rectification of bad behaviour.

## **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

1. To comment on human nature and behaviour through prose fiction.
2. To address critical issues that influence and affect the boy child in the process of coming of age.
3. To juxtapose characters who go to school and those who do not attend school.

## **HYPOTHESES**

1. A creative work can be used to depict a sense of human struggle as a way of displaying a sense of reality.



2. A creative work can be used to elevate the plight of the boy child who seems to have been forgotten in the contemporary society.
3. A creative writer can play an important role in suggesting areas of improvement, for example in the educational sector by juxtaposing characters who go to school and those who do not.

## **JUSTIFICATION**

Firstly, I was aiming at giving hope to the youth that no matter what problems they may face in their growing up they should be optimistic that there is hope at the end of the dark tunnel.

Secondly, my aim of writing was to add lore to the already wide literary circle. I wished to put into writing my ideas, and my imaginations as it concerned the process of growing up. Although as a matter of fact, I was addressing universal themes, what was different was the story, as I believe that no two writers can write the same even if they are addressing the same issues. For example, Chinua Achebe, Alex La Guma and Ngugi Wa Thiong'o in some of their writing at some point addressed the effects of colonialism on the society, therefore, their thematic concern was the same but the stories are different and the style that they used is also different. In short, I was processing the world and my experience as well as my imaginative ideas by writing this fictional work.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye, in her book, *Creative Writing in Prose*, looks at the elements of writing good flexible prose and how these elements relate to the making of literature. She says about language:

Nationally, we all have a choice of language, that is, everybody has a choice, both of register within the mother tongue or language of instruction, and of other learned languages. For practical purposes, the Kenyan system, for instance, requires students to write in English. Learning to do so well will inform the student's creative writing in any other language he may adopt. (4)

This I found useful in the writing of my project, as I adopted the English language as my medium as I wrote my creative work. This I did in order to reach a wider readership.

Macgoye also comments that, “The possible events do not have to be probable, since life is full of improbabilities, but it helps the reader along if some of them are” (40). In this line, I was able to portray Kiori, one of my main characters, as somebody who turned out as disillusioned even after having a successful education but at the end succeeded to a remunerative employment.

Macgoye says in her *Creative Writing in Prose*:

At the same time, a story is a story. It has to show how time goes on, how people change, sometimes how dull life is while they are waiting for a letter from an absent friend, an appointment or an election result. . . . A life where every item has special significance is not easy to believe in. (37)

The above observation allowed me to create my plot in such a way that it allowed “ordinary life to go on round the characters” (37). For example, the day-to-day life of my characters such as school life, their religious life and all that relates to their societal life. Thus, in reading this book, I was trying to find out how central plot is to my story and what the benefits of having a good plot are.

She goes on to show a writer’s inspiration when she says, “What, then, sets a writer exploring a situation and a set of characters? It may be a long time-interest, a memory, an unexplained event, or a revelation” (37). This guided me as I wrote my fictional novel from observation and from my own experience.

When writing creative prose, Macgoye says, “We need to learn about what already exists in literature and about the techniques, which can prepare both for our own writing and for evaluating new works as they come to be written by others” (20). This meant that, I needed to have read other literary works to hone my skills.

On the background of the novel Macgoye says, “. . . . Some of the novelist’s techniques are also useful in the composition of biography and other forms of narratives, such as social history or travel writing. The difference is that fiction can concentrate more on significant themes and images” (34). Therefore, I believe the scales tipped in favour of my project being a work of fiction against it being biographical or social history.

She goes on to say that:

. . . Stories tell us something out of the ordinary. They have to have a plot to move the characters from the opening situation to the closing one and to draw the threads together. . . . each of the three separate events does not constitute a story. There has to be a demonstrable relation between them. Therefore, the novelist must be consistent about the ages and characteristics of the protagonists and the situations that brought them together. (35)

Themes were central to my novella as Macgoye puts it that, “Serious fiction writing generally has a theme as well as a story” (55). She comments that, “A story consists of words on a page” (48). She goes ahead to comment on as to what comes first between the themes and the story. She refers to her creative novel *Coming to Birth* where she says: “I personally do not think it matters very much, whether the story comes first and theme emerges or whether the theme presents itself and then one looks for a story to exemplify it” (56).

I have also read *Creative Writing in Prose* by Marjorie Oludhe Mcgoye and identified the various points of view that were at my disposal so that I could come up with a narrative method that was the best for me to use in my creative writing. She says that a story can be told “objectively, without the intrusion of the narrator.” This narrative method she says can be called ‘the eye of God method’ whereby the story teller tells the story in the point of view that he or she knows everything that happens in the minds of his or her characters and what happens around them. She adds that, “Even so the narrator may decide not to disclose events to the reader in the order in which they occur, as in Patrick White’s *Voss*” (70).

The second narrative method that Mcgoye talks about is telling a story “subjectively, which is still from the eye of God, but implying judgement on the situation as in Steinbeck’s *Grapes of Wrath*” (70).

The third narrative style that Macgoye talks about is by first person, where:

A character in the story telling is as he or she knows it, sometimes having to fill in the background on something after it comes to his knowledge. Here the character may be: a principal actor in the story as in George Lamming’s *In the Castle of my Skin*; a minor character who participates in but is not the driving force in the story, like the tenant in Emily Bronte’s *Wuthering heights*; several characters sharing the narrative, as in Wilkie Collin’s *The Woman in White*; an alteration of the detached character and one or more of the

characters as in Dicken's *Bleak House* or a collection of supposed documents, letters or records. (70-71)

I told the story "objectively" in the point of view that I knew everything that was happening to and around my characters, including what was going on in their minds.

I read Mauron's edition of E.M Forster's *Aspects of the Novel* which was of much use to me in this undertaking. First, Forster in his lectures identified that "the most fundamental aspect of a novel is to tell a story" (44). The reading of Forster's *Aspects of the Novel* helped me to come up with a story that I believe was both interesting and that which has a sense of value to the readers. He points out that to maintain the reader's interest a story must have suspense. In this way, following Forster's observation, suspense was an aspect of style that I very much made use of in my writing.

As I created imaginary characters such as: Cleopas, Hannanias, Kiori, Joe, Chillie and others, E.M Forster's work helped me to come up with characters that perform activities that are experienced by real people such as, love, hate and sleep. This made my characters credible as well as authentic.

Forster goes on to say about a character in a fictional work:

. . . . He is created in the minds of hundreds of different novelists, who have conflicting methods of gestation, so one must not generalize. Still, one can say a little about him. He is generally born off, he is capable of dying on, he wants little food or sleep, he is tirelessly occupied with human relationships. And — most important — we can know more about him than we can know about any of our fellow creatures, because his creator and narrator are one. (87)

I also tried to find out the advantages of using round and flat characters in my creative work. Foster says that, ". . . a novel that is at all complex often requires flat people as well as round, and the outcome of their collision" (108).

About the creation of characters, he continues to say that, "We must admit that flat characters are not in themselves as big achievements as round ones," and that, "they are best when they are comic." He suggests that, "A serious or tragic flat character is apt to be a bore" (111).

From this resource, I tried to find out how to fit characters in my plot in a way that I did not graft them into my story in such a way that they lacked a life of their own.

Richard Cohen's book *How to write like Tolstoy* was also important in my project. From this resource, I identified certain aspects of writing fiction. In the first chapter, Cohen looks at the different ways different stories begin. He writes about how a good writer grabs and retains the reader's attention with the opening sentence and paragraph. He comments that the opening should create suspense. "In a sense, every good opening is a 'grabber' in that every good author wants the reader to keep turning the pages . . . a good opening sentence not only leads one on but it also enables the author to introduce character, mood and setting" (21).

About the creation of characters, Cohen says:

That memorable characters be intrinsic to storytelling seems given, but the very term characterization, suggesting flexibility and range, was actually a mid-nineteenth-century idea. The word derives from ancient Greek for a stamping tool that creates a distinctive mark. From there, it came to mean the particular mark of an individual, similar to his signature, but no more than that. Another Greek word, *ethos*, from which we get 'ethics,' more specifically meant character. Aristotle, while perfectly aware of the importance of personality, believed in the primacy of plot driven narrative over characters, arguing in his *Poetics* that tragedy was a 'representation, not of men, but of action and life.' (35)

Therefore, this was a good resource, as it enabled me to come up with interesting and authentic characters. Cohen mentions Plato who remarked in *The Republic* "bad characters are volatile and interesting, whereas uncomplicated good characters are dull and always the same" (36). Cohen continues to say, "Through the centuries, novelists have found it difficult to portray goodness, but we scarcely mind so long as we can hiss the villain" (36).

Dialogue as a stylistic device in a novel is quite important. "Dialogue is crucial to the novel. It makes the story more lifelike and less 'told,' by conveying character, dramatizing an incident and giving a sense of immediacy in a way that straight exposition might not do" (95). Cohen then adds, "Dialogue can also set the scene as it helps us visualize, and it can provide pattern and tone. Moreover, it can give the point of view of the author or the characters" (95). Therefore, instances of dialogue featured in my novella both as a stylistic device and to make it interesting.

James Scott Bell in *Write Great Fiction: Plot and Structure: Techniques and exercises for crafting a Plot that grips readers from start to finish* says that, “No matter what kind of a novelist you are, there’s one thing you will have when you have completed your manuscript—a plot” (12). He adds that, “It might be a lousy plot, a disjointed plot, a mess, or a master piece. But the plot will be there, staring you in the face . . . Plot is the power grid that makes it happen” (12). Therefore, he is of the view that a good story must have a good plot. This piece of literature review was important in my project, as it helped me to come up with a plot that formed the storyline of my novel. Bell’s point of view is that:

Plot and structure both serve larger enterprise- story. In the end, that’s what this whole novel thing is about. Telling a story in a way that transports the reader. . . . A good story transports the reader to a new place via experience. Not through arguments or facts but through the illusion that life is taking place on the page. Not his life. Someone’s else. Your characters’ lives (sic). (8)

Bell, just like Cohen, suggests that in the beginning the writer should ultimately create suspense and have interesting characters to hook the readers. “The first task of your beginning is to hook the reader. Period” (56). This reading enabled me to come up with a gripping opening chapter and an interesting story at last.

On how to design the middle of a novel Bell suggests, “Think of the long middle of your book as a series of an increasingly intense battle . . . back and forth, parry, and thrust. That’s the heart of your novel” (81). This gave me insight as I depicted the characters’ struggles in the middle of my novel as they tried to cope with the conflicts that faced them.

On ending Bell says that a weak ending can ruin an otherwise wonderful book while a strong ending can redeem an otherwise mediocre book. He continues to say that a great ending does two things: First, it feels perfect for the kind of novel it is appended to. Second, it surprises the reader . . .” (99).

This assisted me in knowing how plot influences structure and so I believe, learnt how to come up with a page turning fictional novella.

The novel writing guide, *Writing the Breakout Novel*, by Donald Maass showed how I could come up with characters that are both convincing and authentic. In creating a protagonist, Maass’ opinion is that,

We stick with characters we like, admire, and cheer to while we abandon characters we dislike, disapprove of, and don't care about . . . . That is not to say that protagonists cannot be flawed, troubled, torn, haunted, unhappy. . . . That is why lifting your hero above his circumstances- indeed above himself- is necessary. (19-20)

Other creative writers who were of great insight in the writing of this novella for they have also dealt with the issues of growing up are NoViolet Bulawayo and Meja Mwangi. In *We Need New Names* Bulawayo looks at the growing up of a girl whom she has given the name Darling and makes her the narrator of the story. Although Bulawayo concentrates more on the girl child, she has exposed the dehumanising conditions experienced by children growing up in the slum areas. The narrator says of Paradise, which is a slum setting:

To pass the time I let my eyes wonder towards Paradise. When I am on Fambeki like this, I feel like I'm God, who sees everything. Paradise is all tin and stretches out in the sun like a wet sheepskin nailed on the ground to dry . . . . The shacks themselves are terrible but from up here, they seem much better, almost beautiful even, it's like I'm looking at a painting. (Bulawayo 34)

This is where darling and her friends, Bastard, Chipo, Godknows, Sboh and Stina grew without even an education. They go stealing guavas from Budapest, which is a well to do neighbourhood. Chipo's grandfather has impregnated her and no legal action has been taken against him showing the vulnerability of the girl child. The NGOs do not help much either. They bring the inhabitants of Paradise inadequate portions of food not to mention toys. Although Darling manages to go abroad where her Aunt Fostalina, lives, her suffering does not end as she is now faced with double discrimination as both a woman and a black migrant.

Meja Mwangi has traced the idea of growing up. In his novel *Kill Me Quick*, he depicts two young boys as the major characters, Meja and Maina, who due to pressure from the society to find jobs end up in the backstreets and later in the slum areas. It is here in this slum that Maina was initiated into the life of crime and later Meja. In this novel, Meja Mwangi has exclusively dealt with the plight of the boy child who is supposed to get an education and save his family from the clutches of poverty and so through his characters he depicts how unemployment can make one venture into the life of crime.

Some secondary sources assisted me in this research for they showed that there was a gap that needed to be filled in that, very little was being done to address the plight of the boy child, for example, the Kenya News Agency. This media organization deals with the gathering, packaging, processing and dissemination of news and information on Government's policies, projects, programmes and initiatives to the Kenyan public. In an article dated January 23, 2021 they argue, "The boys have been neglected for a long time at the expense of giving priority to the girl child, and it is time that the two genders received equal attention" (Kenya News Agency).

In another article dated June 25, 2018 by Mabel Keya-Shikuku and Alex Tanui, the agency, continues to note:

But the girl child is seen as the weaker gender prone to many vulnerable situations and incapable of defending herself, hence the need to give her a voice. As this has been happening, the boy child has been falling prey to the challenges of modern life such as drugs and too much expectations from the society. (Kenya News Agency)

In a Kenyan newspaper, the *Business Daily* of Monday November 11, 2019, Collins Odote writes:

While the measures to address the plight of the disadvantaged in society is laudable, a crisis occurring in the country is putting a spotlight on the real interpretation of gender equality and measures to ensure it is realized in Kenya. The challenges that the boy child faces in today's Kenya do not receive as much attention and focus as is necessary to resolve their plight. (Business Daily)

To address the issue he says:

To do so we must recognise that boys are suffering just like girls. The challenges may be different, but the challenges exist. Consequently, we must start discussing and identifying measures to address their plight and put resources and efforts to deal with these challenges. (Business Daily)

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

In this project, I used Lev S. Vygotsky and Robert J. Sternberg's tenets as proposed in their theories of creativity as well as the Psychoanalytic theory.



Sternberg in his investment theory of creativity propounds that there are three abilities that a creative person should exhibit. First, is the synthetic ability which is defined as the ability to generate novel and interesting ideas when writing a creative work. Second, the analytic ability which is defined as the critical thinking ability whereby the creative person is seen as that person who can analyze and evaluate ideas: that a creative person is able to analyze good and bad ideas and therefore he or she works out the implications of his or her creative idea before putting it to test (Sternberg and Wendy). The practical ability whereby Sternberg says that creative writers will use their practical abilities, for example, in my case here, to write prose fiction to try to convince people that my idea of writing this novella is worthy. “To be creative, one must first decide to generate new ideas, analyse these ideas, and sell the ideas to others” (Sawyer et al. 94). The above tenets of the investment theory of creativity guided me in evaluating the themes and ideas in my creative work before I decided to put them out to an audience.

According to the investment theory of creativity, it requires one to merge six distinct but interrelated resources, which are intellectual abilities, knowledge, styles of thinking, personality, motivation and environment. Although levels of these resources are sources of individual differences, often the decision to use a resource is a more important source of individual differences (Sawyer et al. 94). A study on creativity, for example, examined laypersons’ and experts’ conceptions of the creative person. These conceptions contain a combination of cognitive and personality elements, such as “connects ideas,” “sees similarities and differences,” “has flexibility,” “has aesthetic taste,” “is unorthodox,” “is motivated,” “is inquisitive,” and “questions societal norms” (Sawyer et al. 92). The study used tasks such as writing short stories using unusual titles for example, ‘The Octopus’s Sneakers,’ drawing pictures with unusual themes for example, ‘The earth from an insect’s point of view. In addition to devising creative advertisements for boring products for example ‘Cufflinks,’ and solving unusual scientific problems for example, ‘How we could tell if someone had been on the moon within the past month’(Sawyer et al. 94). This research showed creative performance to be moderately domain-specific, and to be predicted by a combination of certain resources. The resources can for example be knowledge where on one hand, one needs to know enough about a field to move it forward. One cannot move beyond where a field is if one does not know where it is. On the other hand, knowledge about a field can result in a closed and entrenched perspective, resulting in a person not moving beyond the way in which he or she has seen problems in the past. Thus, one

must decide to use one's past knowledge but must also decide not to let the knowledge become a hindrance rather than a help (Sawyer et al. 96). In line with this observation, I exploited my knowledge in the field of education to advance my plot.

