

**ANOTHER WHITEMAN AT THE DOOR:
A Biography of Jonathan Kariara**

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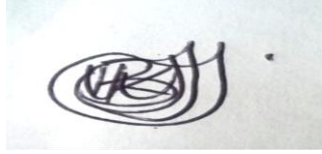
OCTOBER 2020



Jonathan Kariara Kimamo

DECLARATION

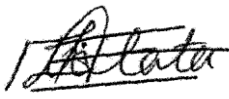
This project is my original work and has not been submitted for the award of a degree in any other University.



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This project has been submitted for examination with our approval as university supervisors.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this project to my mother Beatrice Wanjiru Kamau. You who does not know what a project is but supported me nevertheless, you who knows not what coursework is but kept supporting me, you who never stopped encouraging me to soldier on. I dedicate this poem to you.

“Black Woman,
African Woman, O
Mother, I think of
You...
O Wanjiru, O
Mother,
Who carried me on
Your back, who
Nursed me,
Who governed my
First steps
Who opened my eyes
To the beauties
Of the world, I think
Of you...”

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ABSTRACT

This research study focused on the life of Jonathan Kariara Kimamo, who is a renowned poet, editor, actor, and writer who is known for contributing to the development of East African literature. His most known poems include 'Grass Will Grow', 'A Leopard Lives in a Muu Tree', and an anthology of poems *An Introduction to East African poetry* (with Ellen Kitonga) and short stories *The Coming of Power and Other Stories*. His is a story of a journey by a young boy raised in a staunch Christian family at the slopes of Mount Kenya, endured the tough and harsh colonial and post-colonial regimes in Kenya, travelled to the 'hill' in a foreign land to acquire university education but still maintains his natural smile and humility. Kariara's love for nature, as reflected in most of his poems and short stories, English language, outstanding editorial skills and his accommodating heart for everyone makes him a unique person. His simplicity, meticulousness and a connoisseur of art and music compels one into noticing his artistic gift and personality. Unfortunately, his life story has not been told like that of other literary writers. Apart from a celebration made a year after his death, nothing else has been organized in Kariara's honour. The chapters that follow narrate the life of Jonathan Kariara. This narrative was created after a research carried out on the facts surrounding Jonathan Kariara's life; tracing the genesis and development of him as a poet and writer. The writing was guided by biographical theory and narratology.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Better pass boldly into that other world, in the full glory of some passion than fade and wither dismally with age. Kariara's passion in whatever he desired to achieve makes him a deep root that is not reached by the frost. A beautiful flower in the field can only be seen and admired by people.

In *Auto/Biographical Discourses: Theory, Criticism, Practice*, Laura Marcus argues that:

It is in the mirrors of our friends that we chiefly live. Every human being has a reflection in the society where he or she operates. In every mirror of different people in the society, biographical subject holds different reflections. The things that human beings do in the course of their lives linger on even after their departure. The memories they implant in the minds of those who knew them become very significant in creation of stories about them. Through a biographer, a new image of a subject is created.

The son of Jacob Kimamo and Tabitha Waruguru is my subject in this work. I laboured to write the story of his life as he lived it through actual circumstances.

1.2 The Genre of Biography and its Origin

In *The Development of English Biography*, Harold Nicholson defines biography as, "The history of the lives of individual men as a branch of literature." (7). Nicholson argues that "The independent genre of biography as distinct from general history writing began to emerge in the 18th Century and reached its contemporary form at the turn of the 20th Century."

The writing of Kariara's biography is based on Ira Bruce Nadel's definition of biography in *Biography: Fiction, Fact and Form*. Nadel argues "Biography is a verbal artifact of narrative discourse whose tool, figurative language, organizes its form."

In *Eminent Victorians*, Lytton Strachey argues that "Victorian biographies had been as familiar as the cortege of the undertaker, and were the same air of slow, funeral barbarism."

(5) With this, his narrative demolished the myths that had built up around the cherished national heroes – cardinal Manning, Florence Nightingale, Thomas Arnold, and General Gordon – whom he regarded as no better than a set of mouth bungled hypocrites. His work revolutionized the art of biographical writing. In the 1920s and '30s, biographical writers sought to capitalize on Strachey's popularity by imitating his style.

Andre Maurois argues that the task of a biographer is to “search for the thematic unity and harmony of the life he recounts, claiming that this is not imposed but natural aesthetic.” (92) It is in the same vein I set out to examine the life of Kariara as a biographer and not a chronicler. A biographer is more of an artist than a chronicler because of the way he selects and synthesizes information as opposed to a chronicler who is more interested in history in the story. A biographer documents facts about the subject, describing how they occurred, but a chronicler puts much emphasis on the time than the actual life of the individual.

As a biographer, I attempt to capture life as it was lived by the subject and present it as bare as it could possibly be. I delve into the life of Jonathan Kariara to attempt to capture his personality, his guiding philosophy, his role as a poet, novelist and editor and how all this shaped him as a man, therefore attempting to establish him as humanly as he possibly could be. This way, I agree with Sidney Lee who argues that “A biography exists to satisfy a natural instinct in man—the universal desire to keep alive the memories of those who by character and exploits have distinguished themselves from the mass of mankind.” (7).

In writing the story life of a literary writer, I agree with Virginia Woolf who disputes the belief that it is only the great achievers who deserve to be written on. She argues that everyone who has lived has a record of the life he/she has lived and therefore a story to tell, including the “obscure” ones. “Is not anyone who has lived a life, and left a record of that life, worthy of biography – the failures as well as the successes, the humble as well as the illustrious? And what is greatness? And what is small smallness?” (97).

A good biography contains incidents of success and failure, hopes and disillusionment, rises and falls, and rise again. In narrating Kariara's life story, I capture all this to help the reader see the inner struggles of Kariara, the obstacles he ran up to, and how he coped with them. Biographies not only give the readers an opportunity to see a man or woman in the thick of trouble and getting out unbowed. They also make one appreciate complex issues through the eyes of the person writing or being written about. “In reading about the life of such inimitably great men like Abraham Lincoln, Mahatma Gandhi, Winston Churchill and Nelson Mandela,

you have had a glimpse into their minds.”, claims John Magu in ‘The great Educational Tools that are Autobiographies and Biographies’. Readers of Kariara’s biography have a glimpse into his mind and by this, will understand him as a person and also as a writer.

“Keeping someone alive across time” – that’s the biographer’s charge. To do that, we should look for the human details; the juice of life. In that way, biographers have something in common with gossips.” wrote Paula Tarnapol Whitacre while celebrating the Washington Biography Group’s 30th anniversary in 2016. Leaning on Whitacre’s argument, Kariara’s biography narrates the juicy part of his life with a view to keeping his legacy alive across time.

1.3 The Spread of Biography in Africa and Kenya

According to Lisa A. Lindsay in *Biography in African History* argues:

Life histories entered Africanist Historical studies through anthropology, with its long tradition of incorporating them into ethnographic work. As in Mary Smith’s *Baba of Karo* {1954}, the life history generally took the form of an extensive record of a person’s life told to and recorded by another, emphasizing the experiences and perspectives of the individual. (29)

Lindsay says that:

Praise singing could well be considered an oral form of biography. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, coastal elites in Anglophone West Africa merged this form with printed eulogies in the missionary tradition to produce sketches of important figures from within their ranks. In 1960s, more professional historians wrote biographies of powerful figures from colonial era but by the late 1970s and 1980s they also centered on African nationalist or proto-nationalist leaders like Tsekeledi Khama, Jomo Kenyatta, Hastings Banda, Moshoeshe, Sol Plaatje, Tom Mboya and Amilcar Cabral. (52)

Lindsay on development of biography writing in Africa says that:

With the 1978 publication of the *Dictionary of African Biography*, it was clear that biography was thriving in Africa, and that its subject was a nationalist actor, typically male. “Great man” biography was part of the nation-building project, intended to

inspire, to show what was accomplished and how, and to instill feelings of patriotism by encouraging readers to identify with biographies' subject. (53)

According to Farouk Topan in *Biography Writing in Swahili*, "One of the most read biography in East Africa, partly because it was part of the school curriculum for a long time, particularly during colonial period, is James Mbotela's *The Fleeing of the Slave in East Africa*."(13) Topan argues that "The British Colonial experience, education, and the entry of English publishers on the East African market gave rise to a form of biography and autobiography whose title and style is more akin to their counterparts in the Western genre."(15)

Nyaga in an article in the daily Nation says that:

Though biographies are important to national history and the bedrock of national literature, writing a biography may sometimes seem fruitless. "The next foible with owners of Kenyan biographies – and most likely a byproduct of post-colonial self-flagellation – is the craze to make money from the sale of their memoirs.

Kariara's biography aims at telling his life story as a student, editor, poet and writer, and his childhood. It is academic and does not purpose to make any money.

1.4 Literary Biographies

In recent times, creative nonfiction biographies are coming up. The biographers turn the discussions in the biographies into a narrative using various instruments usually employed by fiction writers. This has attracted an encouraging readership to the genre.

Recently, biographies like: *The World is What It Is*, *Abraham's People: A Kenyan Dynasty A Teacher of All Times: A Biography of Mary Okello*, *Francis Davis Imbuga: The Story of His Life*, *Mandela: The Authorized Biography*, among others, have been published. By carrying out this research and recording the biography of Jonathan Kariara-a Kenyan literary writer, I am continuing a trend that is emerging in the scholarship of biography as a literary genre.

1.5 Statement of the Problem

Studies on life writing in Kenya indicate that while there is a large number of biographies by and on Kenyans, the biographies of literary Kenyans who contribute immensely to both academics and development of Kenyan society have not been accorded the consideration they

deserve, more so if the subject is deceased. This research aims at recording the biography of Jonathan Kariara, a Kenyan literary writer and evaluate the significance of Kariara's life and writings using biography as a literary genre.

1.6 Objectives of the Study

This project sought to achieve the following objectives:

- i. To document the life of Jonathan Kariara Kimamo
- ii. To evaluate the significance of Kariara's life and writings using biography as a literary genre

1.7 Research Hypotheses

The hypotheses of this biography were:

- i. The story of Jonathan Kariara projects lessons for the society.
- ii. His writings and aesthetic craft can be accounted for through narrating the story of his life.

1.8 Justification of the Study

Despite Jonathan Kariara's contribution to the growth of East African poetry, a source of inspiration and support to great writers like Ngugi wa Thiongo, Sam Mbure and Sam Kahiga, Kariara's life story has not been told exhaustively. Writers like Ngugi wa Thiongo, Anne Frank, Ernest Hemingway, Mark Twain, Camara Laye, Leila Abouzeio and Buchi Emecheta among others have written their own autobiographies and Memoirs and thus are well known. Kariara died young and sudden. He didn't live to write his own Memoir or Autobiography. On The same note, biographies of literary writers like: *The World is what It Is*, *James Baldwin: A Biography*, *Chinua Achebe: A Biography*, and *Francis Imbuga: The Story of His Life* among others, have been written. This has ensured that their legacy lives on. By writing Kariara's biography, I contribute in ensuring that his legacy as a literary writer lives on.

As a literary genre, biography depends on language to make an impact even though it is based on facts. Unlike other literary genres such as the novel, the composition of a story is based on a real person and not imagined person. In most cases, the literary act of composition or narration in biography is not recognized in the literary sphere. By writing Jonathan Kariara's biography, I seek to fill this gap.

A biographer creates a narrative from the fact of a life well known to him or her. I researched to write a biography of Jonathan Kariara because biography is a literary genre that engaged the literary act of composition and depends on language to express a life story and the task significantly contributes to the growth of the biography as a literary genre.

Many readers often go for well written stories about people. Therefore, a biographer is compelled to create a patchwork of the biographical subject's life. This task therefore becomes a conscious literary act. As a writer, the biographer follows the aspects of narrative creation. This proves that "the how" in biography writing takes precedence over 'the what'. The how, of writing is what constitutes literature. I therefore choose to undertake this task because it is a contribution to literature.

Since biography plays a monumental role and helps to immortalize those in our midst and who have contributed immensely to the society, this study sought to immortalize Jonathan Kariara. Kariara distinguished himself in the literary sphere by contributing immensely to the growth and development of East African literature during the post-colonial period when western literature dominated the literary works in East Africa and Africa at large. For this, I am compelled to create a monument for him in art by writing and accounting for his contributions and life.

1.9 Scope and Limitations

This study mainly focuses on narrating the life history of Jonathan Kariara. It is an account of his background, personality, career and political convictions as viewed from different perspectives. The research is limited to Jonathan Kariara as a person and what I gathered from his family, friends, colleagues, newspaper articles, and interviews. I aim at narrating how his life and education background influenced his whole life and his writing.

In this study, I examine the issues that molded Kariara's life. At the same time, I attempt to find out why the world, especially the intellectual community, should take Kariara's contribution in the literary sphere seriously.

1.10 Literature Review

This part examines the writings on biography in the Kenyan context and a reflection on the necessity of a Biography on Kariara.

1.10.1 Critical Text

In *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life*, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson differentiate between life writing and biography. They expand on Spender's metaphor of driving the "auto". In her argument Spender argues:

We are seen from the outside by our neighbours; but we remain always at the back of our eyes and our sense, situated in our bodies, like a driver in the front seat of a car seeing the other cars coming toward him. A single person...is one consciousness within one machine, confronting all the other traffic. (5)

In this, Smith and Watson argue that

the biographer can circle the car with the driver in it to record the history, character, and motivations of the driver, the traffic, the vehicle, and the facts of transportation. But only the life narrator knows the experience of traffic rushing toward her and makes an interpretation of that situation, that is, writes her subjectivity. (5)

Smith and Watson's argument guided my research and helped me understand the scope of biography; that even though broad, and extensive, unlike autobiography, it lacks the inner motivations of the subject.

In *Women's Autobiography: Voices from Independent Kenya*, Jennifer Muchiri argues:

the process of memory is not a mere retrieval from a memory bank. Rather, the remembering subject actively recreates the meaning of the past in the act of calling to mind ... History influences memory, such that how people remember, and who does the remembering are historically specific. (29)

Her argument helps me to be careful when documenting Kariara's life with the nature of truth. This is so because I attempt to recreate the meaning of Kariara's past encounters with people who somehow affected his life. I also seek to know how the significant experiences encountered in Kariara's life had an influence on him as a human being.

Although Muchiri focuses on the autobiographies of Kenya women, she offers valuable information on the biography as a genre. She argues, "Biographies offering different interpretations of particular historical figures or other individuals may appear periodically over many centuries" (38). This helps me to understand that time and timing of biography

differs significantly in autobiographies and biographies. My research in this case narrates the story of a man who lived through the colonial and post-colonial period.

E.M Foster in *Aspects of the Novel* argues that “writers while writing go through a state known as inspiration in order to present a good story.” Though Foster emphasizes the storytelling aspect of a novel, the same is applicable to the writing of a biography. The tendency of Kenyans to forget people after they die and whose contributions continue to influence the contemporary society inspires me to write a biography on Jonathan Kariara. Reading Francis Imbuga’s biography- *Francis Davis Imbuga: The Story of His Life* contributes and fuels my desire to write about Kariara. Even though I read Imbuga’s works from high school to University, I had not experienced him like I did after reading his biography. This pushes my desire to write and share with the world the life story of Jonathan Kariara.