Sternberg says that thinking styles are preferred ways of using one's skills. In essence, they are decisions about how to deploy one's skills. With regard to thinking styles, a 'legislative' style is particularly important for creativity, that is, a preference for thinking in new ways and a decision to think in new ways. This preference needs to be distinguished from the ability to think creatively. Someone who is creative should be able to think globally as well as locally (Sawyer et al. 96). This proposition by Sternberg can be seen in the way I have woven my plot and setting from a local one to a global one.

Robert Keith Sawyer is another proponent of the creativity theory. In their book, *Creativity and Development*, he writes:

Throughout recorded history, scholars have noted similarities between artistic creativity and children. These similarities have led many scholars to suggest that artistic activity and children's play are related and perhaps somehow tap into the same inner source. In the centuries prior to the modern era, this inner source was often conceived of as divine inspiration, and children were thought to be closer to God. German idealists such as Schiller associated the creative impulse with children's play, and almost since the beginning of formal schooling, idealists and romanticists alike have criticized overly structured classroom schooling for squashing children's natural creative ability. Many twentieth-century psychologists have also observed parallels between creativity and children's play. For example, Freud thought the artist was like a child at play: 'He creates a world of his own, or, rather, re-arranges the things of his world in a new way which pleases him.' For Freud, fantasy worlds are created by both the child and the artist from the same motivating impulse: the desire to satisfy an unfulfilled wish. (Sawyer et al. 4)

The above tenet of the exploitation of the inner source is what I have expressed in my methodology.

Sawyer continues to argue that:

Several psychoanalytic theorists have likewise proposed that the creative unconscious is guided by the conscious mind. Arieti studied the contributions of primary process (unconscious) and secondary process thinking to creativity, in what he called a ‘tertiary process.’ Rothenberg proposed that the combinations were ‘active, directed forms of cognition in which the creator intentionally and in distinct ways brings particular types of elements together.’ (Sawyer et al. 24)

Lev S. Vygotsky was another creativity theorist whose theories guided me in writing this project. [R Sawyer](#) et al. , book *Creativity and development* enabled me to revisit Vygotsky’s studies on creativity with which I can argue that personal transformation is the underlying factor of creativity. It is for oneself, in the mind, that novellas and novels are written, comedies and tragedies are acted out, and elegies and sonnets are composed. How the reader will decipher the meaning of the creative piece, is a nugatory situation over which the writer has very little control; however, Vygotsky’s tenet here is that a creative work is social in nature.

Art is the social within us, and even if its action is performed by a single individual it does not mean that its essence is individual. . . . Art is the social technique of emotion, a tool of society that brings the most intimate and personal aspects of our being into the circle of social life. . . . It would be more correct to say that emotion becomes personal when every one of us experiences a work of art: It becomes personal without ceasing to be social. (Sawyer et al. 61- 62)

For example, my individual work will be social as it comes to be read and at the same time, it is individual as it propels my own judgment on a capitalistic society. In a short paper written a couple of years before he died, “On the Problem of the Psychology of the Actor’s Creative Work,” Vygotsky revisited these issues of aesthetics, experience, and emotion as a social phenomenon (Lindqvist 246).

In his dialectical approach to creativity, Vygotsky viewed the creative process as an interaction, tension, transformation, and synthesis over the parallel timescales of the creative act, the creative life, and historical cultural development. He viewed the two social processes, internalization and externalization, and the two symbol-based forms, personality and culture, as being in dialectical tension with each other. The tension he suggests that it provides a good ground for the growth and development of new ideas or creative products. His argument is that internalization is not the

grafting of a culture onto a personality but an engagement with existing cultural resources, which leads to newly realized aspects of the self while externalization is the basis for domain-changing creative transformations that expand the culture. Through objective fantasy, adolescents, as well as adults, anticipate and plan their future behaviour; therefore, helping to construct the culture of which they are a part (Sawyer et al. 66). This is observed in the characters that I created, as they had to plan their future. This they did when the time to do so came influenced by their social and cultural backgrounds as well as their own 'self.'

Lev S. Vygotsky argued that emotion is what rouses imagination, thinking, meaning making, and the understanding and use of signs: 'All psychological systems which attempt to explain art are nothing but various combinations of the theories of imagination and emotion' (Sawyer et al. 72). Through the embodiment of the creative process and subjective experience into objective form and meaning, creativity makes the emotions of the artist and audience to be public in a systematic way and it achieves an aesthetic effect from the tensions between form and meaning. Vygotsky supported this line of thinking in a short essay on the psychological 'paradox of the comedian' first noted by Diderot where actors are said to embody feelings that become what the entire audience feels (Explaining creativity). Nevertheless, these embodied feelings are not necessarily the actors' real feelings; the actors do not live through or subjectively experience the emotions they convey. Still, the audience interprets these emotions as real (Sawyer et al. 73). Vygotsky made inference that understanding this phenomenon lies at the intersection of the qualities of the actors and the general psychological and ideological patterns prevalent in a particular culture at a specific historical period: in the interaction of personality and culture. The creative person draws from "idealized passions" of his or her culture that are similar to the conventional literary or artistic forms on which novelists and other artists draw. Hence, the creative individual will draw material from the society and other works done by others before him or her. From this observation, I had to read other literary works to see how different writers write. The audience also play a crucial role in determining the creative process, for example, the art of the actors is the crystallization of these social passions in dialectic with the audience (Sawyer et al. 73). Vygotsky's argument is similar to the early studies of Gardner, which emphasized art as an interaction between creator, performer, viewer, and critic (Feldman 366-367).

I was also guided by the Psychoanalytic theory in designing my characters. This theory was invented by Sigmund Freud and developed into the literary field by Jacques Lucan. The major tenet of this theory is that the three concepts of the id, the ego and the super ego play an important part in the behavioural processes of the authors and their characters (Hossain). Jacques Lucan was to the idea that, ‘The unconscious is structured like a language’ as the unconscious is seen to play an important part as what writers write is influenced by the psychoanalytic concepts which are reflected in the characters of their work (Lindqvist 247).

Psychoanalysis explores the complexities of the human soul and mind, which is a major preoccupation of literature (Hossain). Therefore, as I developed a character like Cleopas, I looked at how external forces tried to hurt his ego and his reaction to the forces. For example, how he related to Joe was because he felt that his ego was being hurt when Joe reacts to him the way he does, that is trying to belittle him as he exercised his power on him, so this theory helped me demonstrate how the above concepts, that is, the id, the ego and the super ego influence the thoughts and the behaviour of my fictional characters. The super ego was portrayed through how the society played its part in influencing my characters’ behaviour.

## **SCOPE AND LIMITATION**

I narrowed down my creative work to the writing of fiction in the form of a novella under the sub-genre of young adult fiction as opposed to poetry, drama, and the short story. I focussed majorly on the challenges faced by the boy child in our society today.

In this project, I capitalized on the major aspects of the novel such as plot, character and characterization, language and style.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Creative writing in literature can be defined as writing in certain particular ‘literary’ genres such as poetry, drama and the novel. Creativity comes from the Latin word ‘creare’ that means to create or make and therefore I carried out my project through a creative perspective. For example, in the creation of settings and characters who are striving to achieve certain things in life hence built up conflicts, which kept my novella moving and at the end had a denouement. I as a creative writer nonconceded with the existing forms of readership and released my inner

narrative in a personal form that is often associated with stream of consciousness. In short, creativity was the key element that enabled me to write this novella.

I tapped my own personal speech as a form of expressing my inner vision and so in this manner, through the inner speech and my inner vision, I was able to come up with my creative piece. This means that I was able to put my thoughts and imaginations in the form of writing this novella.

Inner speech is that meaning that comes from social interaction; therefore, it is related to our own experience, to form a more intricately interconnected web of understanding of oneself and one's world. This means that I was able to create a societal setting and a fictional world that is very much similar to a real one; thus, creativity assisted me to compose a literary work from my imaginative ideas and my experience of growing up as a boy.

As a creative writer, I moved from the expressive self to the public other, who is the reader. Therefore, I hoped to say something to somebody else in writing this work. In this line, I was able to express secret desires and anxieties. I also brought in fantasy that expressed my unsatisfied wish of how I would like the society to be through the moral values that I put across in this novella but how it will impact on the reader or how they would propel the change there in will be out of their own volition. Vygotsky observes that creativity creates the self as well as external personalities (Sawyer et al. 164- 166).

The psychoanalytic theory also assisted me in this project in that it seeks evidence of unresolved emotions, psychological conflicts and contradictory attitudes or feelings toward a person, object, or an action, which was portrayed by various characters in this novella. This theory also assisted me as I explored childhood traumas and family life from my own experience which could be seen in the behaviour of my characters in this fictional work, for example, in the character of Kiori.

I have used secondary sources such as the internet to conduct research on the challenges of the boy child to find out what other people have written that concerns the boy child.

In a nutshell, I wrote this project through a creative perspective which encompassed imagination, experience and observation.

# ***THE AFRICAN SUNRISE***

## CHAPTER 1

Cleopas sat his son on his lap near a window seat, and his wife sat next to him. He could not have afforded to pay for an extra seat for his son who in any case might have been forced to stand inside the bus and give the seat to someone elderly as a show of courtesy.

The journey to the city was uneventful. His mother had assisted in the packing of the penurious clothing that her daughter-in-law and grandson had. All their clothes had fitted into two small suitcases. They had all woken up early anxious for the day and to catch the bus that plowed determinedly through this part of the country to the city. The bus was crammed to capacity with passengers. Their luggage had been firmly secured on the roof of the bus, on the vehicle's carrier together with loads of other things that the villagers were transporting to the city. These included squawky chicken, bags of maize, sweet potatoes, sacks of kales and beans, which they would sell in the city to middlemen at wholesale prices. These intermediaries bought the items at a throw away price then later sold them at exorbitant prices to the city folk.

When they alighted in the city, it was almost dark and Cleopas led his wife and son through the milling crowds of people who seemed to be going everywhere. They walked the streets in the streetlights, hurrying not to be caught by darkness in the unsafe street alleys. Occasionally, there had been incidences of mugging, rape, and even murder in the narrow streets that characterized Cleopas' abode.

By the time Cleopas was fumbling for the keys to his house, they were too tired to walk. The distance and the city noise had made them dog-tired. Elizabeth in particular had feelings of excitement and dismay. The spinning roast chicken she had seen through the windows of some big restaurants and the delicious aroma of delicacies of the city hotels had sent her appetite for food skyrocketing. She wished her husband had stopped to buy some for their supper but his mind seemed to be occupied elsewhere. She also had that foreboding nagging thought of their son getting lost in this massive crowd, as in anyway, how was he going to find his way to and from school as young as he was? This dismayed her, but she kept her thoughts to herself.

After unlocking the padlock, he ushered them in. It was a single room with some scattered pieces of furniture. An wooden table sat in the middle of the room, some armchairs were placed strategically round the table and a bed in one of the corners. A curtain hung loosely to conceal



the bed from the sitting area. A rope had been fastened from one wall to the other with some nails and plastic clothes' pegs had been used to fix it in place. A small cupboard, which was used to store food, stood at a corner further from the bed. As for the utensils, they were scanty but could serve their purpose. The room was shoehorned between others, which were at the front, back and on either side. The rooms were made of iron sheets and the property owner had made sure to use all the available space in constructing the shacks.

As one sat inside the room one could hear what was going on in the adjacent rooms: the loud music, the quarrels, the insults, and mothers admonishing a stray child. During the day when the sun was at its zenith, the heat was searing. The small windows cut on the sides did not help much to abate the heat and usually it was one small window per room.

Cleopas rummaged through some foodstuffs from the small cupboard, lit the cooking stove and out of these prepared a meal, which they ate in silence and prepared to sleep. It was almost ten o'clock in the night when they retired to bed, the boy slept on one of the long cushioned wooden chair and they, on the squeaky bed but sleep could not come by easily. His mind was occupied with thoughts of how he was going to enrol his son to a school and most importantly take his wife to hospital. When sleep at last overcame him, his mind was exhausted.

The old man appeared again in his dream. He had been having these weird dreams of the old man who came talking to him about things that he did not understand. He floated on indefensibly in his sleep. “. . . 1924 and the Italians had ruled Europe for four hundred and fifty years. Do you know that, that time the Kenyan newspaper was being printed in Mombasa when it was just one page? . . . and you say that you read history in those schools of yours . . . let me tell you . . . my memory is still fresh and I can recall the white man whom I worked for saying that they were going to finish the black man's culture if not his race. So all the items that are sold in the shops that come from the white man I would like them inspected as they are a major cause of the illnesses that have no known cure that our people are experiencing today . . . ,” the old man was telling him but Cleopas happened to be tongue-tied.

“Look at me now,” the old man persisted. “I now have eye cataracts and I cannot see with one of my eyes. I had gone to the hospital for them to remove them as I hear that in hospitals they just place something on the affected eye and the cataract just pops out of the eye but let me tell you . .

.” he hesitated, “without bribing those people, you will have to wait for a long time. Maybe forever before they can have you treated.”

“... and who are those people?” Cleopas managed to find a voice to ask.

“Those doctors have been brought and hired by the P.C.E.A church, although I do not know which hospital they come from. Without giving out something, you cannot be assisted so they told me to come back with somebody who will be there when the operation is being done but the others were not asked to bring anybody with them. After looking around so well I found that they are marred by corruption. That is what thrives best there . . . so I am hopeless . . . it is only this one eye that I am remaining with and with time I might lose both . . . this one cannot see . . . if I cover my other eye with my palm like this . . . ,” he tried to demonstrate, “God is my witness I cannot see you.”

“You need to be operated on,” Cleopas tried to advise, both stunned and shocked at the revelation and the prospect of the old man probably losing his eyesight.

“And that is how I will demonstrate to the head of state because I will go there . . . .” he went on, “To go to his house is not a problem to me at all. I knew his father and grandfather and his grandfather was my friend. I also have a close friend of mine who told me that he will personally take me there.” Cleopas knew that this will be a hard task to accomplish but said nothing.

“So I want you to assist me to write a letter that I will give to the Head of State with my own hands. In it I want you to tell him about the issue of manufactured foods and about the eye cataracts which I think came about because of resulting to taking tea with sugar instead of bone soup for the last ten years,” he went on uninterrupted. “I want to also ask him in that letter to assist me with a piece of land to grow apples so that the technology I learnt of growing apples from the white man may not go to waste. To show this I will produce a copy of my certificate certifying my ability to grow different varieties of apples as I know of about thirty varieties . . . and there is something we will touch on as we write the letter . . .” he hesitated. “We will tell him that I was one of those who chose his father’s bodyguards when he was elected as the Head of State after we took power from the white man . . . ,” he seemed to reflect. “. . . and I want us to write a good story so that when he sees me he will recognize me . . . and I know that he will give an order that these cataracts be removed or give me money for the operation. For at another

mission hospital they do the operation at a cost of eighty thousand shillings but I do not have the money. I do not know how those doctors remove the eye cataracts. . . . I was told that one just feels as if he is being caressed in the eye and ‘pop’ the cataract is removed without one even feeling it when it comes out.”

“What about here at the government hospital . . . have you asked around whether they can surgically remove eye cataracts? Cleopas tried to inquire from the old man. The government had started a Universal Health Care insurance scheme for its citizens.

“I don’t know and I have not heard about it although it is a government hospital. I once saw with my own eyes somebody being operated on and shivers ran down my spine and so I don’t think I can dare go for an operation in that hospital. So let me pass through the way that I am going and see whether I will be assisted. I know the Head of State will assist me as he has the power to say that I be removed these cataracts. You know he cannot know about these things but I am going to hint to him about that corruption that is going on in that P.C.E.A Hospital and the high cost of this kind of a surgery in the other hospitals. I want to accuse them of corruption as they are supposed to be doing the eye cataracts as an initiative of the church . . . free of charge. I will also mention that the person who assisted me to write this letter is a teacher and he also has a family of three, two girls and one son, and he doesn’t have a piece of land . . . .”

“We will write the letter when you are ready,” Cleopas tried to defend himself.

“It is now that I am ready. I want us to write the letter right away. It is now that I feel I have to see him after they refused to treat me so that I can ask him to think wisely on how to put the country right . . . .”

Cleopas woke with a start, his mind so much confused about the dream that he glanced at his wife who was peacefully sleeping beside him. He could not stop wondering whether she was ‘really’ sick. She did not even stir when Cleopas sat in bed to think about the dream but he could not make head or tail about it. The old man had seemed familiar but he could not make out his face. He then drifted into a languorous sleep wondering whether it had been a latent dream. What if they were going to have two more children, which were girls? It was not a bad idea but for him he wanted at least five children.

When he finally woke up in the morning, he knew he had to go to his place of work and ask for permission to be away for at least one working day. He did not know how the principal was going to take it as there might be other teachers seeking for permission to be away on that same day. He knew without a doubt that he might end up being the sacrificial lamb as the school did not allow more than three teachers to be absent on a single day but he braced himself up. He had not informed any of his colleagues about his wife's condition and he was not sure he would have done so even if she had been sick for a whole year knowing that few if any would have sympathized with him. The welfare they had as teachers of that school could not have helped much either. The welfare members only came in when one lost a close relative. This had been emphasized in bold on the welfare constitutional rules: **each member of this welfare will be required to give out a standardised amount of money if any member loses a close relative, that is, a member of his nuclear family or his or her mother or father.** So, if your uncle or grandfather died, the members were asked to contribute voluntarily. This rule had been amended to be like so after some members had claimed numerable deaths of their non-existent uncles, aunts, and grandparents. The other welfare constitutional rule that might have made it possible for him to be assisted was that: members are supposed to contribute money if one of the members or his nuclear family were admitted to hospital and were in critical conditions and the member or his family were unable to pay for the hospital bills. Accordingly, Cleopas did not fit in this either as his wife had not been admitted to any hospital. Moreover, whatever they gave as contributions was not much.

Hannanias also woke up, so did Kiori-for that was the boy's name. She asked for the usual ingredients to help her prepare tea and she set out to the task.

"I think I feel a little bit better now," she said after a long silence over breakfast.

"But you still need to see a doctor," Cleopas said pensively. "I am going to ask for permission to be away for a day and I will be back in a jiffy to take you to the General Hospital so that you can have a check-up."

After taking a hurried shower in the shared bathroom, he groomed his best behind the curtain. A black tailor made pair of trousers which fitted him well and a clean blue and white striped shirt and his laced black pair of shoes which his wife had helped to polish as he was bathing. He did not like keeping his hair long and so running a comb through was easy and he was ready within

no time. He did not put on a tie as he did not fancy ties and he did not want to be nicknamed “Wagatai” as they had nicknamed a certain teacher who always wore a tie to school during his schooling days. He bade his family goodbye after warning them not to venture far away from the house.

As soon as he had left, Hannanias decided to have a look around. No sooner had she stepped out of the door than she was met by a confused sight to behold. The houses looked alike and they were surrounded by similar housing back, front and sideways. The lavatories were on one side of the shacks and so were the bathrooms. There were no gates to the shacks and they all looked alike, like a shilling to another. As she went further, she could not help to notice the labyrinth of trenches running through the shacks that carried dirty water and emitted a very foul smell. The neighbours did not even bother to greet her, whom she found quite strange, but having heard so much about the city people, this did not make her rankle and she decided to mind her own.

She had just passed a few blocks of houses when she came face to face with a street fight. Two men were going at each other like enraged bulls. In no time, the men’s shirts had been reduced to tatters and the onlookers did not attempt to intervene. Whatever that they were fighting for did not seem clear and it looked like they were somehow drunk. One of the men hurled insults at the other who retorted in equal measure.

“You thieving son of a . . . . I am going to teach you not to mess with the master,” said one of them viciously. He appeared a bit shorter and stouter than his opponent did and therefore had some physical advantage over him.

“Go to hell, you think I came to the city to paint donkeys?” The other man hurled the insult, viciousness showing all over his face. He was lean and of medium height. He was now sweating as he tried hard to topple his opponent and make him kiss the ground while at the same time trying to disengage from the vise-like grip that had almost rendered him immobile.

“Today I will show you the way to your mama’s hovel, you snitch,” said the shorter of the two. They were now at each other’s throats. The spectators cringed at the thought of death. Those at the back craned their necks to have a better view.

“Beat him up Master,” some shouted as the others dared the other man to get even with the so-called Master.

“Show him that you are not mama’s boy, Thande!” they taunted the taller of the two.

“You are going to give me back my money, dead or alive. You thieving bastard,” howled Master.

“I will, if it’s your mother’s money,” replied the other man who seemed to be getting a fair share of the beating and who Hannanias now identified as the one being called Thande. From the exchange of words, she was able to gather that the men were fighting over some money, which had been snatched from a lady, by the roadside. The purse had been conveniently disposed off after it had been ripped open and emptied.

Frightened, she moved on taking care to note landmarks that would assist her to find her way back home, as she did not want to get lost in this maze of houses. She came to the edge of the slum upon which a tarmac road ran as far as the eye could see. On the other side of that road, just opposite the shacks, were well-constructed houses made of bricks and red roofing tiles.

On the lower end of the slum was a river that carried dirty smelly water downstream. This must be the river that Cleopas had always told her about when he came back to their rural home, she mused. When it rained, it flooded and its roaring could be heard miles away as it murderously raged carrying along with it some of the houses that were built on the lower range.

When such flooding occurred, the NGO people came to visit the slums and donated blankets, crockery and other essential items to the affected but more often than not, people who had not been affected by the flooding found a way to put their names on the list alongside those affected.

Most of the slum dwellers did not have a stable job and almost all the young people did not go to school and evidently had grouped into gangs that terrorized people along the busy tarmac road early in the mornings and late in the evenings. It was a very daunting task for the police to apprehend them as they smartly disappeared into the maze of houses once they robbed someone. The police could not make out their way in these confusing alleys, and even if they tried to pursue them, they could not tell which house the gang had disappeared into. Hannanias found herself silently praying that her son would not join the gangs.

She decided to walk back the way she had come lest her son wandered away from the house. When she came to the place where the men had been fighting, the crowd had disappeared. She almost took a wrong turn but for a barber’s shop and a trader who had placed his plastic

merchandise on some make shift table on which he sold plastic wares: plates, cups, bowls, basins, and water jugs, arranged according to their various sizes. These made her recollect her sense of direction and within no time, she was inside the house.

Meanwhile feeling at home, Kiori had already made some friends and they were playing a game of marbles near the lavatories with four other boys of his age. She called him inside and started warning him of the friends he kept company with. She had not liked the scene she had witnessed earlier of the fight and the ragged clothing of these young boys sounded a warning as to what kind of men they would grow up to be in no time. She felt pity that there was nothing she could do to salvage them from their situation that steered them to their ineluctable destiny. The men who had been fighting could not be more than twenty-five years of age or so, she thought and already they had started to show their fangs and ultimately these young boys will end up being their protégé.

You only miss the sunshine when it starts to pour. Now she had second thoughts about faking her illness so as to come to the city. She had not made any friends yet and she found the heat overwhelming. The noise was also a confusing lot. She tried to rack her brains on what to do next but did not come to an amicable solution. She was now on the rack, as she grew claustrophobic. She warmed the last night left over food for their mid-day meal and rested to await Cleopas' return. She was on the sixes and sevens as to whether to reveal her well-kept secret. She wished she were in her mother-in-law's house. She wondered how she was going to pull through in this bedlam with no one to confide in or to talk to.

She now thought that she had gone overboard in her pretence while in actual fact she had just wanted to find out whether her husband had a city woman. In their rural home, there had always been such stories that those men who went to work in the city were 'kept' by city women and this made them to even forget their families. It was a reprieve for her when she had found no woman in her husband's house but this place teeming with people intimidated her. She wished her husband had taken a house on the other side of the road, among the beautiful houses that she had seen, but she knew it would cost an arm and a leg to rent. She excused herself to go and rest on the bed as Kiori took a nap on the long seat.

As soon as his mother was asleep, he slipped out of the house and went in search of the friends he had made.

## CHAPTER 2

At school, Cleopas went to see the school principal for a day off. He had only a diaphanous hope of success in getting the day off impromptu. He recounted what had transpired between him and the principal about the issue of vacating the office of the charity club and other instances where they had rubbed shoulders as he walked to his office but he knew that he would have to see the director of the school if push came to shove.

“You do know our school procedure,” said the principal gruffly, after Cleopas had sat down and stated his reason for coming to see him.

“Yes sir,” Cleopas replied, keeping his voice as respectful as possible, “but this issue . . . .”

“There are no ifs and buts. Go and look for teachers to step in for you during your absence in all the classes that you have lessons with, come to me when you already have the list of step-in’s and then ask for your permission,” the principal said stiffly. “You do know that we cannot leave the students unattended, don’t you?”

Cleopas went out downcast. He knew how difficult it was to find teachers who were willing to teach extra lessons during their free time, more so for him who did not have many friends. Those who were willing might have lessons that coincided with his lessons while others might claim that their lessons were too many for the day and that they had only one or two free lessons in which they wanted to rest their tired limbs.

It was almost at the end of the day when Cleopas did finally manage, after microscopic scrutiny and comparisons of timetables, to find some teachers who pledged to attend his lessons. He hoped that they would not sabotage him when he was away as some always did when left with such responsibilities and so he had his off duty granted for the following day and the next.

The day had been hectic and tensed. He had not been in a position to concentrate fully during the lessons and he had longed for the day to end. During one of the lessons, he had asked the students to read a comprehension passage aloud as they always did but he came to his senses after one of his favourite students had brought him back to class. He informed him that they were through with the reading of the passage and were waiting for him to start asking them questions from the passage. The student asked whether they were to answer the questions orally or to write



them down in their books. It was at this moment that Cleopas realized that he had been staring blankly at the page of the textbook from where they were reading. He had not even turned to the next page as the students did so and he thought that he had heard some giggling from them but he had not paid any attention.

His mind had lost concentration and had wandered from what they were reading as he tried to evaluate all the schools that were nearby. He knew with the salary that he was getting, he could never manage to enrol him in the primary section of the school that he was teaching in. What an irony! The school was a high cost school and he marvelled at the salary they were being paid. Not even enough to pay fees for one child! He thought of talking to the director of the school about it as he could allow him to pay a little less than the other parents paid. This was done as a subsidiary to his employees. However, he knew with a reduction of two or three thousand shillings he would have to live from hand to mouth and that was not possible as he was also saving a little money for his future prospects. He pondered over the idea in his head and decided that he was going to enrol him in a public school where the fees were subsidized by the government as it had declared a sort of a free primary education for all the children who were of school going age. According to this system, parents had only a little money to pay and education was not too expensive in these schools to keep many poor students from attending school. Though the education in these schools was free, there were ridiculous expenses that were being made on the parents by the school heads. In a certain school, the parents were asked to pay some ten shillings each, for the deworming of their children and ten shillings for the trimming of the school fence as it was a kei apple fence.

As he went home that day after school, he wore a forlorn face. He had always thought it silly to join in the staffroom conversations where the other teachers tried to cite oppression in terms of what the school was earning from the large number students in terms of school fees and what they were being paid as salaries. They tried to come up with figures according to the number of students that they taught and then distributing expenses of books, stationery and meals, which they deducted from the fees paid, but this was not of interest to him. He had always been satisfied with whatever he earned without lifting a finger but now his son could not even afford to be in the primary section of the group of schools that he taught in and considering that he worked at the high school section, it was somehow absurd. What would have happened if he had

two, or three, or four more children? he asked himself as reality suddenly dwelt on him. So, were these schools meant to be some sort of moneymaking machines? He mulled things over. All along he had thought that they had the interest of the learners at heart and he had never viewed them in terms of cash cows otherwise the owners would give a fair salary to their employees or maybe if that was to happen, most people would quit their jobs after getting enough . . . aha . . . That was it! If people were paid enough money, then the employers won't have any employees in the long run . . . that was why they had to pay them as little as it was acceptable so that they would keep working, hoping that one day they'll have accumulated enough to realize and build their dreams. At least he did not want an equal share, as this would have made him an overnight millionaire, but he reasoned out that a fair share would have been plausible. Nevertheless, what did it matter to him? he found himself excogitating. The money he was getting as a salary could allow him to live a fairly comfortable lifestyle and not in squalor as most of his neighbours were and by renting a house in the low paying area, he had always ensured that he had some money to save with the bank.

He was brought to the present by a speeding car, which hooted at him and almost ran him over. He was almost sure that the car tyres had brushed the toes of his feet. The pedestrians on either sides of the road had stared at him, shock written all over their faces. He was about to cross over to the other side of the bridge that ran over the dirty river near his residence when the car whizzed by.

As his memory was jolted back, he knew that he had to pass by the grocer's shop and buy some vegetables for their supper as he had enough flour in the house to last them for a whole week and because it was a week to the end of the month, he was not worried about food.

The shopkeeper was a slender man of about forty. He was motor mouthed with his customers, most of who lived in the ghetto. He knew almost all the men and women who were salaried and at times gave them goods on credit to be paid at the end of the month but was very stingy with those who did not have a regular income. As Cleopas approached the shop, he wondered how the grocer managed to keep so lean with that entire foodstuff surrounding him.

"Hello Cleopas," he greeted him as he rose from the chair he always sat on behind his wares.

"Hello and what do you have for us today?" Cleopas asked.

“Lots of fruits and vegetables, enough for everyone . . . and fresh ones too,” he answered. “And how comes I don’t see you often these days or do you now go to shop at the big supermarkets at the city centre like the big shots in big cars and leave us, skinny ghetto rats to starve? he asked, trying to rearrange the tomatoes, mangoes and spinach. Normally, he placed the overstayed fruits and vegetables at the front of the piles and at times, he would coat them with a spray of water so that they appeared luxuriant while the fresh ones, he placed behind these. He did this so that the unsuspecting buyers would think that those at the front of the piles were the best- put there for display to attract customers. By doing so, he ensured that he did not have to cope with a lot of rotten fruits and vegetables, which he was forced to sell to the lowborn in the ghetto at throwaway prices. Whole bunches of spinach and kales, whole cabbages and tins of tomatoes and fruits could go for as low as twenty shillings after heated bargaining and haggling with the unemployed. He knew he had to let them go even without passing them on the scales, which he used for the measurement of the fresh ones.

“Are they fresh?” Cleopas inquired.

“Come on now, Cleopas, you know me well. I am not one of those who go committing all sorts of evil to gain wealth,” he said, “like I have heard that in some developed countries, they are now injecting their vegetables and fruits with chemicals that keep them fresh for long and to make them appear ripe when in actual sense they were harvested before their time. Surely, you cannot imagine me doing that.”

“Let me have a kilo of kales mixed with a little spinach, a quarter of bulb onions and tomatoes,” Cleopas said handing him the money.

“It looks as if today we have . . . visitors,” he said as he packed the items in a recyclable paper bag, “or are we starving?” he asked with a sneer, as he handed Cleopas the bag, now full with the things that he had bought.

This shopkeeper was an interesting man and although at first he had treated Cleopas with some sort of suspicion, he had eventually come round to trusting him and even saw him as a friend. Cleopas had also come to learn that the grocer went by the name of Opash, neither a name that he made head nor tail of its meaning or its origin. Opash was one of those who could be termed

as 'the natives' of this ghetto estate. Just like the many others who resided here, his education was minimal although he knew how to do his own calculations with the groceries.

### CHAPTER 3

Cleopas manoeuvred his way through the maze of pathways and knocked upon his door. He set his shopping on the small table, sat to take off his shoes and put on a pair of sandals. Hannanias was still in bed and a thought to reveal her status as regarding her health crisscrossed on her mind but she did not bring herself to actualize it.

“How did it go at school? I have been waiting for you all day . . . what took you so long? I was so worried being all alone in here . . . will we manage to go to the hospital this late?” she had a myriad of questions for Cleopas.

“It was a busy day but I got the permission to be away from school for two days starting tomorrow. It was difficult for me to get the permission there and then. We will first pass by the bank as soon as they open so that we can have some money as it might be needed for your check up, first thing tomorrow in the morning. Later if all is well I will go to look for a vacancy in the school that I want to enrol Kiori in,” Cleopas said as he slumped back into the chair.

“I think I am okay and there is no need to . . .” she started.

“No Hannanias,” Cleopas cut her short, “you need a medical doctor to have a look at you before you can run into any conclusions . . .”

“But you see, I am feeling quite okay now . . . I even went out to look at the surrounding . . . and . . . and . . . I . . . I . . . I . . .,” she stammered.

“What! You mean to say that you have been out all alone in this strange place. Oh my God, why did you do that! What if you had got lost? Where would I have begun looking for you?” Cleopas said, starting to get agitated.

“It was okay. See I am right here and did not get lost. I didn’t go far and I was keen to note the way that I went,” she replied. “There were two men who were fighting but I didn’t stay there long to the end of the fight,” she said a little affright.

“Here men fight over anything and everything, women, alcohol and money,” Cleopas said cautiously. “And where is Kiori?” he asked in sudden realization.

This jolted her back to her senses and the feeling of triumph that had started to crop into her melted away like butter exposed to heat. She bolted out of the house followed by Cleopas at her heels. They found him just a few blocks away with some boys who were trying to demonstrate to him how to sniff glue, from some dirty bottles, which was commonly used by shoemakers to mend shoes. Kiori looked on, amazed by what he was seeing. He longed to have a try at the sniffing but he was afraid of getting intoxicated. The boys were almost his age and they stepped back as soon as they saw Cleopas approach. Kiori was left stunned like a trapped animal. As his mother and father approached him, he started to walk toward them timidly.

“Hey young boy,” Cleopas said between clenched teeth, “you have not been here for a day and I can see that you have already started forming company. Let’s go into the house before I give you a beating,” he threatened as he took him by the collar of his shirt and led him away from the urchins.