In *Theoretical Discussions of Biography*, Hans Renders and Binne De Haan argue that:

The biographical tradition, based on individuals like Hitler or Einstein, but also less famous persons has thus been replaced by a research tradition that focuses on misunderstood individuals. These individuals represent social groups; such as women, coloured people, transvestites, victims of the Holocaust and others. (172)

Renders and De Haan’s argument helps me in writing a biography of Jonathan Kariara who was always misunderstood by his contemporaries especially on his insistence on meticulousness.

Harold Nicolson in *Biography as an Art* argues that a biography contains three principles that any serious biographer should observe. He writes that:

A biography must be history, in the sense that it must be accurate and depict a person in relation to his times. It must describe an individual, with all the gradations of human character, and not merely present a type of virtue or of vice, and it must be composed as a branch of literature, in that it must be written in grammatical English and with an adequate feeling for style. (197)

This argument helps me present Jonathan Kariara’s historical life accurately, describe him as he was and employ literary skills in writing the biography.

Henry Indangasi in “The Autobiographical Impulse in African and African-American Literature” recognizes artistry in the autobiography. He says that the autobiography is more than just an I-narrative seeking to tell the writer’s life story; but rather a narrative that aims at communicating a higher truth by interpreting reality with acumen and intelligibility. He argues that ‘besides seeking to answer the question “who am I”; autobiographies are “propelled by an impulse to fight (unjust) institutions” (116). Though Indagasi argues on behalf of autobiographies, his argument helps me in writing Kariara’s biography in realizing that as a biographer, I have an artistic duty of representing my subject – not as a holy person – but as he is and hence, help in fighting the unjust institutions towards my subject.

In *Bildad Kaggia: Voice of the people*, Evan Mwangi argues that “Kaggia is a real person and one cannot make the story as fully fictional as most people tell it...” (ii) Though Kaggia was a political figure and a legend, his biography enables me to write Kariara’s story – a literary figure – in a semi-fictional way, having in mind that he was also a real person and hence his story could not be made in a full fictional way.

Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s *Birth of a Dream Weaver: A Writer’s Awakening* helps in understanding the intellectual environment in Makerere during Kariara’s time as a student. Though the text is autobiographical in nature, it helps me understand the intellectual environment and the day to day life of a student in a foreign country and in the only university in East Africa by then. He argues:

We lived in different halls of residence, a life fraught with friendly rivalries in arenas ranging from sports to drama, and every winning play in the Inter-Hall English Competition on the Hill had always been re-presented at the only major theater in town. Having the drama appear on a national stage was the most coveted outcome of a win. It carried no material reward, a little reminiscent of the drama on the Greek acropolis of old, where the recognition of a fictive creation surpassed any material gain. (44)

Birth of a Dream Weaver also helps me to understand the political environment in Kenya. “Images of the numerous atrocities committed by the white settler regime in Kenya compete within me. It is not so much the Wanton Massacres, the mass incarcerations, and the violent mass relocations; these were too large to take in wholly at the time” (55). Kariara was two years older than Ngugi as students in Makerere and so politically, the two shared the political

problems experienced in East Africa during the colonial period. This in return helps me understand Kariara's political stand and his contribution in liberation war.

David Wafula in "A Teacher of all Times: The Biography of Rosemary Okello", argues, "The lives of people encompass the history of nations; this is sometimes through the courses which they lived for" (10). Jonathan Kariara's biography brings into remembrance the problems the literary scholars had to deal with during post-colonial period in Kenya, especially the teaching of literature in schools from the lower levels to the higher levels.

Makhakha Joseph Wangila in his thesis, *Francis Davis Imbuga: The Story of His Life* argues:

Autobiographies and biographies invoke varied philosophies of life. Apart from satisfying human curiosity, the auto/biography also outline a pathway to destiny of human beings. For instance, a person reading about an individual, who has worked his way up the ladder, be it socially or academically, gets inspired to also pursue the best in life no matter the challenges encountered. (6)

Jonathan Kariara's life story offers inspiration to aspiring poets and literary writers.

Makhakha also argues "just like an auto-biography, a biography plays a role of searching one's inner discovery (or inner self) through the narrative. It is a quest to understand and transform the self through a journey of feeling and self-discovery." (7).By agreeing with Makhakha, I illuminate Jonathan Kariara's life as experienced through public and private spheres. In a nutshell, I narrate his life as it was.

Patrick French in *The World is What It Is* vividly describes Trinidad and Tobago; a country in the Caribbean where his subject- V.S Naipaul -was born. He says: "The new World, the Islands of the Caribbean dot and dash their way through the sea, linking different worlds. Central America joins the Southern and Northern hemisphere, taking you up through Colombia, Panama, and Nicaragua by the land route until you reach Mexico. (6)

In his description, French creates an imagery of the South American Continent. This helps understanding the structure and style of biography writing and how to employ the use of description to create vivid images for the reader.

Jane Clare Barsby in *Abraham's People: A Kenyan Dynasty* writes "The last man to remain mounted in the East African Mounted Rifles, Abraham survives the war and, while all round him struggle through the post-war depression, he ensures that he is always in the right place

and the right time.” This helps me realize the struggles faced by Africans in the war and post-world wars. Kariara was born in the middle of two wars: Second World War and Liberation war.

The Other Barack: The Bold and Reckless Life of President Obama’s Father, a biography by Sally Jacobs was a model to my narrative. Sally traces the life history of Obama Senior from the historical context of Kenya and presents a comprehensive human character of an impatient intellectual whose recklessness contributed to his downfall. Jacob’s biography of Obama Senior was driven by the desire to tell the history of a father to the former president of the United States of America-Barack Obama. Were it not for Barack Obama’s success, Obama Senior’s life history would have died with time. The biography inspires me to research on a man whose contributions in development of literary works in East Africa have been forgotten. This research therefore seeks to fill a gap where literary writers are forgotten and their contribution to the society ignored when it comes to biography.

In *Making Literature in Kenya: The Influence and Effects of Publishing*, Jonathan Kariara writes:

First, we need to promote a demand for literature in our school system. We have in our possession a sizeable body of literature on which a tradition in African writing can be built, in both English and Kiswahili. The present hostility to this inherited literature by our younger generations – if what is said of it in Kenyan newspapers is an indication – has led us to a mood of once more feeling deprived. In the cultural vacuum that we are manufacturing, a new type of literature has found favour in Kenya, a nostalgic literature that harks back to the colonial period and creates a romantic myth out of it. White mischief, colonial Grogan, North of South and longing for Darkness (longing for darkness, indeed) were national news.

This paper was presented in the UNESCO Conference on Appropriate Technologies in Education, Nairobi, 1983. From the paper, one can see a man in deep concern of literature in Africa and Kenya. This helps in understanding the contributions made by Kariara in the literary sphere in Kenya and Africa.

From the literature review, a biographer subjects an individual to close examination in order to understand real person and what defines him. In Sidney Lee’s word, “The subject of a

significant biography should be a personality of magnitude.” In other words, the biographical subject should be a unique person like Kariara was.

1.11: Theoretical Framework

In this study, I focus on the biographical theory and narratology. The biographical theory is divided into psychobiography and interpretive biographical theory. In this case, I use the interpretive biographical theory because the research is based on a departed subject.

In *Interpretive Biography*, Norman K. Denzin defines interpretive biography as “the studied use and collection of personal life documents, stories, accounts and narratives which describe turning point moments in individuals’ lives” (10). He argues that the subject matter in biographical method is the life experience of a person. The biographical theory is guided by the tenets that include: the existence of others, the influence and importance of gender and class, family beginnings, starting points, known and knowing authors and observers, objective life markers, real persons with real lives, turning-point experiences and truthful statements distinguished from fictions. The theory further postulates that biographies are “ideological statements, often representing and defending the class or gender of the writer” (18). This shows that however objective the biographer may claim to be, he or she will eventually show his or her stand point on gender and class. The theory helps me understand that the biographies are grounded in the family history which is regarded as the point zero of origin. It also guides me to avoid biographical injustice (false representation of the biographical subjects) as presented by Denzin “The concept of “the other”, which monitors the honesty of the biographer. “The eyes of the other direct the eye of the writer” (18).

Narratology is the other theory that also proves to be helpful in this research. According to Susana Onega and Jose Angle Garcia Landa in *Narratology: An Introduction*, Narratology “is the science of narrative” (1). Onega and Landa define a narrative as “the semiotic representation of series of events meaningfully connected in a temporal or causal way” (3). Their explanation of narratology is helpful in this research because it helps me to understand that a story is not just a series of events but a representation of that series. A story has syntagmatic axis which is entirely the plot and the hermeneutic axis that represent the depth of each part.

In *Literature, Criticism and Theory*, Nicolas Royle and Andrew Bennett argues that “a narrative is a series of events in a specific order-with a beginning, middle and end” (53).

They put emphasis on plot- a story always has a definite plot. Royle and Bennett identify the fundamental distinction in narrative theory to be that between story and discourse. They observe that

A story involves the events or action which the narrator would like us to believe occurred, the events (explicitly or implicitly) represented. Discourse, on the other hand, involves the way in which these events are recounted, how they get told, the organization of telling. (55)

Despite this distinction, story and discourse can never be separated. In most cases, the two are intertwined. Bennet and Royle argues:

Stories are everywhere. Not only do we tell stories, but stories tell us: if stories are everywhere, we are also stories. The telling of a story is always bound up with power, with questions of authority, property and domination. Stories are multiple: there is always more than one story. Stories always have something to tell us about stories themselves: they always involve self-reflexive and metafictional dimensions. (52)

With this idea in mind, I approach my task knowing that people are stories, and more often than not, they are the untold stories. The attempt to write the real story of Jonathan Kariara presupposes the idea that what people know about him is very little.

E. M. Forster in *Aspects of the Novel*, claims that “the temporal ordering of events is not the whole story” (54). In Yenjela’s words:

A story must be connected by causality; it is not just a matter of listing events chronologically. The story teller must then be bound up by power. He or she should be full of questions-radical questioning of events. The desire to unearth something new should be the driving force. (24)

Narratology is helpful to me in that after collecting the facts appertaining Kariara’s life, I am in a position to construct a story which demonstrates truthfulness to the biography as a genre.

1.12: Research Methodology

This narrative is written after undertaking semi-structured interviews for data collection. According to Anne Galletta in *Mastering the Semi-Structured Interview and Beyond*, “semi-structured interviews incorporate both open-ended and more theoretically driven questions.”

The principles of the theory of biography and narratology guide the writing of the biography. In *Interpretive Biography*, Norman K. Denzin defines interpretive biography as “the studied use and collection of personal life documents, stories, accounts and narratives which describe turning point moments in individuals’ lives.” The theory of biography helps me in collecting, and using personal life documents, stories, accounts and narratives which describe the turning point moments in Kariara’s life, while narratology helps in the structural framework that underlies the order and manner in which a narrative is presented. “Narratology is a systematic account of the narrative techniques, method, their transmission, and reception.” Mielke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to Theory of Narrative*.

To get a comprehensive understanding of my subject -Jonathan Kariara, I travelled extensively to collect data from different people who knew him. I travelled to Moi University Eldoret, Tumu Tumu-Nyeri County, and interviewed his relatives and neighbours who knew him when he was growing up. I also visited Kagumo Boys and Tumu Tumu Primary where he schooled. I travelled to Kanunga in Kiambu to meet his lifelong friend and colleague – Sam Mbure. Other interviews took place at the University of Nairobi, and within Nairobi while other respondents like Ngugi wa Thiong’o, Peter Nazareth and Austin Bukonya were interviewed through Skype and emails.

I also read a number of biographies that have exhaustively interpreted the lives of different personalities and a few that interpreted the lives of different literary writers in Kenya and Africa. This enables me to understand the process of writing biographies as well as the challenges that are encountered in writing biographies. The evaluation of the history, nature and functions of biography works also helps in the construction of the narrative according to the modern standards of biography.

CHAPTER 2

BAND OF SOLDIERS

*Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the common hall,
And gathered unto him the whole band. - Mathew 27: 27.*

When men are in a deep slumber by being too pre-occupied with their day-to-day activities, that is when man's adversary; the devil, strikes.

It had been raining and the trees dripped along the busy Limuru Road. It was on Monday November 29th 1993, in the rush hour, when everybody is busy, hurrying to get to work on time. With an average of twenty patients daily, physicians at Aga Khan Hospital jumped from patient to patient and diagnosis to diagnosis. This chilly morning, Kariara's condition gave his doctor a gleam of hope.

"Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your lord is coming...for this reason you also must be ready; for the son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think he will." Mathew 24: 42-44.

Exactly four days after Kariara had insisted on that one last party with close friends and relatives, the man who never lost his sense of humor and his life, the man who though in pain, filled the party with incredible cheer, death, like a band of soldiers came to him with the rattling gasps that had taken his father Jacob Kimamo and his mother, Tabitha Waruguru, years before him.

His breathing would stop for a time, only to re-emerge like a drowning victim up for one last breath. But in a few moments, he passed on peacefully, with a smile on his lips, his earthly tether separated and his soul bound for the Lord.

Though there was no social media, the news on Kariara's death spread fast and furious. By mid-day, two hours after his death, many of his colleagues at Moi University, his relatives, friends in Kenya and beyond had received the sad news. Led by one of his closest friend- Elimo Njao, relatives and friends gathered at Aga-Khan Hospital to view the body. Later, the body was transferred to Chiromo Mortuary at the University of Nairobi for preservation as the burial preparations began.

“Death has occurred of Jonathan Kariara; Writer, actor, and teacher. He comes from a large, loving and loved family and leaves behind two sisters and two brothers. He joins the many more that went ahead of him. The funeral service will be at the University of Nairobi, Great Court, on 4-12-93 from 9:30 A.M. Burial will be at his home in Ikonju, Mbari-ya -Njora, Tumu Tumu at 2:00 P.M. No flowers please but donations to the Nairobi Hospice for the terminally ill cancer patients.” Read an obituary in the Daily Nation of December 1st, 1993.

CHAPTER 3 KARIARA'S PEOPLE

Other things may change us, but we start and end with the family – Friedrich Nietzsche

Jonathan Kariara was a kikuyu of the Agikuyu people of Kenya. The Agikuyu speak the Bantu Kikuyu language and like many other Kenyan ethnic groups, they are divided into different clans. According to Father Cagnolo of the Consolata Fathers in his 1933 book, “Agikuyu”, the nine clans of the Agikuyu are named after the nine daughters born by Gikuyu (father) and Mumbi (mother) the first parents of Agikuyu. Jonathan Kariara belonged to Angari or Aithekahuno clan. The Agikuyu are further sub-divided into Mbari. Kariara belonged to Mbari ya Njoora.

From Mūkūrwe wa Nyagathanga, the legendary origins of the Agikuyu, the population increased and it became necessary for people to move southwards and northwards in search of new settlements. It's reckoned that by the year 1700 A.D., people were migrating northwards from Mūrang'a through Mūkūrwe-inĩ, Othaya, Tetũ, Nyeri and settling on the fertile lands along the edges of the Nyandarua mountains.