Once inside the house, he lectured his son on what was good for him and advised him to stay away from drugs and those who would lead him astray. He felt that it was a failure on his part not to have warned his son about whom not to keep company with especially the non-school going, glue-sniffing ragamuffins. Such kids, he knew would soon graduate to smoking bhang and later to heroin and cocaine and eventually they would be gun-trotting youths just like their predecessors.

“Here in this place nearly all the young people are criminals so you better keep away from those who do not have manners,” he said with finality.

It was true. Here in this place every secret was kept under closed doors. One knew so and so or the son of so and so was a thief but none dared to tell on them. This community seemed to have been bonded by the harsh life that they experienced day in day out. The most surprising thing was that: they never stole from each other in the ghetto. They seemed to have come to an agreement about that and so most of the stealing took place at the roadside or in the rich neighbourhoods. Those who were mature enough went stealing as far as from the city centre.

The girls too had their way of life. Immediately they came of age, they would join those other girls in scanty dressing who frequented the various nightclubs in the city. Here they would hook up with clients who would buy drinks and food and then give them money in exchange for a

night's lay. This money would last them a day or two after going to bed with their clients in the cheap hotel lodgings. They were out looking for clients almost on a daily basis and it stuck like a habit on them and therefore, with or without money, they were always out in the cold streets at night doing their trade.

When these girls became old or became mothers and they could no longer compete with the upcoming young girls over men at the nightclubs, they retreated into the ghetto, where they now dated men from the ghetto who were no-good drunkards with little if anything to offer them. There was usually a stiff competition for the men who brew illegal liquor and drug mules and those who sold them because they at least had something to offer. This, the women now did at the comfort of their homes when their children were out on their various excursions. Most of them now had a tooth or two missing from being beaten by the ruthless men or from fighting amongst themselves for a man who was worthy a few shillings.

Now this slum had a history of its own. The original inhabitants had been a group of homeless street dwellers who had found themselves a no man's land where they had built illegal structures in which they had dwelt depending on the well to do Muslim and Indian communities who provided them with their leftover food. They went begging for the food at the doorsteps but some of the people were generous enough such that they just placed the leftover food at their doorsteps in the evenings and waited for the street families to come and collect it. The most surprising thing was that they never stole the plates but emptied the food and left the plates there. This food was often not enough and at most times they had to go for food forages from bins that were placed strategically in front of restaurants and food kiosks. Mothers and children who were of age did the food foraging. The food was brought and shared out to the younger siblings and even idle fathers who had spent their day drinking illegal brew and gambling amongst themselves also ate from the collection that was brought back wrapped in polythene bags, and so the lives of these lowborn people continued.

Life was not as smooth as it would have seemed to be. These residents had fought endless battles with the city council askaris and sometimes, actual police forces who burnt and brought down the illegal structures built of broken pieces of cardboards, sheets of tin cut out from old chemical and water drums and other containers, discarded canvases and polythene papers and carton boxes. These battles at times would last a whole day with the police hauling tear gas canisters

and firing rubber bullets at the residents while they fought back with sticks and stones. They were however, not deterred by the long battles as they always found a way of coming back in the evenings and rebuilding their homes some more until the government decided that enough was enough. The government decided to allocate them a piece of land and every mature person who had an identity card was given a plot of land just enough to build a house by some government officials who had been assigned the task. The scheme was a most welcome idea as they set out to construct houses that they could now call their own homes on that other disused lower part of the city.

The walls of their new houses were mostly made of mud, which was readily available while the roofs were made of shiny iron sheets, which were donated by some NGO that had come on board to help. Within no time a kind of a city village had cropped up and so it is to be understood that, this was a community that knew each other perfectly well. They were later given title deeds to these plots of land by the lands ministry and everyone was happy. This was before the madness of land grabbing had infiltrated into the minds of the people. Later after many years, the mud structures fell apart and gave way to structures made of iron sheets all round including the walls as there was nowhere they could now dig up soil to make mud with. The country was also developing and they did not want to look backward and outdated by building houses made of mud.

After Cleopas had eaten the meal that his wife had prepared and she too and Kiori had eaten they retired to bed early but sleep could not come easily due to the noise that emanated from the neighbourhood. He longed for the day when he would build his own house in the rural area in his own farm after buying a huge piece of land, as this was what he was saving for. He was also thinking of running a sheep ranch on this farm, which would see him through his twilight years but his thoughts were incessantly being interrupted by the cacophony of radio, television and human noises, which seemed to be perpetually hampering their peace and sleep.

He spent a restless night and he was looking forward to when the day would dawn so that he would be through with all the disquietude that tended to overcome him.



## CHAPTER 4

Baa, baa, black sheep . . .

Sung the children at a high pitch, trying to outdo each other. Kiori had been enrolled at a school and one year later, he was good in class work as any other bright child. He could count and add small figures and sing the ‘a . . . b . . . c’ rhyme as well as other nursery rhymes perfectly well as the adage goes, he had taken to education like a fish to water.

The school was not far from where they lived but it was quite a distance. He had to cross the bridge that went over the river and walk to the other side for about three kilometres to the school. It was a nursery school, as Cleopas could not have afforded to take him to the ones labelled kindergartens and academies. These were regarded as high-cost schools and normally they often consisted of the kindergarten, primary and secondary sections just like the one that he worked in. Being a graduate teacher, he taught at the high school section of the group of schools but phew! The money that these kids paid as fees per term would have taken him a whole one-month’s salary to pay and so he had not bothered searching for vacancies in such schools.

Hanannias had stayed in the city for a whole three months after which she had gone back to the village. She and her husband had decided that Kiori was to stay in the city if he was to get the quality education that they yearned for him to acquire. His wife for pulling such kind of a trick on him had teed off Cleopas but after some days, he had forgiven her like the level headed person that he was. He had felt mortified by her childish behaviour after she had revealed her pretentious behaviour about her purported illness and he did not even have the guts to tell his mother about it. He had seen her off at the central bus station where she had boarded the usual bus from the city to their rural home one fine Sunday morning, with provisions to last her and his mother two whole weeks. He smiled at the way she had learnt to cope with the ways of the city. In fact, she could now easily find her way around the city and do shopping without the fear of being mugged.

Kiori was over the moon when he was enrolled in his new school and when he was told that he was to remain with his father in the city. Here, he did not lack company as a few of the boys who attended the school were from the ghetto. They always woke up early, prepared, and joined the throngs of people on the main road on their way to school.

At first, he was afraid of crossing the bridge that passed across the river that was near the slum village but with time, he got used to it. This river harboured and carried all sorts of filth within it. At times, they would stop to watch as a dead body was fished out of the river, probably a drunk or a murder victim but what really made him sick in the stomach were the numerous human fetuses wrapped inside polythene bags that the police fished out of the river. These were from the numerous illegal abortions that were carried out by the quack doctors in the city on the young girls from the ghetto who helplessly went to them for assistance. When he witnessed such scenes, he could not eat food for that day and even the next as he felt like retching his guts out immediately he put food in his mouth. Sometimes, these scenes affected him for days and even gave him nightmares. The removing of these corpses from the river did not take long as the river was not deep and so they were rarely late for school.

The water that this river carried was not fit for human consumption. It was smelly and greyish in colour. Some of his friends had even told him that the city mortuaries emptied the water that they used to wash dead bodies with, into this river and this made him scared of falling over into the river whenever he was crossing the bridge on his way to and from school.

One day a man from the ghetto was being fished out from the river as Kiori and his friends were going to school. He was so stiff that he was giving the villagers a hard time to get him out from the slimy muddy water and it was not until the police had arrived in their truck and protective gear suits that the task was accomplished. His face had been covered with slime and mud and water had to be splashed on his face for clear identification. When this was done, the villagers were shocked, as they had known the man for a long time. He was a renowned boozehound and he must have missed his way back from a drinking spree before plunging into the dirty river.

At school, Kiori was among the bright children and consequently joined Morrison primary school. The green pair of uniform excited him, as they had worn no uniform while in nursery school. Some boys from the ghetto had also found their way there although most of them dropped out and few of them survived up to class eight where they were required to sit for their K.C.P.E. (Kenya Certificate for Primary Education) examinations.

Those who stayed on in school were taunted and jeered at, by those who had dropped out to form street gangs and could be seen now openly sniffing glue from dirty bottles. Those who stayed on were regarded as weaklings and cowards. Kiori was one of those who stayed on due to his fear of

his father, although he at times felt some kind of braveness creep into him and an inner voice, which kept on telling him not to fear, and that he could be like the others who had quit school but he did not actualize it.

At times Kiori would give a try at the glue sniffing, although, discreetly. The experienced boys would try to initiate them to their group by making them sniff glue as a starter. They would gather them at a secluded corner and show them how to do it. They usually placed their lips on the opening of the bottle necks in such a way that there was some space left for the air to go into the bottles as they inhaled and took deep breaths of the glue fumes. At first Kiori had been afraid but he was overcome by curiosity. After having a go at the sniffing he had felt very dizzy and his head had gone in a whirl but after a while, he did not feel anything although his speech slurred a little.

His father had started sensing that something was going wrong with his son and he warned him regularly against wayward behaviour. On top of the warnings, he always ensured that he took him with him while going for Sunday services and devotions at the Catholic Church for he wanted him to grow up responsibly and to walk in the ways of God.

At the church, Kiori was made to join Sunday school where they learnt many Bible teachings from the Sunday school teacher. Here, he learnt the virtues of being a Christian: humility, forgiveness, and being good to others. Ultimately, feelings of mercy infiltrated into his heart and he began feeling sorry for the boys who got themselves gunned down by the police or stoned to death by angry mobs from the estates that they went stealing from. As most of the boys who were killed were underage, he often found himself wondering how those people and even the police could not recognize the fact that these were young boys who were just trying to be heroic and that poverty was what was causing all the crime.

“Why couldn’t they just arrest them instead of killing them in cold blood?” he had once wondered when one of his best friend was pursued and gunned down just as he was about to get into the ghetto after having snatched a purse from a woman at the eighth street in Eastleigh. After the contents of the purse were emptied, it was discovered that it only contained a few coins, some tissue paper, lip-gloss in a squeezable tube and some lipstick. “Why didn’t the police go for the big time robbers who carried guns?” he had tried to reason out, but who was there for him to lend him a listening ear or share his sentiments?

The church was a solace for him and was like balm to his parched soul. Here, they would listen to the stories of Jesus and other Bible stories and sung songs, which rejuvenated their spirits, and they felt that the kingdom of heaven belonged to the poor and the wretched of the earth. One of the songs that made him sing his heart out went like:

Father Abraham had many sons

Many sons had Father Abraham

I am one of them

And so are you . . . .

This song was accompanied by the actions of lifting their arms and the chin and finally sitting down as it ended. Were they not the true sons of Abraham? He felt that one day all the suffering that the people were going through would end and everyone would be happy and live in joy when all the unpleasantness in the world would vanish as they had been promised in the Bible.

His heart had also started flowing toward the altar boys whom he greatly admired. He would at times gaze at their immaculate uniforms, and long to touch the uniform with his bare hands but they were always far removed from them that their worlds seemed different. He hoped that one day he would be one of them, sitting at the front with the Catholic father in his robes and him in the red cassock and liturgical surplice. He especially loved the thurifer who handed the thurible to the Catholic father. The smell of the incense as the priest incensed the altar, the scripture book and then the congregation exhilarated him. He also admired doing duties as they did such as carrying the host and wine and the towel and the water that the priest used to wash his hands with, before dishing out the host to the worshippers. In addition, they were the ones who carried the lit candles as they walked at the front of the priest or at his both sides during processions such as entering the church during mass. However, this had to wait for the right time, that is, until he was baptized and then given the confirmation, which was the second sacrament from that of baptism.

After church, Kiori met with his other friends who never went to church, in fact, it was only him and two other boys who went to the church in the whole ghetto. Although he tried to tell them of the goodness of going to church and to school, they never gave a hoot. His good intentions were overpowered by the pressure they had on him. They started telling him of their various triumphs

in the various risky undertakings that they had had during the day such as how they had ventured into far-flung ghettos and made friends who had shown them knives hidden in their pockets, which they used during fights and muggings.

Now they were telling him how they were going to brave the knife during their initiation into manhood. One of the boys whose name was Dan was perpetually being mocked as his elder brother, as word had leaked out to the whole ghetto, had cried and wailed like a woman as he was undergoing the rite. “Me, I will face the knife like a man,” one of the boys was saying, “and then I will join the big gang of Master and go into stealing big things.”

“You are a big coward,” said Mwai. “The other day you beat it when we met the gang from down town ghetto and that shows that you cannot stand the knife,” he added, his voice full of pride, as he was known to be the toughest among his age mates.

“Let us do it on ourselves and see who is the bravest,” the boy who had started the conversation, challenged. They were about four boys and they came to the decision that they should go to their homes and look for a knife with which to accomplish their mission of initiating themselves. Dan volunteered and darted to their home, which was two houses away to fetch the knife, and within minutes, he was back with a knife. Kiori shuddered at the thought of slicing off his foreskin with the knife and so he did not want to be the first one to do it.

## CHAPTER 5

At school, Cleopas was a troubled man. Joe Rigogo, the school principal, was always interfering in Cleopas' department so often that Cleopas felt that one day he might voice his thoughts and tell him to his face to run the department himself.

On that particular opening day meeting, Cleopas had almost told him his mind. He had almost told him to take over the running of department but he had held his reigns as a noble man. Contrary to the director's directive that a H.O.D. should not have more than twenty-eight lessons a week so that they may have enough time to prepare and file the schemes of work and other departmental files such as minutes of their departmental meetings; in addition, checking to see that the records of work were up to date. Mr. Rigogo had tried to infuriate the teachers by hiking the lessons to above thirty claiming that people should lead by example, obviously to mock Cleopas whom he knew had gone to see the director to complain about the intermeddling in his department.

It happened that after the director had left the meeting, Mr. Rigogo had asked the teachers to remain behind as he had something to say.

"So . . . when it hits thirty three lessons be comfortable as you are in twenty four lessons, so that is what we are going to do. First, before we decide if there is a inadequacy . . . er . . .er . . . whether we are overstaffed or inadequate or what? Er . . . understaffed . . . er . . .," he had started and then hesitated, obviously waiting for someone to fill in for him an appropriate word. When nobody did, he continued to say. "So that is what we are going to do with the examination office with all the subjects we are having and we are introducing computer. . . . er . . . we are going to introduce a computer class for form one only and the repeaters that are going to come . . . er . . . with a computer subject. . . . So thirty three is a maximum . . . twenty seven is minimum. So I don't know what we are going to do . . . er . . . the teachers are going to have their meeting . . ."

"Their departmental meetings," Mr. Ken Mbita, the examination officer intercepted.

"Departmental meetings after this . . .," the principal picked the conversation up. "And they are going to allocate themselves the subjects . . . ." the subjects? Cleopas wondered. Surely, it must be lessons and not subjects.

“Now, the other issue is tomorrow,” he said. “Actually tomorrow is very essential. It is the day we are expecting the boys from the long holiday and you know the work you should do. One, we need to allot who are going to be registering them as they come in. Normally we give this to the ladies because they are the ones we don’t want to task a lot, isn’t it? Like now you people need to be on the desk there registering them as they come in. that is, you check them as they come in according to the classes. Let them be known that they have come in. That one should be the point number one,” he paused to let it sink into his workforce, some of them who had been listening to him with half an ear.

“Point number two should be . . .er . . .er . . . what?” he seemed to lack words, “because that is not point number two . . . er . . . er . . . er . . . I think that is the last point . . . uh?”

“What last point?” Cleopas wondered.

“Because they can refuse to be checked in,” Mr. Rigogo tried to rumble on, “depending on the situation you are in, so that one should be the last one here. In this case, you have dealt with every section and now you started back to school and here you are, you are marked in. Is that okay? So you are going to be here . . . ,” he tried to demonstrate to the lady teachers, “Nyinyi ndio mtakuwa point ya mwisho . . .er . . .kwa ile gate nyingine,” he said in concocted Swahili to mean that, “You are going to be at the furthest end near the second gate.”

“You are going to organize yourselves,” the principal continued. “You will handle this, you this and you this, is that okay ladies?” he said gesticulating and the ladies gave a subdued ‘yes.’

“Er . . . er . . . gentlemen we are here now,” Mr. Rigogo said bracing himself. “Our work is the donkey’s but . . . uh . . . one, there is that part of the gate, we have the watchman . . . er . . . Mr. Nixon, what does the watchman check?” the question was directed to one of the most active teachers in the frisking of the students. In fact, he had severally seized drugs and alcohol hidden in the most unsuspecting areas by the students. Some disguised as toothpaste and others hidden under the rolls of tissue paper.

“The body . . . the watchman checks the body,” Mr. Nixon said. This made some of the teachers and even the principal to laugh out aloud. Cleopas thought that they had taken ‘the body’ to mean a corpse but he did not laugh with the others.