Among these migrants were the earliest known ancestors of Angari / Aithekahuno clans now settled at Tumu Tumu. These were Icamwathi, the father of Icamuturiri, father of Wanduku, who moved across the Thagana River (Tana River) to start the occupation of these lands around Tumu Tumu Hills.

Three men separated themselves from the other migrants at a place near Minuti and decided to move North-Eastwards to Aguthi area. The three were of the Angari / Aithekahuno clan and first settled at a place in Aguthi named Ithekahuno after the name of their clan.

The three men were named Matawa, Gicimu and Wanduku. The descendants of the first two occupied some areas of Aguthi, while Wanduku and his family moved eastwards across River Thagana to a place west of TumuTumu Hills called Ngurumo, in Mathera Division.

Wanduku had two wives named Nyakagumo-ini and Nyamakonju. He made his home at Ngurumo with his two wives and is the father of four related clans whose descendants occupy large areas of Mathera from the southern slopes of Tumu Tumu Hills to the western slopes of Mt. Kenya. The first wife Nyakagumo-ini was the mother of three sons named Ngure,

Muthungu and Karuoro. The second wife, Nyamakonju, was mother to the fourth son of Wanduku called Ndarathi.

Two sons of Wanduku, Muthungu and Karuoro, decided to seek new lands to the North-East of Ngurumo. Muthungu made his home at a place called Gitaro near Kiangoma, while his younger brother Karuoro moved on to the Northern slopes of Tumu Tumu Hills near where PCEA Tumu Tumu Mission Hospital stands- It's located in Nyeri County, 5 kilometers from Karatina town.

The descendants of the eldest son of Wanduku, named Ngure, occupied the land along the River Thagana, Northeastwards of Ngurumo, while the descendants of Ndarathi were left at Ngurumo and Southern slopes of Tumu Tumu Hills.

Hunja was the eldest son of Karuoro and had three wives named; Njamiu, Wangui and Ngina. Njamiu was the eldest wife of Hunja and a mother of three sons; Rubua, Njuki, and Kihoori. Rubua had no son but had three daughters named Wangari, Wanjira and Muguro.

Njuki, the second born, had three wives. Wanjiru Kariara was the first wife to Njuki and mother to three sons. Jacob Kimamo was the first born. Kimamo married Tabitha Waruguru and together they had three sons, and eight daughters. Jonathan Kariara was the eighth born followed by James Wang'ombe and James Kihori.

CHAPTER 4

JACOB KIMAMO

As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord – Joshua 24:15 NIV

Jacob Kimamo was the first born among his three siblings. He was born in 1889 to Njuki Hunja and Wanjiru Kariara. Kimamo was born in a period when Kenya was taken over as a property of England. "... between 1890 and 1896, the years that Queen Victoria, through her Prime Minister, Robert Cecil, 3rd Marquess of Salisbury, took over what was then a company "property" and called it East Africa Protectorate, and, in 1920 Kenya Colony and protectorate." Ngugi wa Thiong'o.

In this period, the Gikuyu people practiced hunting, trapping and gathering more than farming. "In those days we did not cultivate so much as we do now. A man trapped animals and his hunting area where he set his traps became his Ngundu-land claim." Responded Gitau-wa-Mathu, a kikuyu elder in TumuTumu to a question in an interview I held with him.

By the age of fifteen, Kimamo was good at hunting and trapping wild animals. He later started domesticating animals in his father's *ngundu*. This made his father proud of him. He was allowed to use part of his father's land for cultivation and grazing. Kimamo's reputation as the richest in terms of cows and goats among his age mates grew with each passing day.

Kimamo grew under his father's watchful eyes hence he quickly learnt Njuki's hunting skills and Charisma; but from his mother, he inherited undeniable good looks. He held dark eyes set wide in an open face; he had a cleft chin, thick dark hair and a bewitching smile. He was every girl's dream in Mbari- ya- Hwai village.

Waruguru's father owned a huge tract of land that stretched from Tumu Tumu Hills to Karatina. His huge livestock grazed in this piece of land. Once in a while, friends were invited to graze their livestock.

During her free time, Waruguru would occasionally visit her father's grazing grounds uninvited. It is during one of her visit that she met Kimamo and fell in love. "What are you doing in my father's land?" she asked Kimamo. "Nothing much..." Kimamo replied. From that simple conversation, a code of friendship was established between the two. They met occasionally but soon, it became a habit. In 1918, Kimamo married Waruguru.

Unlike many Kenyan families, Kimamo's family was a monogamous family. Kimamo wa Njuki joined the Presbyterian church of East Africa in 1908 and was baptized Jacob Kimamo in 1909. He later became an evangelist and a teacher-catechist.

The Presbyterian evangelism at Tumu Tumu inducted the locals into a story, a hierarchy of history that enlisted pre-Christian practices to point toward the final revelation of the truth. Tumu Tumu was a fertile and virgin land for the missionaries to cultivate. However, converting the then pure traditionalist to Christianity was not a walk in the park. The locals heard the Gospel story with laughter and sleepy refusals to listen. "That year is not a good one for Joshua. Some in Kameno are restless and blame him for the white men. They hear of a Government Post being built at Makuyu and that they will be taxed by a government in Nairobi. Joshua does not mind these changes and sees the white men as his brothers in Christ..." (*The River Between*).

Kimamo was among the first locals to convert to Christian religion in Tumu Tumu. Through reading lessons he was taught to read the Bible and soon proved to be an ardent student who could read and write. Kimamo took his studies and faith seriously and was rewarded for his efforts; he was appointed an evangelist of the 'good news'.

"Joshua, was now a middle-aged man... He learnt to read and write. The new faith worked in him till it came to possess him wholly..." (*The River Between*). Kimamo, like Joshua, was also possessed by the new religion. He preached around Tumu Tumu and Karatina. Through effort and dedication, his followers grew and as the number of converts kept growing with each passing day, so was his responsibilities. He double tasked as an evangelist and a catechist; he taught his followers how to read and write from the Bible.

"Many ethnic communities in ancient Kenya were led by Councils of Elders which made decisions regarding its people. However, during colonization era, the position of Paramount Chief was created by the British administration in order to effectively govern the colonies between the 19th and 20th centuries" [Kenya National Archives]. Kimamo's prowess in evangelism prompted the colonial masters to appoint him chief in 1930. "My father-in-law was born again from an early age. He laid the Christian foundation in our family. He also loved education; when he was appointed chief, he encouraged the locals to take their children to school." Responded Ms Wang'ombe-wife to Wang'ombe Kimamo, in an interview.

From 1950, the liberation war between the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (KLFA), also known as Mau Mau on one side and the British authorities on the other side escalated quickly. L.S.B Leaky in *Mau Mau and the Kikuyu* says that:

In September 1952 it became necessary for the Kenya Government to declare a State of Emergency, as a result of the activities of an organization known as Mau Mau...Mau Mau is openly anti-white and also-anti Christian. It aims to drive the Europeans and all other foreigners out of the country and intends to use murder, intimidation, and, finally, a general uprising to bring this about. (9)

Kimamo being a chief was expected to implement the orders given by the British authorities. This spelt danger for him and his family. “The plans of the Mau Mau leaders necessitated trying to make every kikuyu in the country a member, and in order to achieve this end they instituted as ‘a sine qua non’ of membership, a ceremony of oath taking based upon old tribal custom but which violated ancient custom in many ways. The oath which had to be taken by members was very carefully thought out and so worded that once a person had taken it, even under pressure, there would be little risk of his reporting the facts to the authorities.” [Mau Mau and the kikuyu] Kimamo, being a staunch Christian, refused to take the oath.

One evening, November 22, 1952, Waruguru had not heard the voice of her husband the whole day. He had left for his farm in the morning. She became worried and summoned his son Wang’ombe to go out and see what caused Kimamo’s absences in his homestead. “It was clear that the constant daytime and nighttime raids and the mass incarcerations were breaking up families, taking away or incapacitating breadwinners and diminishing parental care...” [*Dreams in time of War*]. Wanjiru’s family was broken. The Mau Mau soldiers had killed Kimamo in the morning hours in his farm. Wang’ombe found his father’s body dumped in a small fishpond that Kimamo used to rear fish. Kimamo’s death left a huge gap to be filled. His wife assumed the responsibilities and steered the family. Kariara’s education was almost ruined by his father’s death.

CHAPTER 5

DING, DONG

We don't stop playing because we grow old; we grow old because we stop playing – George Bernard Shaw- author.

On a hill in the heart of Nyeri County of central Kenya, away from Tumu Tumu Hospital is a small, little known village, called Kwa -Mbari-ya- Hwai;.The village is approximately six kilometers away from Karatina town and sparsely populated. It is a product of the land demarcation that took place in Tumu Tumu in 1950 which was geared towards consolidating the pieces of land owned by different individuals but scattered all over. One result of fragmentation was that, by cultivating different plots spread over several agro-ecological zones, farmers could spread out their environmental risks. In the event of drought, for instance, crops on a few plots would fail, but not all of them would fail. Fragmentation as an unwitting, though adaptive, land use made tremendous sense in areas of huge agro-ecological variability. Even so, the Administration consistently chose to ignore these types of benefits. The arguments against fragmentation were usually based on the notion that it was detrimental to agricultural practices. Consolidation was thought to be key to an agricultural revolution in Kenya, and the granting of individual title was seen as a mechanism for channeling loan funds, and other resources to smallholder agriculture”

The huge mango trees, coffee plantations, a few muu trees scattered like roaches in day light conceal magnificent houses. The waft of flowers and mango buds and the attractive aroma of coffee berries arrest everyone's attention, especially the visitors. The people of Kwa-Mbari -ya- Hwai involve themselves with agricultural activities like dairy farming, fish keeping, horticulture, and a number of light industries; tea and coffee factories that provide market and employment to the local people.

The Tumu Tumu hills that surround kwa Mbari ya Hwai village are covered with a rug trees, green, yellow, scarlet and orange but their bare tops are scarfed and beribboned with mist. Atop one of the hill, one can see a house built as a result of years of hard labour. The old house is the ever present home amid such change from *Mbura ya Njahi* to the dreaded drought. The house looks like a giant had sat on the roof for it sags terribly with gaping holes for the wind to rush in and out.

In this house, on 25th February 1935, the night was a special kind of blackness, the kind that wants only to hold the stars and help them shine brighter. It was a warm blackness that hugged you no matter what, and within its safety, a scream was heard.

With each contraction came a pain that dominated Waruguru's entire being. It was her eighth pregnancy, but this was a special kind of it. Like Elizabeth's baby that leaped in her womb upon hearing Mary's voice, the unborn child was eager to meet the father who upon hearing the noise in the house came rushing. The pain of labour was a prison to Waruguru's mind and she never realized the change that had occurred.

With the help of his brother, Kimamo took his wife to Tumu Tumu Mission Hospital. This would be the first time Waruguru would deliver without the help of a traditional midwife. It was a new experience all together. The Gikuyu traditional method of using medicine men and midwives to help women in labour was replaced by a modern hospital with Western educated doctors and nurses. It is in this hospital, Jonathan Kariara was born.

Waruguru, being the only wife (Kimamo was a staunch Christian and loathed polygamy unlike his brothers who were polygamous) enlisted the help of her older children and sisters-in-law in bringing up Kariara. Baby Kariara, after leaving the hospital, had many people including his cousins to baby-sit him. This had an effect in the life ahead of the Kimamo's family and the entire Njuki's family. The bond created at child hood saw the family remain united even post-colonial period. "When I got married, my husband –Wang'ombe, was like a father to his siblings and the larger family, at times, I felt like he would forsake his own family because of the many responsibilities." Recalled Mrs. Wang'ombe, emotionally.

Being the eighth child of Waruguru and Kimamo, Kariara was born into an already functioning family of grown up brothers, sisters and cousins of his age. He was named after his paternal grand-father. Being the first born son made Waruguru love him more than the other siblings, though she tried to hide but it was inevitable. Like-wise, Kariara loved his mother and he followed her wherever she went. This relationship would later be seen reoccurring in the old age of Waruguru.

According to Chinua Achebe in *Things Fall Apart*; a chick that could grow into a cock can be spotted the very first day it hatches. The young boy from Ikonju was determined to go places. Within eight months, Kariara had transited from sitting to crawling and in the ninth month, he

was walking with the support of furniture, walls or pulling behind his mother. Within a year, he was confidently following his mother to the farm.

Born and raised up under the harsh colonial regime like his siblings and contemporaries, Kariara had to develop survival tactics to overcome the tough and harsh conditions his community found itself in. In his Memoir *Dreams in Time of War*, Ngugi wa Thiong'o comments about the tough condition the country was in. He says:

Limuru was only about eighteen miles from the capital. There were stories of the dead, and of hundreds herded into concentration camps of course, some stories were about how so and so had managed to slip through the net, but most were about the desolation the state of emergency had wrought.

Kariara and his peers engaged in different children plays to distract their minds from the on goings in the country and particularly in his community which was one of the areas that provided habitation for Mau Mau:

Challenger: *Gwata ndaî* (I throw a riddle!)

Respondent: *Ndagwata* (Let it come!)

Challenger: *Ndathiîna mîndû Iitenjiîra huruka!*

(I walk together with a companion who will never tell me to rest!)

Respondent: *Kiruru kana njîra* (A shadow or a bridle –path).

Riddles were among his favourites. Whenever a mangoe would fall from a tree, Kariara used the trick of a riddle to ensure he ate the mangoe and not his siblings or peers. He used and liked tough riddles some of which he had learnt from his grandmother and his father.

The rainy seasons were every child's favourite. "At the sighting of raindrops we dashed into the yard, formed a circle:

Rain may you fall

I offer you a sacrifice

A young bull with bells

That sound ding dong” [*Dreams in Time of War*]

During rainy seasons, along the path that went into Kariara’s grandfather’s homestead, Kariara and his peers would turn over rocks, jumping with two feet, into mud puddles and play with their hand- made ‘cart’. This made Kariara grow into a strong healthy young boy.

Either traditional songs or Christian songs he heard when he accompanied his father to church, Kariara loved singing. “My uncle loved singing. Anytime my mother was sad or not in the mood to talk, uncle would lift her spirit by singing an encouraging song or recite a poem.” Comments Nyambura-a niece to Kariara. When Rehab –Kariara’s younger sister-was left behind, Kariara would baby- sit her. Whenever she cried, Kariara would sooth her:

Nuu wahura Rehab turi nake,

Arohinga na itura na matungu;

Na mucii utahingaga na kirindi.

Urururu Rehab-ii!

Who has beaten Rehab in my presence,

May he enclose his home with thorny bushes,

His home cannot be popular.

Urururu Rehab-ii!

It was Kariara’s turn to baby- sit his siblings like it was done to him before by his older siblings. The bond made between Kariara and Rehab in their childhood remained forever. The two became very close.

Now a big boy, Kariara joined his siblings, especially his two brothers; Wang’ombe and Kinori, in helping their mother pick tea and coffee to earn extra money for the family. In the evening, they gathered in their grandmother’s house for story- telling sessions. Wanjiru – Kariara’s grandmother – was a great storyteller. To get the children work, she promised to tell them a new story in the evening.