“The students sometimes come in large numbers especially those who come from the same location such that it becomes too difficult for the watchman to effectively frisk them all,” Mr. Nixon chipped in.

“Yes, the work will be easier if we enlist the class teachers and a group of four to five teachers to assist,” another teacher voiced his opinion.

“So we divide ourselves among those classes . . . uh . . . three of them,” the principal said.

“May I please ask what we are to check on?” a newly arrived teacher who had joined the fraternity asked, directing the question to the principal.

“When we now divide ourselves,” the principal said, “ first to know who is going where . . . er . . . you know what you are going to do there, check! You know if it is the piped trousers . . . er . . . the unshaved hair . . . er . . . that line of yours. If it is the form ones . . . er . . . you are checking on the trousers, you are checking on the hair . . . er . . .”

What a confused or unlettered this person was! Cleopas observed. Surely, the form ones had not yet been admitted and they were neither reporting on that day. He was as much bored by the harangue, as was the teacher who had asked for the conclusion of the meeting. He knew it would have gone on and on until five or six in the evening and he wanted to rush home and attend to some issues. This being an opening day meeting at the beginning of the year, he had wished it would end soon. Now that he had sent his son back to the village, he wanted to go shopping for items and provisions to send to his wife and mother and the more the meeting delayed the more vexed he got although he was not sure whether their salaries would be cashed into their bank accounts within that day.

It was exactly after one week since they had held the opening meeting that Cleopas found himself shopping for items that he was supposed to send home to his wife and his mother. As he went securing provisions from the various shops in town, his mind did not stop thinking of the event that had led him to send his son back to the village where he felt that he was a bit safer from delinquent behaviour. “Time passes very fast,” he mused. It seemed just like yesterday that Kiori had been with him. “What if . . . if . . . he had been . . . the first one to have a go at the knife?” he wondered. “Thank God it had not been my son,” he sighed and termed the act as the work of the devil. “Yes it has been five years since,” he marvelled.



## CHAPTER 6

Hanannias had behaved most modestly after she had come back from the city. Even the women from the village and at the church where she went on Sundays had noted the dramatic change. For days, she could not stop talking of her experience in the big city especially about the large crowds of people and of the streams of vehicles and of the aromatic foods in the city restaurants that the rich ate.

“Tell us about the rolling chicken,” Muna’s mother had tried to seek for an explanation.

“You see . . . in the city you don’t have to run after a chicken, slaughter it, boil water to pluck off the feathers and all that . . . all you need to do is to walk into a restaurant and just buy an already cooked chicken and eat,” Hanannias had tried her best to explain. “ And they have so many, many chicken all cooked to an appetizing brown colour rolling on metal frames just waiting to be eaten,” she continued, “but how they cook them . . . I don’t even know, but you eat them hot and not cold.”

“And where do they get all that chicken from, if you are saying that they can feed a whole village?” asked Bill’s mother, with some kind of an inquisitive look in her eyes. “They neither have farms in the city nor chicken runs to be able to rear all those chicken. I have an idea that they manufacture them in their laboratories as we hear they are introducing GMO foods such as maize, bananas, carrots, and oranges.”

“No, in the city they don’t have chicken coops,” Hanannias said, laugh wrinkles rayed out from the corners of her eyes, “I think they go buying and collecting the chicken from the villages in lorries because almost all the restaurants had those rolling chicken stuck in rolling metal bars.”

“So you want to tell us that all the chicken that we rear in the village end up in those big restaurants in the city?” Bill’s mother persisted.

“They must be plastic chicken because I heard that those GMO foods are made of plastic,” interrupted mother of Alicia.

“How do you know and how can somebody eat plastic?” Bill’s mother asked with a look of disgust on her face.

“Haven’t you heard that people are now eating plastic rice and plastic cabbages?” said Alicia’s mother. “I don’t know where the world is heading to. That is what these GMO foods are. They are made in the overseas’ labs using plastic or haven’t you heard that these GMO foods are the ones that are killing our people with cancer. Look at how cancer deaths have escalated . . . don’t you see it is as a result of consuming those plastic foods?” she concluded, a look of repugnance on her face.

“Yes, I totally agree with you mother of Alicia because if you look back in the past, there were no such cases of cancer like they are nowadays . . . in fact I have never even heard of one person who had died of cancer during our grandfathers’ time,” Millicent’s mother also gave her input on the topic.

“It was still there but people didn’t know how to call it or what it was, as the white man does,” Hanannias tried to explain.

“I think this cancer disease is a curse as old Mzee Munka says and if people do not repent of their sins, this disease is going to wipe us all out as it has no cure. I am telling you it is worse than AIDS as the cancer scourge does not spare even small children. I tell you it is a curse and Mzee Munka knows better,” Muna’s mother eagerly gave her views.

By then the country was scourged by cancer and that had led the Head of State to declare it as a national disaster. The government had spent millions of money in buying cancer treatment equipment and several major hospitals had been installed with the equipment and designated to be cancer treatment centres. The disease had befuddled the country. Some people had associated it with the recently introduced microwave form of heating food and drinks, still others claimed that the eating of frozen foods from freezers and fridges was a causative agent of cancer while others went as far as having the absurd notion that eating meat from goats and cows caused it. The later which Mzee Munka laughed it off by claiming that, they had been slaughtering animals for food since time immemorial. That meat had been one of the main dishes and that they used to consume it in volumes, whether boiled, roasted or cooked in its own fat and that there were no such a thing as cancer among the young or the elderly people.

According to the International Agency for Research on Cancer, the disease was caused by accumulated damage of the cells caused by being exposed to a cancer causing substance.

Awareness was being made to the public that the substances that caused cancer were carcinogens and that the causes of cancer were either environmental agents, viral or genetic factors, but this was Greek to this rural village. The disease was also said to be caused by lifestyle trends such as smoking tobacco, alcohol, ultra-violet radiation in sunlight, some food related factors such as nitrites and Polyaromatic. The propaganda of barbecuing food had at least reached the village and the villagers could not think of doing away with their all-time favourite, especially during festivals- roasted meat. The few who feared for their lives ate the delicacy sparingly.

There were various treatment procedures also outlined by the National Cancer Institute. People were being enlightened on the advantages of screening and early detection of the disease and even if the government had declared that the screening for the disease was free in the hospitals designated for cancer treatment, the villagers dared not attempt to go for the screening as it meant a death sentence to them if they tested positive. In fact, one woman was legendary in the village, as she had narrated to the other womenfolk how she had sneaked out of a hospital that was miles away where she had gone to be delivered of a baby after she learnt that all the expectant mothers were being diagnosed of cancer of the cervix. She had been delivered of her baby on her way back to the village assisted by some women passers-by, the baby had lived, and it was with great pride that she narrated her experience. She had named the baby “Blessing” as the baptismal name and the surname was chosen after her mother’s, as was the custom.

The people were also being advised to use containers labelled “microwave safe” and to avoid consuming large amounts of sugar, as these had an increased risk of certain cancers such as oesophageal cancer, which was also said to lead to obesity and weight gain, which in turn increased the risk of being diabetic. This did not sail well with the villagers who especially had a sweet tooth.

In this country of Hannanias, the National Cancer Research Institute had estimated that there were 40,000 new cancer cases and 27,000 deaths every year; however, they were propitiating the people by telling them that the overall cancer death rate had declined and that the number of cancer survivors had increased. This trend showed that progress was being made against the disease but this was not meant for the ears of the villagers because what they understood was that, having cancer meant death. To make matters worse they had heard that several powerful and prominent people in the government had succumbed to the disease, even after undergoing all

the best treatment that there was in the overseas countries where doctors were specialised and highly trained. On the other hand, what amount of money could they not afford to pay for all the treatments in the world? Therefore, to them the disease remained to be a curse from God as old Mzee Munka had insistently told them.

“When was the last time you heard the old age wisdom that ‘Respect your mother and father’ being said?” old Mzee Munka was always heard telling whoever cared to listen to his unceasing laments. “I am telling you people will die and are going to die in numbers because this cancer is a curse for the wayward ways of the present generation,” he often said to those gathered to listen to him. Most of the villagers reasoned and resonated with him.

“Let us leave this cancer thing,” Alicia’s mother suggested. “If you see something that old Munka has no cure for, it is absolutely not in our comprehension.”

Mzee Munka was the old man who usually appeared in Cleopas’ strange dreams. He claimed to be a herbalist who knew herbs that cured various ailments such as diabetes, allergy, low libido, high blood pressure, asthma, kidney disease and arthritis. He had recently cured a neighbour’s son of persistent bellyaches and nausea and he never stopped talking about it for days on end.

“Tell us about the city people,” Millicent’s mother said to deflect them from the discussion about cancer.

“The people in the city are like confused ants,” Hannanias continued with her exultation, a sense of pride in her voice. “You cannot tell where they are going or where they are coming from. At first, I had thought that they were all heading to the same destination but I later came to realize that they do not even know each other. They just hurry along without greeting or speaking to each other, each to their various destinations.”

“And did you find any city woman in Cleopas’ home as I hear that those women are like fire that consumes everything and that they are very free with other people’s husbands?” Millicent’s mother asked.

“No. he was not being ‘kept’ by any city woman nor was he keeping one and that is something that I should thank God for,” Hannanias said.

Some of her women friends had thought that the whole account was an exaggeration but most of them were envious and hoped that one day in their lives they would have the chance to go to the big city. Every day as she walked to church, she had a group of envious women who felt very proud to walk with her.

They attended the African Independent Church and although her husband was a Catholic, she did not mind as long as he never took alcohol or smoked cigarettes. She believed that he walked in the ways of God, which she had been taught to uphold.

Now, ten years later Kiori was also forced to attend his mother's church, which he had been doing reluctantly since his father who had looked irate, brought him back to the village as the nearest Catholic Church was miles away. His dream to become an altar boy was taken lightly by Hannanias and was slowly fading in his mind.

## CHAPTER 7

Kiori had been in high school for three years after passing in his primary school exams and life in this boarding school was a welcomed idea. He had always wanted to be independent of his mother and grandmother and do things his own way without the watchful eyes of his mother who had always been directing and supervising everything that he did. At last, he now had the freedom that he had so much yearned in the school but he never did anything bad and the company he had formed here was composed of disciplined students who knew what had brought them to school and that was to study and pass in their exams and join university. He came out of the laboratory feeling exhilarated by the new experience in the things that he was learning.

Indeed, Kiori could still remember the events that led to his father relocating him back to the village from the city and he could not stop himself from wondering of how naive they had all been, but had there been anyone who had been interested in educating and safeguarding the boy child? None that he knew of. Various organisations, the government, activists and the media were mentoring and safeguarding the interests of the girl child by dishing out things like sanitary towels to ensure that the girl stayed in school and their entry points to universities had been lowered. Girls were falling pregnant and the Ministry of Education in its wisdom realised that girls should be given a second chance and such men were being dealt with seriously including serving long jail terms. But what about boys? Didn't they also deserve the chance to be in school? Or was making them jail birds the solution?

The picture of Dan coming back with the knife was as vivid as if it had just happened the other day. He shuddered at what they had been just about to do and the events that followed fitted into each other like a jigsaw puzzle. After he had come with the knife, the other boys had suggested that it was not safe to do it from there as someone might spot them while they were at it. They did not want anyone to see their manhood as they then felt mature enough and they did not want anyone interfering or reporting them to their parents. One of the boys, Mwai, had suggested that they move to where the city council had placed the big sewer pipes that were to be installed underground to carry the sewage that was generated by the city residents. He reasoned that there, it was a bit safer and the others agreed to the plan.

That day, Mwai had led them to where the pipes had been lain and because it was already in the afternoon most of the people in the ghetto were roasting in their shacks due to the heat. As Mwai

knew all the alleys that were mostly without people, they were not intercepted or seen by anyone that they knew as they walked to their secluded place.

After they had arrived they had ran their thumbs very lightly along the sharp edge of the knife to determine whether it was sharp enough. After confirming that the knife was satisfactorily sharp, Mwai had handed it over to Dan who was to be the first to undergo the self-initiation rite of passage. He was not only shown how to pull out his organ's foreskin but also where to cut it from by the fourth boy whose name was Curry so as to be on 'the safer side' as Curry had put it. His mother was known throughout the ghetto as she had no husband of her own and to add salt into injury, she was a wreck and a drunk and men sometimes fought over her during the numerous weekends of carousal while at the drinking dens.

"You cut it off in one single powerful slash, like this," Curry had said as he gesticulated using a hand gesture to indicate how swift it should be done and so Dan followed the instructions as they had been given to him. As soon as he was through with the slashing, he looked like somebody who had been shocked to the core. The others stood by petrified; waiting to see what would happen next, then without warning Dan gave out a very powerful howl of pain that made the other boys sprint to safety. They had seen the blood sputter and trickle through Dan's fingers with which he had held his manhood. He was then crying in pain.

A number of people had rushed to see what was happening and thereafter Dan was carried away like a child and rushed to hospital. Later they had been identified and pointed out as accomplices to the daring action. The week that followed after Dan had been hospitalized, Kiori's father decided to send him back to his mother and so he never had the chance to hear the end of the story.

Kiori had learnt a lesson and had vowed never to attempt doing it on himself but to wait for the right time. When the time came for him to be circumcised after he had sat for his K.C.P.E examinations, which was, after his class eight, he and several other boys from the village had been initiated into manhood. At this time, most of the boys were of about thirteen years of age. They were taught many things about their tribe and taught lessons on how to behave responsibly. They were told that they now all belonged to the same age group and that they were to treat each other as brothers from then henceforth.

Kiori also learnt how wrong they were when Mwai had given Dan the directions of how initiation was done. They were strictly warned of relating anything that went on during the initiation process and the proceedings of the ritual to the small boys who had not undergone the rite of passage.

Kiori's parents had ensured that he underwent the rite of passage before joining form one as they feared that the senior boys who tortured and taunted the form ones about not being men, fit enough to be in high school, might bully him. This was a normal occurrence during those days if the boys entered form one when they had not been initiated. The incident, of how he and the other three boys had attempted to initiate themselves was also still fresh in their minds and so they had deemed it fit to let him undergo the rite before he joined the school of his dream- an extra county school, which was in a different county from theirs. This school was a dream school for many boys and their parents but none had attained the required cut off marks to enable them to join that school in the village but Kiori had done exemplarily well in the exams that it was not a surprise when he had received an admission letter to the school.

“What career would you like to take when we finish school?” Chillie, his old time friend since they joined form one asked.

“Why? Of course I would like to study genetic engineering after school,” Kiori answered as a matter of fact.

“And where do you suppose you will go to study that because as far as I know it is not offered in any of our local universities?” Chillie asked, as they walked toward a group of students who were basking in the sun outside their classroom. It was already lunch break and they used part of it to sun themselves before going for their plates of food after coming from the Biology double lesson.

“It doesn't matter,” Kiori answered. “I think I can even go abroad if they admit me for the course in one of their universities,” he said as they joined their friends. Kiori and Chillie being among the brightest students had remained with the teacher after the lesson had ended to ask questions and seek for clarifications where they were not sure about some facts or where they had not clearly understood.



“Look, here they come,” one of the boys, said as he pointed towards Kiori and Chillie’s direction.

“And what have you two been up to with Mr. Moore?” Kambodia, one of the laziest boys in form three East -their class- welcomed them to the group of sunbathers. He was one among those boys who would even skip their morning breakfast in an attempt to sleep some more. They were supposed to take their morning tea at six o’clock but some boys who were from rich families did not bother with what was being served in the dining hall; in fact, they referred to the tea as ‘diluted water’ as they had refreshments in form of juices in their boxes that served as a substitute for the tea. The juices were of different flavours such as mango, passion, orange and peach packed in plastic bottles.

“Listen guys. I have some great news for you,” Chillie hushed them into silence. “Kiori wants to fly out of the country abroad to pursue a career in Genetic Engineering,” he declared proudly.

“Genetic Engineering? What kind of engineering is that?” Kambodia asked.

“It’s a form of biotechnology that aims at making changes to the genes of a plant or an animal with the aim of improving the product, maybe in terms of production or its resistance to diseases,” Kiori tried to explain himself, a little embarrassed by the revelation that Chillie had just made.

“What will you do with the altered genes of these plants and animals?” another boy in the group interjected.

“Maybe he is going to sell them at the market place to make lots of money,” Kambodia jeered. It was obvious he could make neither head nor tail of the topic.

“No. I am not aiming at making money but to save the lives of people who suffer from genetically inherited maladies and starvation,” Kiori said.

“What do you know about genes? Can you even see them with your own eyes?” Basco, another rascal persisted.

“Genes are only seen through powerful microscopes and there is that technology of extracting them from an organism, whether a plant or an animal, you birdbrain,” Moses intervened, trying to come to Kiori’s rescue.

“Do you honestly believe in such crap?” Kambodia retorted, soliciting for support from the others with his eyes.

“Yes, tell us Mr. Engineer,” Basco challenged.

“All I know is that I am going to prove you wrong when I get admitted for the course,” Kiori said with finality.

“But don’t you know that home is where one feels the warmth, as our people say,” Chillie tried to reason with Kiori. “There are dozens of courses that you can choose from, here in our country.”

“You know that I do love Physics, especially when dealing with electrical circuits and the calorimeter. I also perform well in the subject. I am intrigued by the way chemicals react when mixed or when they are passed through certain liquids such as acids and bases but I think I love the topic on genetics more,” Kiori said.

“So tell us, do you believe that all human beings came from the same parent- Adam and Eve- as we have been taught to believe?” challenged Basco.

“No. I don’t believe that,” Kiori affirmed.

“What?” another boy who had been closely following the discussion asked surprised then said, “That is the greatest profanation of the Holly Book that I have ever heard.”

“Look at it this way, if two whites . . . let’s say a man and a woman are secluded in one place and say they are allowed to enjoy conjugal rights, you think they can ever give rise to a black child . . . eh?” Kiori said, belligerently to the puzzled boys, “and where on earth have you ever seen or heard that a black couple had given birth to a white child, even if they were to live for a million years?” he said, as his face brightened up.

“What about the albinos?” another boy in the group tried to add his input to the debate, which was turning out to be a heated one.

“An albino is not a white man,” Chillie also gave his input. “Look at their coarse hair and the colour of their eyes; they are those of black people. They only lack a skin pigment known as melanin.”

“Yes. No two white people have ever given birth to a black child and so it is a fact that Adam and Eve were not white as portrayed by the pictures the world all over and on our church walls,” Kiori said. “Our parents have been hoodwinked into accepting and believing the white man as God’s own chosen to deliver us from our darkness.”

“So these teachings in the Bible are all a white lie,” another boy said.

“No, I didn’t say that,” Kiori corrected him. “In fact, the morality taught in the Holy Book is angelic and every good person, black or white who hates evil and adores the good in the society, should follow it to a tee. I had initially seen all the white men as evil until I read the writings of Leo Tolstoy, George Orwell, and Emily Dickinson who wrote to castigate evil in their communities.”

“And so who came up with all that white mythology about their superiority as the bearers of the Holy word,” Ikuwa asked, concerned. He was one of the best performing students in class and was so obsessed with studying Mechanical Engineering after his fourth form.

“I think the Bible was twisted by the white men who took it from Africans and manipulated it for their own selfish gains,” Kiori said.

“How do you know that it is African?” a student who was the best in religious studies asked.

“You have to read the Bible keenly to realize this,” Kiori said. “If you read from the Song of Solomon, Chapter One verses five to six, Solomon himself says,”

‘I am black but comely, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, as the tents of Kedar, as the curtains of Solomon. Look not upon me, because I am black, because the sun hath looked upon me; they made me the keeper of the vineyard; but mine own vineyard have I not kept’

“That’s just in Songs of Solomon,” the religious studies boy said. “Where else do we find evidence that the people being talked about in the Bible were black or Africans and not whites as you claim?”

“Have you ever read Lamentations Chapter five verses nine to ten? It is written,” and he quoted,

‘We get our bread with the peril of our lives because of the sword of the wilderness. Our skin was black like an oven because of the terrible famine’

“So you see, something was stolen from us and greatly altered by somebody somewhere who wanted to take advantage of our humble selves. Do you know that some new versions of the Bible have changed the ‘black like an oven’ in that verse to ‘hot like an oven?’ Since when was hot a synonym for black?” Kiori said. “And mark you; those are the words of prophet Jeremiah.”

“What about Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution?” a history student wanted to know.

“That’s all balderdash,” Kiori affirmed. “If we evolved from apes as the theory claims, why have we never seen other monkeys build themselves a village in the forest and start using fire to cook even after all those millions of years or did evolution come to a stop after human beings had ‘supposedly’ evolved?” he said indignantly.

“But I saw on television a documentary program in which some monkeys or baboons were using stones to break hard nuts which formed part of their food and the commentator said that the monkeys had evolved to using a tool,” the history student said.

“What then would you say about the lamagier vulture that is a common bird at Naivasha found here in our own country that breaks its bones on a rock by flying high and then dropping the bone on the rock to break it so that it can feed on the bone marrow? Did it also evolve from other vultures or was it born like that? What about its offspring wouldn’t they also break their bones to expose the bone marrow?” Kiori said affirmatively.

“I think we are all one people, white or black because the colour of blood that runs in our veins is red in all of us,” Chillie tried to reason out, “or can’t a white man’s blood be transfused into a black man who direly needs a blood transfusion and vice versa?” he queried, imploring Kiori for a concession.

“That’s not possible,” Kiori declared, taking them by surprise. “A white man’s blood cannot be transfused into a black man nor a black man’s into a white man even if they have the same blood groups O, B or A or AB but a black man’s can be transfused into another black man safely without any reactions of the antigens.”

“Yes . . . I support Kiori on that,” Kambodia said. Everyone turned to look at him puzzled. “I read that during the Second World War, the blood that was collected from donors to replenish that which was lost by the fighting soldiers who were wounded had to be labelled ‘N’ for negroes so that the doctors didn’t have to infuse black blood into a white man as it was not compatible.”

“So which God do you worship; the God of the white man or of the black man?” the question was directed to Kiori.

“There is only one God who is the creator of everything but we know him by different names. I think the Africans were naive when they thought that the white man had come to teach them about the ‘true’ God that they didn’t know before. If we were to follow the Bible, it will indicate that they went against the first commandment that says that you should only obey and worship the God who created you: that you should have no other gods besides him. This they did by intimating that, the God of their ancestors, the one who created them, was not a true God.”

The conversation seemed like it would have gone on and on had they not realized that lunchtime was almost over. They all agreed that it did not matter whether one was black or white but what mattered most was whether you are good or evil. The religious student concluded the argument by enlightening them that every day was a judgement day and one’s actions within that day determined how one was going to be judged. He told them that, that was why the book of judgement was known as the book of life and so they had to mind their daily actions and strive toward morality. They hurriedly walked to the dining hall and munched their lunch fast and prepared for the afternoon lessons.

## CHAPTER 8

The young men watched keenly with their watchful eyes on the cauldron that was boiling furiously over a huge charcoal brazier. The time was 2:00 a.m., which was the perfect time for them to do their work. They looked on with happy and concerned faces that were dimly lit by the fire as the distillate trickled into a twenty-litre jerry can. The forest in which they were working was very cool at that hour and the river that flowed beside them gurgled as it hurried on its course downstream.

In this forest at this hour, the crickets chirruped noisily and this was mixed up with some other noises from the various nocturnal animals that lived deep in the forest. When the jerry can that were collecting the liquor in filled up, they replaced it with an empty one and at the same time checked to see whether the charcoal in the brazier had been consumed, making the fire not to be hot enough to keep the cauldron boiling. If it needed more charcoal, they fed it with more of it, for if the fire were burning low, then the process would be slowed.

Kiori stood up to check on the jerry can that was now filling up with the distillate. They had to do this now and then, as they did not want any of it to spill. They could not afford over spilling as a significant amount of money went into the buying of the ingredients that were used in the making of the brew. He was now a handsome, tall, young man with broad square shoulders and the chemistry they had learnt at school was of a significant use here. They were a group of five young men, out of which only two had not set foot into a secondary school.

Kiori and his friends had completed their form four a year before and had done well in their final exams. They were now waiting to join the various colleges and universities that they had applied for. They had been led to the occupation of brewing alcohol by the craze of money and other essentials. He had performed exceptionally well and he had even applied for an abroad scholarship to study his lifetime dream career in Genetic Engineering.

“How many drums of the brew are we distilling today?” asked a shabbily dressed man, whose name was Micah. He was a short, squat man with probing eyes. He was beginning to get intoxicated, as he was the one who took the slightest chance to taste the liquor coming out from the other end as not everything that was on the brazier was distilled. After one or two jerry cans were filled up, what came out from that end was pure water and they did not want to have a lot of

water in the distilled brew as this would lower its alcoholic content and the customers did not want that. Therefore, his job was to keep on testing what came out until he was satisfied that no alcoholic drink was coming out. Although he had gone up to the eighth grade of his primary school schooling, he was both a sharp lad and an aggressive one too.

“We are going to do two more drums,” said Kiori. “We are running out of time as we still have to trek back to the village before the day breaks to avoid those sniffing watchdogs from the chief’s office.” A police post had not yet been built in this area. “I wouldn’t want to lose an extra coin by bribing those lazybones whose only work is to harass those who are doing their thing to earn a little something.”

“Remember last time they poured all the liquor that we were carrying and punched holes in the jerry cans when we refused to give out the one thousand shillings that they were asking for,” said Micah.

“It’s not like we refused to give them, it is only that I did not have the money with me at that particular time,” said Kiori flippantly. “It is a good thing that they do not know where our brewing base is; otherwise, they would come here and destroy our equipment.”

“How comes you did not have the money?” Micah quipped. “You know we had to duck into the maize plantations to avoid being locked up in that filthy place they call the holding cells. I think you sometimes play us false, even the money you pay us is very little. I think you should be giving us more than you do.”

“What do you mean by that? Not a penny more and not a penny less,” Kiori said defiantly. “This business requires money to run and we divide what we get according to our contribution in the running of the business. I for one, was the one who came up with the idea and the capital to buy the ingredients and the equipment and the welder who fixed the outlet pipe and you know that that cost a lot of money not to mention the coiled brass pipe that cost a fortune.”

“Now you two, could you leave your bickering and let us do what brought us here,” said another young man. He was considered cool and polite among the rest. “If we continue quarrelling, our gang won’t stand as one for long and very soon, we shall have traitors among ourselves,” he said with finality.

After they were done, they had about four full twenty-litre jerry cans of the liquor. They tidied up the place after putting out the fire and hiding the quarter sack of charcoal that was left in the bushes. Their brewing equipment was hidden in different places in case somebody stumbled on one of them. They then set off for the village. They did not mind much about the brew, which was ripening in the drums as these were carefully concealed in the dugout holes in the earth and after placing lids on them, soil was sprinkled at the top, such that one could walk on the top of them without suspecting that there was anything underneath. What worried them most were the brass cooler and the other pipes because they could not be hidden under the soil to prevent blockage and corrosion of the brass pipe.

Rivalry ensued thereafter, after Micah persisted that he was being cheated out of his money, he went and started his own brewing business in another part of the forest with his own gang, now that he knew the whole brewing process and so, competition between these two groups was not withstanding. The one who started it all was Micah who one day led the administration police from the chief's camp to Kiori's brewing base, where they unearthed their equipment and destroyed the drums by punching holes in them by use of the machetes that they were carrying. When he and his gang came to check on the progress of their brew a day later, they were nonplussed to find their base in a state of incomprehensible mess and after deriving a conclusion, they knew that only one person was capable of such perfidy and that person was Micah. They swore revenge as they worked out how to shift to another area in the forest and how to buy new things.

It did not take long before they had their first revenge. Little did Micah know that all that Kiori had to do was to follow the course of the river through any beaten path and with no doubt they were apt to find some traces of sprinkled ash from a brazier near the banks of the river to uncover his brewing base. Tit for tat is a fair game they say, and so when they found where Micah had his brewing base they planned an attack on it. They espied his movements and when they were sure he had had enough to drink in the village, they set off and descended upon his brewing base. They unearthed the ripening alcohol and after siphoning what they could carry in the jerry cans that they had with them, this they would go and distil at their base without an extra cost, they poured the rest into the flowing river. The annihilation of Micah's base was a big blow to him. They dented the cauldron used for the boiling of the raw brew and the huge charcoal



brazier. They took with them the metallic cork that had the small pipe welded at the top used to conduct the steam into the plastic pipe, as it was one among the valuable things in this business. The coiled brass pipe was also among the items that they carried with them. The plastic drums had holes punched into them using the machetes that they always carried with them at night. After some half an hour the base was left in a mess.

When Kiori returned home after the caper, he looked down-at-heel and his mother did not fail to notice this. Although this was not the first time that she suspected that his son had joined up with some village crooks, she had not had the nerve to question him, but that day she decided to confront him forthrightly. She had also heard rumours that her son was among those who were supplying liquor to the village.

“Come here Kiori,” she had called him, once he was about to go inside his one roomed house which was constructed some distance away from the main house. This house had been built for him when he had come of age at the time when he was initiated into manhood. It was the custom that young boys could not undergo the rite of passage while still in their mothers’ houses. “I want to talk to you now.”

Kiori hesitated but because he was still eating from his mother’s pot, he thought that his relationship with her was not at jeopardy and so he reluctantly stopped at his tracks. He approached his mother who was now trying to search him all over with a mean expression on her face which meant that she was feeling ashamed of what he had grown up to be.

“Is what I am hearing true or not?” she asked casually, not wanting to appear serious about the issue but seething deep within her.

“What truth?” Kiori said. “What is that that you are hearing?”

“Stop acting and tell me to my face that it is not true that you are the one who is supplying that dirty Kirugo with brew. It is all over the village that you have even joined those thieving sons of Kirugo . . . . Do you want to send me into an early grave? . . . or why did I ever bother to educate you . . . .”

“I am not one of them,” Kiori said perplexedly. “They are not even my friends and I have nothing to do with them.”

“You know, you are my son and I know you better than you know yourself Kiori. I am not stupid and I know that you have joined these village idiots whose only work is to loiter from one place to the other. Listen to your mother Kiori, our people have a saying that the young one who rejects its mother does not survive, please change your ways,” she admonished.

“Mum please, those people who are spreading such rumours only have the intention of trying to make me appear infamous and disreputable. I do not associate myself with them. My friend is Chillie whom we were at school with and you know him well. He comes from the village beyond the hill, mother,” said Kiori. It was true that his high school friend came to visit him occasionally and they even assisted Kiori’s mother and grandmother in farm work since Kiori had quit working in the sawmills.

“You can say that again because I did not educate you to end up a vagabond and to spend your entire time loafing around the village like those dumb heads. You are our hope and my hope is that one day you will build me a decent stone house where I will be comfortable and at peace of mind. My desire is that you will be in a position to support yourself and your family. That is the true nature of an educated man or who in their right sense would give you their daughter to marry, if you cannot even support yourself? Whose daughter would marry you in this wooden house and what will you be eating. You know very well that there will come a time when I will not continue supporting you and feeding you,” she said.

“Mum, have you forgotten that I am just waiting for the scholarship that I applied for to study abroad to be accepted. You know the course that I want to study is not offered in any of our universities . . . .”

“That’s another point of concern. Why didn’t you just apply for the available courses here? I am beginning to doubt that there is any such thing that you applied for and that this is just a form of a scapegoat to hoodwink us to continue waiting on you,” she said, exasperated. “You know your father won’t be happy to hear what you have been doing together with those village goofs since you finished school.”

“I know what I am doing and I know right from wrong, so believe me mum, I am not doing anything bad,” Kiori said.

“I am just a concerned mother my son. Let not my advices go in through one ear and come out through the other . . . let it stick into your mind,” she cautioned, “and please resume joining us for church service on Sundays.”

“Yes, I will think about it mum,” Kiori said. When he left for his small house, he was fully convinced that he had managed satisfactorily to persuade his mother to believe in him.

When he got into his one roomed wooden house, he kicked off his dirty shoes and lay in bed thinking. He saw himself in America already admitted into his university of choice. He was in an immaculate white dust coat, inside an expensively equipped laboratory at the university, doing his own research in genetics. He felt overwhelmed and optimistic. He felt that the life he was now leading was not meant for him and he comforted himself that it was just a matter of time before he flew out of the country. When this happened and he was through with his education, he felt that he would become a rich man, drive an expensive car and build a chateau for himself and a mansion for his family. He felt that life would be all-colourful for him.

He drifted into sleep dreaming of success and he forgot to lock the door. A cold wind that was blowing into the house woke him up. He was shocked to find the door ajar and his first instinct was that somebody had been inside the house and as he knew who Kirugo’s sons were too well, his first action was to check on his transistor radio and a 3-disc changer player. The disc player was bought from his own money while the radio was his father’s. When he found that they were intact on the small table in the corner of the room, still covered with the decorated pieces of cloth that he used in covering them to avoid dust accumulating on them and as a form of concealing them from preying eyes, he let out a sigh of relief and went out to relieve himself. It must have been late in the night as his grandmother, his mother, and his two sisters had already gone to bed. There was Jane who was now twelve years old and Mumbi, who was the younger of the two, who was about nine years old. After uncovering the cold food that was set on the small wooden table at the centre of his room, probably by one of them, he sat down to eat and left the house afterwards in search of his gang. He knew he would find them at the village centre, which had already started to grow into a little town with a cluster of shops, butchery and a clothes shop to boast of. His gang members, he knew did not fancy going to bed early until well after midnight.