Responding to my question, Gitau wa Mathu – a Kikuyu elder in Tumu Tumu comments:

The Agikuyu used to tell stories at night after a day's work. The grandparents or the first wives and times the fathers were the custodians of oral narratives. The stories were meant to teach, condemn vices and immorality among young people but more so, to pass the history, culture and tradition from one generation to the other. Story telling sessions were also a good time to entertain the family and light up the atmosphere in the homestead.

The chores-coffee and tea picking, planting and grazing- and the story- telling sessions may have informed Kariara's choice of imagery later when he began writing. The poem *A Leopard Lives in a Muu Tree* is a good example.

Though in time of war, Kariara enjoyed his early childhood; daily interaction with other children where friendship and alliances changed from now and then sandwiched between fights and tears, joy and laughter. All these prepared him for life as a young adult.

CHAPTER 6

AN OATH

When an oath is taken... the mind is more attentive, for it guards against two things, the reproach of friends and offence against the gods. Sophocles [496-406]

The Agikuyu people are known to have many traditional dances like *Gichukia*, *Ngucu*, *Muigooyo*, *Kibata*; meant for the young folks and *Muthongoci* and *Mwomboko* for the old folks. The young Kariara, like many of his contemporaries participated enthusiastically in these dances especially during ceremonies such as the dance competition between young people who came from different locales stretching all the way from Mathira, Nyeri, Othaya and Tetu, and circumcision ceremonies.

His prowess in face painting and drumming made him famous in the village and provoked envy among his peers. This ability to paint people's faces turned him to a great artist and drawing became a hobby that he really cherished even as a grown up.

Like a flashback, the young Kariara liked and enjoyed hunting like his father and grandfather. Accompanied by Wangombe and Kinori-his brothers, they frequently hunted at the Tumu Tumu Hills, bringing home fresh meat of different species. Kariara would always insist on cooking the meat for the family and a special *rukuri* for his mother.

One day, Kariara and his friends went hunting on the hills, a few years after his father's death. On this fateful day, the colonial officers had planned an ambush after learning of the Mau Mau activities in the forest. Mistaking Kariara and his friends for Mau Mau fighters, the colonial agents pursued the poor boys. They all run towards different directions for fear of their lives. Kariara found himself in River Thagana, unable to swim through the expansive river.

Mau Mau fighters had known of the planned ambush and were ready to retaliate. They drove the colonialist back, killing many of them. Kariara and his friends were saved from the jaws of death by the Mau Mau warriors. River Thagana would have swallowed Kariara were it not for the expertise of the warriors who saved him in a nick of time. He was shocked terribly by the experience. His mother warned him from ever going back to the hills, something he never did again for his entire life.

A few months after the incident, many Mau Mau fighters were killed. The movement needed reinforcement to continue with the struggle. They recruited many young men from the very many villages within Gikuyu land. Kariara and his brothers, being young and energetic, were prime candidates for recruitment. According to L.S.B. Leakey in *Mau Mau and the Kikuyu*, “In the initial stages of the movement, membership was voluntary; but in the past two years all kinds of pressure has been brought to bear on the members of Kikuyu tribe to force them to join the Mau Mau.”

Daniel Kinuthia in *Urathi wa Cege wa Kibiru* comments on the prophecies of that great Gikuyu seer-Mugo wa Kibiru: “There will come a people from the East who will look like butterflies. Their skins will be colourless like that of the tree frog, *kiengere*, and you will be able to see the blood flowing under their skins just like in the *ciengere* (plural). These people will also look like lepers. The *ciengere* will cause a painful upheaval of the tribal ways and things will never be the same again” (15) the white man was already running amok in Gikuyu land. Led by Dedan Kimathi -the leader of the Mau Mau, the Kenya Land and Freedom Army and the public at general felt that fighting and forcing the white man to leave the land was the way forward. “... I shall take my father, for example, if you like. He is the head of the family. Suppose another man, Karanja or Njuguna... comes in and we offer him hospitality. Suppose after a time he deposes my father and makes himself the head of the family with a right to control our property...Do you think I am bound by any consideration to obey him? And if conditions become intolerable, it lies with me to rebel, not only against him but also against all that is harsh, unfair and unjust...” [The River Between]

Kariara had heard stories of Dedan Kimathi and other freedom fighters. He envied Kimathi just like any other young man of his time. When the Mau Mau came calling for his help, few months after they had rescued him from River Thagana, Kariara almost gave in. He was to take an oath and join the freedom fighters in the liberation war. Whether he was influenced by the fact that the Mau Mau had killed his father or he heeded the prophecy of Mugo wa Kibiru. “The *ciengere* will carry sticks that spit fire and it will be foolish for our warriors to confront them with their spears...” [Urathi wa Cege wa Kibiru]. On the day of taking the oath, Kariara never showed up.

Kariara did not take the oath hence did not join the freedom fighters. He chose a different route in liberation war: “Arise. Heed the prophecy. Go to the mission place. Learn all the

wisdom and all the secrets of the white man..." *The River Between*. Kariara chose education. This choice would later be seen in his literary works.

CHAPTER 7

DREAM DEFERRED

What happens to a dream deferred? Does it dry up like a raisin in the sun? Or fester like a sore- Langston Hughes [1901-1967]

Jacob Kimamo being a Christian affected his family positively and negatively. Kimamo strictly followed the Christian principles and this made his family a laughing stock around Tumu Tumu. Many people still clinged to the Gikuyu traditional ways of living. In a letter that Wang'ombe wrote to a friend, he recalled that "In our formative days, going to church was an experience we all hated. Many of our contemporaries didn't go to church since their parents forbade, even the curious children, from going anywhere near a church. When playing in the fields, we were mocked and bullied by other children because of our father's faith. Nevertheless, our father encouraged us to soldier on and ignore our adversaries." Kariara didn't like the mockery. With time, he lost the desire to go to church. This desire grew and was bare to see in his adult life.

Positively, Kimamo's involvement with the daily activities of the missionaries exposed him to the white man's education. This made him desire the new form of education brought to Africa by the white people. In return, he ensured his children enrolled to school at any early age to get the 'new magic'. That is how Kariara got to join Tumu Tumu Mission Primary School in 1942, aged seven. "After Kenya went from being British company property to being a colonial state in 1895, the State left education largely in the hands of Protestant and Roman Catholic Missions, among them the church Missionary Society, founded way back in 1799. Others such as the Gospel Missionary Society, founded in 1898, came after..." *Dream in Time of War*. Church of Scotland Missionaries dominated the Tumu Tumu area from 1908.

Many pupils at Tumu Tumu Mission Primary school in the evening rushed to attend to different chores. The girls helped their mothers in preparing evening meals while the boys ran to the bush to bring back home the livestock and assisted in milking. In Kimamo's home, things were done differently. After school, Kariara and his younger siblings were to change their school uniforms, take a bath and evening tea before sitting in the study room Kimamo had built for his children. Many of Kariara's siblings didn't like this routine for it denied them a chance to play outside like their neighbours' children. Kariara and Lois – Kariara's

sister – on the other hand enjoyed reading and attending to their homework. This made their father love the two dearly - Kimamo loved and cherished education.

Kariara's first four years at Tumu Tumu Mission Primary School were taught in Gikuyu. This was happening across the country, both in Government schools and Independent schools - "Following the boycott of the mission schools in 1929, the Kikuyu parents petitioned the director of Education to provide non-mission schools... other missions and the government were opposed to this. As the government hesitated, the Independent African School Association opened independent schools" [Kenyan African Education in the Colony]. The first four years were taught in local languages, depending on the school's locale. In class four, the candidates sat the Common Entrance Examination, also tested in Mother Tongue, at the end of the year. Kariara excelled in his examination and was allowed to continue with classes-five to eight.