When he reached at the centre, he found that a few shops were still operating and in the dim light, he made out one of Kirugo’s son who was popularly known as ‘manager’ conversing in

hushed tones beside one of the shops. He was with two other figures that were not easily discernible because they had worn woollen marvin hats and hoodies which were almost covering their eyes. They were already drunk but what they were talking about seemed to have frightened them such that they had a little control over themselves although one of them kept swaying from side to side and was wobbly as if his knees could not bear his weight. As Kiori inched closer, he was able to make out the other two young men. There was Marcus and Carlos who were part of his brewing gang. They greeted him with the ardour of true friends and offered him a smoke of the pungent smelling weed that they were smoking in cupped hands but he declined.

“That Micah got himself arrested today in the evening and the police are trying to source out information from him,” said ‘manager’ in a low tone to Kiori, who had suddenly become alert.

“We fear that he might divulge . . . .”

“And what did he get himself arrested for?” inquired Kiori.

“We heard that Munga’s shop was broken into the night before and items stolen from it,” said ‘manager’. “They are working on him the way they do to hardened criminals and as Micah has a soft spot, I am afraid he is going to bring the whole police force . . . .”

“That’s none of our concern,” said Carlos. “I tend to think that this is an opportune moment to go and steal his entire brew from the forest and distil it at our own base. All we need are enough jerry cans to transport the brew to our own base.”

“That’s a good idea from you, Carlos. We shall have a free ride all the way without spending a penny and there will be nobody to stop us although I have found out that they now chain some three dogs near their base to ward brew predators like ourselves,” Kiori told them, “and we do not know their current brewing base for now.”

“So far the better because the barking of the dogs will inform us on the place easily,” said Carlos.

“Therefore what we have to do is carry enough meat for the dogs. Throw them the food and cut the chains and my dear Micah will be all done,” said Marcus who was starting to sober up a little.

“That is it,” Kiori said to them and bade them a good night, leaving them to continue with their smoking.

“Then, we meet for the expedition tomorrow in the evening at our usual place,” said Carlos, who seemed to have already carefully thought of the plan.

When he went back to bed, sleep would not come easily and he found himself thinking of his schooling days especially that speech that their head teacher had given some days before they had sat for their final exams. This was after he had been invited to address them by the deputy head teacher who had also given his lengthy speech.

“Thank you for this particular opportunity. Good morning boys. Good morning once again,” he had started and then went on uninterrupted. “First of all I want to begin by saying that we love you so much and we appreciate you so much. We take you as grownups and believe that you are taking care of yourselves but you have been brought into our hands to take care of you and we feel that it is our responsibility to take care of you until you become grownups who are responsible and then when you go out there you will have learnt the skills to survive outside there. I know it is hard but the skills that we have given you will enable you to go through life easily.

Let us forget where we are coming from, as I know that some of us come from very needy homes and they have to do small businesses like selling sweets, roasted groundnuts and vegetables while at home to earn something and I know it is problems that make you do so. Let us focus ahead of ourselves with a lot of hope that our tomorrow will be better than it is today and that is why God has kept us up to this particular day because if he wanted us not to be there we will simply not be here. We want to tell you this; there is hope at the end of the dark tunnel.

The school rules and regulations remain the same and they will still apply because they are relevant. Discipline is our utmost priority because it is relevant and will remain relevant, thirty years down the line when you will be out there. Therefore, we need it when we are here in school and in future. And when we talk of discipline, we mean that enabling environment for us to achieve what we came here for in the best way possible. Sometimes we say discipline should be in our minds: it should be inculcated in our minds. It should be a situation whereby you feel you are not causing concern to yourselves and to other people: be they the other students, teachers or the non-teaching staff. So the moment you go and steal, you are causing concern to your conscientiousness and you are causing a lot of concern to that student whom you are stealing from and to other people, for example the parents or guardians of that student. For instance, just

imagine how their parents would feel if they were poor. And believe you me, that act of stealing will disturb you a lot, right when you are here and when you go out there. Therefore, we are talking about that environment. Obey your conscience and I do not think that your conscience in the right mind will tell you to go and steal or to sneak out of school or to go take a drug that you know is bad like cannabis sativa or other intoxicating drugs that have made people to lose their minds. . . .” Kiori was still reviewing that particular speech in his mind and wondering if he would fall into the footsteps of those alcoholics or drug addicts when sleep caught up with him.

## CHAPTER 9

Cleopas walked outside and chose his favourite spot. This was under a massive jacaranda tree that dropped its purple blossoms on the soft grass that was always well manicured and made the ground look so beautiful. He liked it best when the tree was in the flowering season and showered the ground around it with the beautiful velvety flowers. No other tree dropped its beauty on the ground like the jacaranda tree. There were other trees of different species such as blue gum and wattle trees dotted all over the ranch to provide shade but none beat this spot. Sometimes he just sat on the grass under this tree and at other times, he felt like lying on the grass, just to feel the velvety softness of the shed flowers.

He tried to ease his mind as he watched the African sun set, a big red orb that was sinking in the western horizon, making the countryside appear bright red. Cleopas loved it when the sun set like so. Sometimes the sunset was not so thrilling but when it set like that, big and red nobody could miss it or ignore it. It was a remarkable sight. At times, the sun would set and nobody would notice. It just sneaked out and what marked the end of the day was when darkness descended.

He looked towards the farther end of his farm where his two favourite cows and some mischievous goats were grazing and then at some sheep that were in a paddock and a genuine smile lit his face. The cows and the goats were tethered but the sheep were left to roam freely in the paddocks. He knew that as darkness approached, he had to untie them and lead them back to their kraals. For the sheep, the farmhand had to herd them back to their enclosure for the night and then let them out in the morning into another paddock.

“It is true as our people say, that old age doesn’t knock upon the door, so one cannot choose whether to welcome it or not,” he thought to himself. He was now approaching old age and had retired from his work some years back. He thought of the achievements he had accomplished and was pleased. He was a man who could not let disappointment creep into him and rule his life. Although he had not achieved much, he was happy with his life and anyway, he was not too old to be in a position not to multiply what he already had, that is, he still had the energy to do things here and there. He was also sure that Kiori would man up as a son should and help him to expand the sheep ranch as he had often dreamed of.

Now, memories came flooding back into his mind. He thought of Joe Rigogo, also now a retired teacher and how he had ganged up with some teachers to humiliate him. As a retired principal, he had tried his hand at various businesses but failed. First, he had bought a minivan and had ventured into the transport business. The car was not a brand new one and the previous owner had just wanted to dispose it off when he sold the car to Rigogo. Joe Rigogo had bought the car using all the savings that he had accumulated in the bank and took an additional bank loan, as the van was to cost about a million shillings. This was according to those who were close to him and his friends although nobody knew how much he had really spent on the van. The car had run for several months ferrying passengers around the city and to the city suburbs and then it had begun developing complications. It reached a time when the vehicle could not operate for two consecutive days without being taken to the garage for repair. The money that Rigogo was now using for repair and maintenance of the car exceeded whatever money the driver was bringing home to him in the evenings as earnings and the expenditure started eating into his pocket. He went to the bank and took another loan but was not able to process it even after he was forced to sell the van at a lower price than the one he had bought it. This was during Cleopas' last days in that school and he recalled how Joe had walked on air when he bought the van. He had even come in it to school several weeks just to show off to the teachers and the students.

Those who had acted as Rigogo's guarantors when he went for the loan were angry, as their savings had been drastically deducted from their accounts to help the bank recover part of the money that it had loaned him. The bank had taken the step after realizing that Rigogo was no longer processing his loan. The guarantors tried coercing him to continue repaying the loan to no avail. After the transport business collapsed, Rigogo opted to open up a butchery and he was now up to date selling meat to the people. Although the butchery was neither grand nor classic, he was able to sell one or two goats in a day, including soup in cups, which he obtained after boiling some parts of the goats such as the head, the legs and the lungs that he sold as ready to eat boiled meat at the butchery. His wife had filed for a divorce due to his drinking habit and had moved on with the children, leaving Rigogo with nothing and running after other women.

Nonetheless, he Cleopas had not had his heart's desire but he had managed to build a decent house and send his son Kiori abroad to undertake the course that he had set his heart on, to Ohio in the United States. Kiori had managed to secure himself a scholarship at Case Western Reserve



University which was in Cleveland, Ohio and Cleopas knew that it was just a matter of time and patience before Kiori reciprocated what he had done for him by helping him buy more land and extend the ranch as he was now through with his undergraduate studies and was doing jobs ‘here and there’ as he had put it.

When Kiori had been informed that he had won the scholarship he was overly excited. He had gone to his former school to pick it up and when he came back and showed it to his parents they were equally excited. When the day for his departure came, all of them had escorted him to the airport except for his mother and grandmother who had remained at home. Although they had been anxious to go to the airport, it had been decided that they remain at home for it was unwise to leave a home without somebody to look after it. The day before his departure, they had held a party to celebrate him and it had been a great party. Kiori’s friend Chillie was there too to see him off. Cleopas had taken the opportunity to advise his son and Kiori had promised to change for the better.

“I know that you have not been behaving well and it is my entire fault for not having been there for you when you needed me the most to advise you and to give you something to do to occupy yourself with,” Cleopas had said. “We are not the wealthy types who ensure that their children are absorbed somewhere where they can work and earn something for themselves after they are through with their education. Nonetheless, I failed as a parent but I do hope that you will change and be a responsible citizen and that the money we have spent on this whole affair will not go to waste. So when you go out there please keep away from drugs and alcohol because they are the most dangerous habits that ruin the lives of most young people.”

“I promise you all that from the moment that I received this scholarship I have changed. It was because of the harsh reality of life that I had to do what I did and Chillie here is my witness. I promise not to let you down again and that I will do my best at the university for I know that no matter how long the night seems to be there will be sunrise in the end. I think I have been living in darkness but now my sun has come to shine and I will keep it shining and hope that the young people will learn from me to be on the good side as I wouldn’t like to be a bad role model to them,” Kiori had said to the joy of his friend and parents.

Cleopas was happy that his son had turned over a new leaf and had found his feet again and he hoped upon hope that he would not find friends who would mislead him into bad behaviour. On

the other hand, Hannanias had been worried sick when Kiori's day of departure finally came. Although she did not voice her fear to her husband, she looked worried and had for months avoided to look at Cleopas straight in the eye. On the outside appearance, she looked a proud mother and to the outsiders, she looked perfect and held her head high as her son had gone abroad and wasn't it known that, that was the land of milk and honey in terms of riches? Only Cleopas knew how his wife had vacillated on her son's departure. He knew she had that inner fear and she was trying her best to conceal it within herself. In the recent days, there had been an increase in air crashes. There were also the rumours about the kinds of jobs that immigrants resulted to on their arrival in those foreign countries and he did not blame her for the fear that had engulfed her.

The neighbours had not stopped admiring Hannanias. They knew that where her son had gone to was a good place, a place where money was not a problem. With the changes that had occurred in their village and the way things were going, money was everything that mattered in their lives. They knew that Kiori was going to make himself and his family rich as soon as he started working and they secretly wished that their own sons were in Kiori's shoes. In spite of the fact that they did not exactly understand what he had gone to study, they knew that it was something that would earn him a lot of money in the end.

Cleopas found himself thinking of the small town that had emerged in the area. "Change had really come," he mused. In that place where they had had only two shops, it had now evolved into a small town.

What amazed him most was how the entire forest that had surrounded the village had disappeared into the bellies of the sawmills. Most of the small scale and individual sawmills that had cropped up when the trees were in abundance had now closed down. Only one sawmill owned by an Indian company was operating. This was because they had heavy machinery and they could go for good tress from far-flung areas as they had long and powerful logging trucks that were used in the transportation of those trees. The villagers had not even once imagined that all that forested area that went as far as the eye could see would be without a single tree one day. They had been there when the sawmills had started setting up business but none of them thought that the trees would one day become extinct. They had depended on that forest for their firewood as far as they could remember and a place where they went to graze their cattle and as a hunting

ground but now the forest was no more. Initially, when the sawmills had set up business, there was a lot of waste when the logging was being done as the branches were not useful when the logs were being cut into lumber and these were collected from the forest free of charge to use as fire wood. Earlier on, they had cut firewood from fallen tree branches or trees that had been felled by the strong winds that blew over the area.

The pine and Cyprus trees were the first to be harvested. The Europeans through the blacks who had been employed by the forestry department had planted these trees. It was during the pruning of these trees that the white operator who had been in charge of the black work force had shot down Cleopas' father like a bird. Nobody knew why the white man had shot him while he was up in the tree doing the pruning but those who had been around had said that they had heard the gunshot and seen him fall from the tree and his lifeless body as it lay on the ground, the handsaw that he had been using to cut the unwanted branches with, beside him.

Then followed the indigenous trees that had been there from time immemorial. The indigenous trees produced more expensive timber than the pine and Cyprus trees because they produced hardwood timber while the exotic trees produced softwood timber.

People who came in trucks claiming that they were in need of cedar posts and cedar beams to be used in construction sites also mowed down the cedar plantation. At first, the young men were happy as they went about felling the trees, which they later split and shaped into round posts of various lengths using mallets, metallic wedges of different sizes, axes and machetes. The timber merchants came in big and small trucks, bought the posts at a throwaway price, and took them to nobody knew where. They had found themselves a way of earning easy money but later when the trees dwindled, they found that they could not afford to buy themselves the cedar posts for purposes of building their own houses or for fencing their compounds as the posts did not rot and termites didn't eat into them as they did to other posts from other tree species. The posts were now too expensive to buy.

There was also that section of the forest that had been planted with some extraordinarily tall pine trees. At first, these had been spared for some years. The villagers had been informed that these were crossbred trees and that they had been planted to provide seeds for growing other trees such as they. These trees in addition to being of abnormal height were also very wide in diameter. Nobody was allowed to cut the trees down but when they also went into the remaining sawmill

the villagers were shocked but they said nothing. The land that was forested now exposed what the villagers would have not thought about: a green landscape that was full of ridges and valleys that lay one after the other as far as the eye could see.

After this, the logging trucks from this surviving company had now to travel to remote locations, which were unknown to the villagers to harvest their timber and the forested area of the village, was left bare, without trees but for those that could not be used for timber production. This land was divided into small plots of land which were being sold by nobody knew who. It was from these plots of land that Cleopas had bought the thirty-acre piece of land that his ranch sat on from a man whom they knew to be a surveyor of lands in a government office.

Shops and businesses had also cropped up along the tarmacked road and even a petrol station had been set up in the small town that had developed in the area. The villagers had now been used to the presence of this road that it had long ceased to fascinate them. Young men would just sit idly on the bunks of this road and watch vehicles zoom by and probably having thoughts and fantasizing of the types of vehicles they would like to own and drive in their minds.

The huge river had died out into a stream. The sole remaining saw mill had dug trenches to the stream and was now emptying its effluent into this stream as it was now producing plywood and fibreboards which were chemically treated. The logs that were used in making them had to be boiled in an admixture of water and chemicals before the water was drained into this small stream. The water became unsafe for the villagers and they no longer used the water from this river for consumption but those who were poor enough still used the water to wash and clean their clothes because outwardly the water looked clean but for a certain acrid smell. At times, it would appear greenish or yellowish in colour. When it appeared like so, these poor villagers avoided using the water for washing and cleaning until it appeared clear again. When Cleopas thought of how the stream had once been a big river that could not be crossed during the rainy seasons and how it had provided free clean water for them and their livestock, he felt tears sting his eyes. They now had to part with money in order to have clean water from a borehole that some opportunistic entrepreneur had seized the golden opportunity and sunk a borehole in the area. The big river had disappeared slowly by slowly when the forests had been cleared and the people had encroached and cultivated near the banks. What remained of the big river was the

small stream and the big black river rocks and smooth boulders, which had sat in the riverbed. These had been barely visible when the river was flowing huge and mighty.

Cleopas then had a sudden thought of his two daughters. Jane, who was now approaching her thirteenth birthday and her sister Mumbi, who was sixteen years old. These two were their mothers pride and had taken after her with impressive eyes and slender bodies. These two would never experience the freedom and joy of going to play in the forest or have any games such as those that they used to play in the river when he was a small boy such as racing twigs, flowers and leaves as they floated down the river flowing with the current to see whose twig, flower or leaf won the race.

The shopping centre that was now rapidly developing into a small town was the young men's chill spot. They would wake up in the morning and go to town then they would come back, eat lunch and in the evening go to town again. Whatever their business was in this growing town, their parents did not quite understand. They themselves went into this town when it was necessary to do so. This was initiated by the need to go and buy essentials such as animal feeds, clothes or farm implements. Some of them also visited the local branch of a bank that had been set up in the place. The town consisted of a series of uncountable shops, butcheries, stores that sold clothes, drug stores, and hotels. A market place had been set aside and they now had two market days a week.

Cleopas wondered whether this town would one day grow into a big city where there would eventually be murders by police and thieves and abortions as he had witnessed in the big city. He found that he did not want to think about the big city and his mind now focussed on his family. Already he had three children. The two girls, Jane and Mumbi, had been born after Kiori. He wondered whether he had brought up his son, as a father should, whether he had advised him accordingly as he was growing up. He shuddered at the thought of having failed in that.

His wife was a good parent to the children. His daughters had grown beside their mother who had taught them how to behave, sit and carry themselves as girls should and he feared that he had not lived beside his son to mentor him on manly duties. One day he had overheard Hannanias telling the younger girl not to break her back by carrying out some heavy task like a boy.

"Boys don't get tired," she was cautioning her. "Why are you behaving like a boy?"

Another day she was counselling Jane who was the elder of the two, “Boys can dress up the way they feel like, they can even sit outside or go about their chores without even a shirt on, but girls cannot do likewise. They should always be careful to dress well and cover their bodies. It would be absurd for a girl to be seen like so.” This was because Jane who was about to sit for her final exams in secondary school had started dressing scantily like a fashion model although she had never dared to go in only a skirt on without a top as her mother was intimidating.

Hannanias was happy when she heard that her son was doing well and all the fear that she had had initially had melted away. As Cleopas came into the house after ensuring that all the animals were safely locked up for the night, she welcomed him with a cup of tea as always and sat down to watch a programme that was going on in their vernacular language over the television. It was just a week before Kiori came back home as he had said in that telephone conversation that he had had with his father. Sometimes he asked to speak to her and she was so excited to hear his voice.

## CHAPTER 10

It was early in the morning when an expensive car drove into the compound. Cleopas had been anticipating for this day for the past one week. Being an early riser he had seen to it that he had everything in place and most of the people he had invited were already there busy with the various chores assigned to them. It was an auspicious moment as Kiori was flying back to the country and to his home village. He watched as the car did the stretch from the gate and came to a halt at the back of the house.

Kiori's friend, Chillie was there to oversee the preparations for the welcoming party, him together with Kiori's sisters were doing a splendid job but were still not satisfied, and they were doing the final touches here and there. Cleopas' friend who had advised him on low cost housing in the city was also not left behind. Hannanias had invited some women to come and assist with the cooking. Cleopas had ordered one of the fattest ram in his flock to be slaughtered, and his heart was glowing with pride for having brought up such a son as Kiori. The women were busy in the kitchen while Chillie and his gang worked from the main house.

Mzee Munka, old as he was, was not one of those who would have missed such an occasion. He was there and he was directing the young men on how to slaughter and skin the ram in addition to separating the parts of the ram that were used to prepare the different dishes. He was out in the shade with several young men preparing *mutura* (this was a kind of an African sausage that was a delicacy for the people). It was made by mixing the blood of the ram, which was collected in a bowl during slaughter and some kind of minced meat, which was fried in onions and then stuffed, into specific parts of the intestines meant for that purpose, as not any intestines were used to make it, and then roasted over a charcoal grill.

At first, Cleopas did not recognize the tall powerfully built man who came out of the car. His attire gave out an aura of affluence. His Cebara Dark Tan Oxford shoes shone in the sun, he adorned himself with a pair of dark sunglasses, and Cleopas thought he looked like one of those billionaire characters that he usually saw on television soap operas in the evenings. The tall man surveyed his surroundings, sweeping his eyes across the lawns and glanced up at Cleopas. Cleopas thought that he had seen him slightly wave in his direction, or was he mistaken. He thought of waving back but on second thought concluded that his sight was playing tricks on him.

As the others came out of the house, the man moved round the car to the passenger's seat and opened the door. All those who were walking towards the car stopped in their tracks as an elegantly dressed white woman came out of the car. The man removed his pair of glasses and beckoned the lady on with a sweep of the hand as he directed her toward the people who had stood rooted on the spot. They gaped stupidly as their mouths fell open when they recognised the man who was now walking toward them. It was Kiori, smelling the air expensively as he nodded with satisfaction.

Cleopas met them halfway the house. He did not want to betray his excitement. He greeted them enthusiastically and he and Chillie led the guests into the house. Hannanias and the other women were still in the kitchen pretending to be busy. They acted as if they had not heard the commotion outside but as surely as the sun rises from the east, they had been peeping out through the window at the back of the house and had seen all the drama as it unfolded outside. Now as Kiori was ushered into the house, Hannanias straighten up her skirt and wiped the water that was clinging on her hands on the *leso* that she had wrapped around her waist downward to her ankles. She was as excited as the others were as she came into the living room and regarded Kiori and his companion with a full mouth smile before greeting them. They all settled on the settees as Hannanias hurried back into the kitchen.

The living room was spacious and modern. The house was an eight bedroomed house, with a living room, a dining room, the master bedroom, three guest rooms and a kitchen. His two sisters and his friend Chillie had really gone into great lengths to decorate the house. They had spent the previous day scrubbing the floors and arranging the seats. They had also spread the beds in the guest rooms with the clean bedding that the two young girls had washed in fragrance powder soap as Kiori had hinted to them that he would be bringing some guests with him. He had also made it a priority to invite Chillie to come and assist in the preparations.

The flat screen television set that stood on its stand at one of the corners of the room was placed in such a way that everyone in the room had a good view of what was going on in the set no matter what corner of the room they were sitting. It was tuned to some world news channel but the volume was muted such that only pictures moved across the screen at the flicker of the seconds.



Chillie sat close to Kiori and were deep in conversation, trying to make up for lost time. Their friendship had not ended since childhood, it had not even weathered and it seemed to be growing stronger and stronger since Kiori had found his head and had quit his waywardness.

The two girls seemed to be having an easy conversation with the white lady as Cleopas observed from a lone seat at the corner of the house probably wondering what the three girls were discussing. The white girl, who had earlier on seemed ill at ease, now had a relaxed expression on her face and was conversing animatedly with the two girls.

Cleopas stood from his seat and headed for the kitchen and shortly after, some soft drinks and snacks were served and the conversations continued in low tones. As they slowly sipped the drinks trying to mark time and have something to keep their mouths and lips moistened. The conversation of the girls seemed to have climaxed and Cleopas and the others who were in the room could now make out what they were arguing about clearly.

“So, do your women remain at home and cook for their husbands, look after the little children and tidy up the house as the men go out to work?” inquired Jane, the elder of the two sisters.

“No they don’t and it is very hard to find women who remain at home, cook and do the washing for the husband and the kids,” said the white girl.

“And how do they get their food cooked or is it done by machines and robots. I have heard that you have machines that churn out food any moment that you want them to when you insert coins into them. Tell us, is it true? Mumbi said apprehensively. She was the younger of the two.

“Stop being ridiculous little sister. How can a machine know what food you want by simply inserting coins into it?” said Jane.

“There are such food and coffee machines but people do not have them in their homes to do the cooking for them. They are placed in the streets and outside the shops by vendors and we call them booths. They are programmed to dispense beverages such as coffee to customers who have to insert the required amount of money into the slots designed for the right coin to go through,” said the white girl.

“How do the machines cook the coffee, where does it get the water and the sugar from and how does it know the right amounts to mix in the brewing of the coffee?” asked Mumbi.

“Their owners put the coffee there when it has already been prepared and the machines are programmed to dispense it in equal amounts into plastic cups that are also placed there by the vendors. In the evenings or early in the morning, they come and open up the machines and collect their money,” said the white girl.

“What about the food. Can the machines serve rice and stew or ugali and vegetables too? Mumbi asked, excitement written all over her face.

“No. That is awkward. Couples normally have what they call eating out from restaurants or buy take away food to eat at their homes in the evening,” said the white girl.

“I would love to live in your country where I will just bathe and dress and go out and not remain caged in the kitchen scrapping and scrubbing pots, plates and cups,” said Jane.

“It’s a good thing but as the saying goes too much of something is poisonous, you are bound to get bored with such kind of a lifestyle or end up suffering from what they call lifestyle diseases which can cost you a lot of money to treat or even take your life,” the white girl tried to advise.

“I do not think that I can ever get bored by leading such kind of a lifestyle nor would you Mumbi. Or would you?” said Jane imploringly.

“You wait until mum hears what you are saying or have you forgotten what she has always taught us, that the way to a man’s heart is through the stomach? Now you want to say that you wouldn’t love cooking for your husband,” Mumbi admonished.

“Don’t be outdated little sister; all that is in the past. Since we women went for that historical conference in Beijing, all that has changed and women now know their rights. We refuse to remain in the kitchen as cooks. Now anybody can cook for the family or look after the kids,” said Jane haughtily.

“And where did you see such a man or where would you find a husband to cook and do the washing up for you?” asked Mumbi.

“Open your eyes dear sister. Nowadays men are the best chefs in the big restaurants. We now have institutes offering courses in culinary arts and most of those taking the courses are men, and do you know why? We girls have seen the light and refuse to be in the kitchen doing all the dirty

work while men go to earn our daily bread. Why would I want to run from one kitchen and end up in another . . . ?” Jane was trying to explain.

The conversation was beginning to heat up and everyone had now stopped what they had been discussing or doing and all ears were on the topic of gender equality. They were all eager to give their comments now and then.

“For me I wouldn’t mind going into the kitchen and preparing something delicious for my wife. But not always and she should not make it a must or a routine such that we would be forced to argue whose turn it was to cook on certain days,” Chillie said, as the women led them into the dining room where piles of food were awaiting them on the tables. They had now done away with their *lesos* and they sat to eat with the others.

There were pots of rice, fried and roast meat and the women had done their best to prepare what looked like lamb chops on skewers assisted by some young men whom Cleopas had invited to assist in the skinning of the ram. Potatoes had been cooked mixed with slices of carrots and grated ones to give an appetizing colour. The stew had been cooked with meat from specific parts of the ram, as they knew which parts were to be fried, roasted, or chopped into small cubes to make the potato stew. The stew was also flavoured using natural spices such as coriander, ginger and garlic. Ugali was not an option here as it was the staple food of the people and they almost consumed it on a daily basis and so it was not prepared on special occasions such as this one. Chapatis had also been prepared in plenty and had been cut into quarters and placed in a big ceramic bowl.

“So who do you say would be washing up and looking after your kids if you are saying that women have emancipated themselves from such work? asked Mumbi, as they made themselves comfortable at the table with their plates full. Their mother and grandmother also heard them as they had sat at the opposite side of the table and they also got interested in the discussion.

“Obviously, I will employ someone to look after them,” said Jane nonchalantly.

“And that person will be a man because you are saying that women are being educated not to do such kind of work,” said Mumbi.

“It does not matter whether it will be a man or a woman,” Jane said, making an effort to defend herself.

“Which mother would leave her children to be taken care of by a man especially if they are girls, taking into consideration that they have to be bathed and their clothes changed?” Mumbi catechized.

“In that case I will look for a woman or a girl to be the nanny,” Jane said.

“So you girls are saying that it is alright for a girl to do domestic chores provided that she is earning something?” their mother intruded into the conversation.

“Yes. I think they do work in restaurants as chefs and cooks and look after other people’s children as nannies and do washing at laundries and get paid for it and they don’t complain about it provided that they are earning a living,” Mumbi was sarcastic.

“And may I ask what difference is there if they already have a good husband to look after them . . . what is the use of that money?” inquired their grandmother who had her eyes fixed on the white lady.

“They buy clothes and food, pay for their children to get a good education, and save to buy their own land,” said Jane with a lot of conviction.

“Look here my children, I do not know where this discussion is leading to, but that is what our husbands were meant for. They would provide their wives with food, the upkeep money, buy those clothes and cater for their children, their education, and other needs. They also provided the housing and the land that you want so much to save for after being educated and getting a job. Therefore, unless you are saying that someone else’s money is better or sweeter than your husband’s is, I don’t see why you should reject one and go for the other because the end result is the same. You will work and end up buying the things that your husband should have bought for you. On the other hand, isn’t a nanny as good a woman as any another? Or doesn’t she deserve the rights you claim as a woman?” inquired their grandmother.

“Yes. Even a nanny is bound to have her rights as a woman. If one woman feels oppressed in being given the duties to look after kids and do the cooking she should feel so also unless we

want to bring in the issues of class and oppression where we have boss ladies and lady workers,” Mumbi said.

“Just ask yourself this, if all women claimed for their rights not to be used in doing domestic work, because I think that is what our women have been trying to run away from, would they leave their children to be looked after by machines or robots?” their mother probed.

“I think I am beginning to see things in a different light. I think we are to blame. We brought all this for your culture to disintegrate. Those of us who have fallen for the emancipation of women now find that we have to do the two kinds of work being employed and looking after our homes and if you neglect your children, they start questioning you, citing poor parenthood and advise that you spend more time with your kids. They also claim that some diseases that we are suffering from are caused by lack of exercise and we end up paying a lot of money to enrol ourselves in gymnasiums. Some of the take away foods have also been said to be unhealthy and people have been suing these eateries after developing side effects caused by the consumption of these foods. Therefore, I think if we had stayed at home and cooked our own food there won’t be such food related cases as there are now. All these things about women and their rights and dish washers and washing machines is all laziness on our part and to make matters worse, they can’t even operate on their own, I mean they can’t pick the dirty dishes or laundry from wherever they are and wash them,” said the white lady.

“I think you have a point there Marguerite,” all eyes turned on Kiori who seemed to have spoken for the first time since they had begun eating. “You are only driven by envy as I think you envy the work a man does and you would like to prove that you are equal to the task but at the end of it all, what do you do with your money? You buy what your husband should have provided for you while behind the scenes you enslave your fellow woman who should be in her own home looking after her husband and children,” he said as he searched for an audience while at the same time shoving a spoonful of stew into his mouth.

“You are absolutely right Kiori . . . the modern woman as she refers to herself just want to let down the boy child and show the world how useless he is. That she can also provide for the family while the man can also stay at home cooking and looking after the children while in the past, our women used to value their men. How would you feel as a woman if your man tries to

show the world how useless you are?” Chillie asked, directing his eyes toward the women who seemed to have been following his line of thoughts intently.

“With that . . . now that we have eaten and . . . and are full of energy . . . ahem,” Kiori cleared his throat and everyone turned their attention to him again, “and I think that we are now fit to absorb any shocking news, I would like to announce to you my wife to be, Marguerite. Mother father and grandma, here is the lady of my heart,” he said, offering the white lady his hand and making her to stand up from her seat. She stood and regarded the others with a banana smile not sure of what she was to say.

Cleopas was in jitters, he tried to shift his feet unnecessarily as the others looked on too surprised to say anything while for others, their food hung midway in their spoons between their plates and the mouth. Others stopped chewing and looked from Kiori to the white lady, their mouths agape. The only person who did not seem to be surprised by the news at all was Chillie. He came across as someone who had already been informed earlier about the relationship. Kiori then made his lady sit as he also took his seat.

“She already told us her name,” said Mumbi, “and it is difficult to pronounce, so for our grandmother we think she will just call her Margaret or Maggie,” she said chuckling. The others laughed as Kiori picked up the conversation.

Talk of surprise upon surprise. He told them that he would soon be through with his studies and due to his extraordinary skills in the labs and in the various research institutions that he had worked with during the vacations one of the institutions had offered to cater for his postgraduate studies and pay for his master’s degree at Harvard Medical School, Cambridge Massachusetts. Those whose mouths were already opened saw them fall further wide at the news, obviously their minds going for what that meant moneywise.

“I am going to fly back with my wife to be and live with her until we can organise a wedding which we shall inform you in due course,” Kiori went on.

“No Kiori . . . ,” said Marguerite patiently. Again, the heads turned mouths still agape to stare at the lady. “Since I had had that talk with your sisters, mother and grandmother in-law, I think that I would like to stay here as Kiori goes back to continue with his studies and learn how to be a

good wife. When you are through with your studies I would like us to get married here and that you promise to look for employment here in your country and that we live here.”

“But . . . where would I . . . find the job that I need here . . . in this place?” Kiori stammered.

“Open your eyes Kiori. We do have Agricultural Research Institutes in the country where they would be glad to have a person of your calibre in knowledge and skills. Work with them man,” said Jane, who seemed to have been overly impressed by the suggestion.

“That is true Kiori, or you can even work with your father in the ranch, expand it and help him improve on the breeds so that you can be producing those with high yields and also those that are resistant to diseases. I suppose you told me that genetics was not what you initially had in mind that it would be and what it would help you to dig deeper into but it was all about improving the quality of plants and animals,” said Chillie. He and Kiori exchanged knowing glances as they recalled their blacks and whites’ argument back in high school. The argument had gone on and on until they had come to the conclusion that it was clearly written in the book of Genesis that God made man and woman but didn’t say whether black or white.

“Okay, I think that will do. I will look for employment as soon as am through and at the same time plan on how to work in the ranch. So in the meantime try to coerce those whose farms are adjacent to ours and see whether they will agree to sell us their land or be relocated to an equal measure of land elsewhere,” said Kiori.

“And the African sunset here is usually a sight to behold. I would like you to watch it with me Marguerite when it happens and tell me what you think of it,” Cleopas said.

“I would also want to watch the African sunrise,” said Marguerite. “I am going to be waking up very early so that I can observe the new dawn everyday as I tend to think that we receive it second-hand in our country.” Those whose mouths were gaping fell back into place and they all laughed to that.

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