From class five, new subjects were introduced and the language of instruction changed to English. "English started in grade four or later; in Karing'a and KISA schools, in grade three or even earlier, depending on the teachers. So in keeping with the traditions established by the educational wars of the time" [*Dreams in a Time of War*]. Kariara manifested a strong academic and social character at a young age which attracted all manner of friends and teachers in school; some of whom had to influence him permanently in life. In class six, Ms. Jane Smith- one of the few white missionary teachers at Tumu Tumu Mission Primary School noticed Kariara's academic ability.

Ms. Smith taught English language. In her lessons, Kariara never hesitated to ask questions about things he didn't understand. The two established a bond and Kariara became like a son to her. This may have formed Kariara's love for English language that he perfected and used effectively as a writer. "I owe a lot to Ms. Smith. Her dedication and love for her students was unmatched at Tumu Tumu primary. In whatever you do, put all your love to it." My dad always told me when I was in Westlands Primary especially when I didn't do well in my exams. He encouraged me to work hard and consult my teachers a lot" Comments Brigitte-niece to Kariara.

During one of the story-telling sessions, Kariara was appointed the leader of his group. This forced Kariara to always be on his toes to cover his group whenever members failed to provide materials needed for the story telling sessions. This encouraged his researching skills for it was said he brought a new story to class from the ones heard in the previous classes.

“Kariara benefitted a lot from her grandmother’s many stories. Whenever he needed a story to take to school, he ran to her house and sweet-talked her to a new story. He also benefitted a lot from his father’s mastery of the Bible. When the two were together, Kariara’s father would narrate the parables in the New Testament and David’s story from the old testament.”
Comments Ms. Wangombe- Kariara’s sister-in-law.

Many parents struggled to provide tuition fee and school uniforms. Kariara though, never suffered this for his father ensured he had what it took for him to be in school and be comfortable. The bigger challenge to Kariara and many pupils was to endure the State of Emergency enacted by the colonial masters as a result of war between them and the Mau Mau. “The British day raids, aided by loyalist Home Guards, were often sudden and unexpected.... many young men would abandon their jobs and go into hiding or run away...”
[*Dreams in a time War*]

Many students were affected by the war. Some dropped out and opted to try something else like carpentry, others went to farming and working in the coffee and tea plantations but many joined the liberation front after they discovered they could not continue with their education. For one reason or the other. Kariara, supported by his father, held on and in 1951 he sat for his Kenya African Preliminary Examination (KAPE) at Tumu Tumu Mission Primary School. Failing or passing examination at this stage determined one’s next level of life. “The Kenya African preliminary exams were dreaded. Only about 5 percent of the students taking the tests ever found places at high schools or teacher training colleges. Preparing for the exams was nerve-racking, made more so by our being in the midst of a war.” [*Dream sin a Time of War*]

A day after writing his final exam, the examination exercise took four days, even before overcoming the anxiety of writing the dreaded exams, it was time to face the knife. Kariara was circumcised on 3rd of December 1951 together with his age mates – Komerera – his age set.

At the beginning of the year 1952, the country was still under huge tension. For Kariara and his family though, there was something to celebrate. Kariara had passed his KAPE examination and was among the few from Tumu Tumu Primary School who were accepted at Kagumo Government African School to further their education. “I wish you saw the smile on my father-in-law’s face. Kariara had made him proud and he had high hopes for Kariara to pursue his education to university level,” Recalls Ms. Wang’ombe.

What happens to a dream deferred? Does it dry up? Kimamo's dream, to see his son in a graduation gown, was deferred that fateful morning on November 22, 1952 when he was killed by the Mau Mau fighters in his farm. This, almost stopped Kariara's education.

CHAPTER 8

KAGUMO THE POTTER'S HOUSE

But the pot he was shaping from the clay was marred in his hands; so the potter formed it into another pot, shaping it as seemed best to him- Jeremiah 18-4 [New International Version]

The death of Kariara's father really affected him. Throughout his life, he had sorely depended on him. It was his father who paid his tuition fee and bought necessary materials needed in school. He was also his biggest motivator in academic journey when things became tough. Tabitha Waruguru-Kariara's mother, assumed the role of a father as well. When big trees fall, the young birds flutter. To Kariara and his siblings, this was not the case. Waruguru became the pillar on which Kariara built his hope and life. "My mother-in-law was very fundamental in Kariara's education. After the death of my father-in-law, mother in-law ensured that Kariara never dropped from Kagumo. She provided both the financial and the moral support he and the other siblings needed." Comments Ms. Wang'ombe.

Waruguru worked as a laborer in coffee plantations to provide food and other basic needs to her children but most importantly, she ensured her children continued with their education as was the case before the death of her husband. This must have motivated Kariara to work very hard at Kagumo.

Located at 5,600 feet in the foothill of the Aberdares near Mount Kenya and in the current Nyeri County, Kagumo Government African School was opened in 1933 with ninety students. Of the original ninety students, fifteen were apprenticed as carpenters and fifteen as masons, while the remaining sixty took a general education leading to Alliance High School and careers as teachers and clerks. Because of its combined African and government financing, it was called a Government African School.

At Kagumo, eight subjects were taught; English Language, English Literature, Religious Knowledge, Geography, Swahili, Mathematics, Physics- with- Chemistry, and Health Science. Well-grounded in English language at Tumu Tumu Mission Primary School, one subject caught Kariara attention at Kagumo; English literature. To proceed to the next level though, all the subjects taught at Kagumo deserved to be taken seriously. Kariara's desire was

to do well in his exams and proceed to the next level. Though he was obsessed with English Language and literature, he also gave his best in other subjects.

In his literature class, Kariara was introduced to Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations*, DH Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*, *The Virgin* and *The Gypsy*. There was also Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. The Literature lessons replaced his grandmother's house where he went to listen to her tell stories as a child. "With his father and grandmother dead, his mother busy in the farm, Kariara turned to books in his free time. My children really benefited from this for he would read books and retell the stories he read to the children. He replaced his father and grandmother as a story teller in the homestead." Comments Ms. Wang'ombe. This laid a foundation for Kariara in the literary journey.

At Kagumo, Kariara shocked many with his mastery of the English Language. This made many students to admire and envy him. During his free time, Kariara was always surrounded by his colleagues, either telling them stories he had read in books they were not aware of, or chatting about the day's events. His white teachers did not like the fact that a black student could speak and write in good English like a native English man. This didn't deter his literature teacher; who though a white man, liked Kariara's efforts and ability in class. He was always seen having a conversation with Kariara. He brought him new books; many of them not in the syllabus. At one time, he brought Kariara two articles from the New York Times that meant to improve his critical thinking. This article, Kariara had treasured his entire life. "My two articles from Kagumo should go to Brigitte, let her preserve them for inspiration," Kariara wrote in his will.

Kariara also participated in drama festivals. He was a leading student in the drama group at Kagumo. His acting was partially aided by the fact that he was a gifted artist, but also by his mastery of the English Language. One of his colleagues almost ruined his education. John Wambugu was two years ahead of Kariara and the chairperson of the drama club at Kagumo. They were friends with Kariara for they shared the stage together when performing during drama festivals. Wambugu didn't like Kariara's rising popularity and so he became jealous and had to stop Kariara.

Wambugu enlisted the help of his friend Karuthia. They stole some items and money from one of the other boys and mysteriously, the items found their way to Kariara's box. This meant expulsion from the school. "It was the first time in Kariara's school I saw my mother-in-law summoned to school for an indiscipline case," Recalls Ms. Wang'ombe. For the first

time, Kariara was found on the wrong side of the school rules and regulation at Kagumo, but the offence was serious enough to earn him an expulsion. Some of his teachers, especially his literature teachers, pleaded with the school administration not to expel the then promising student. After a lot of discussions and investigation, it was discovered that it was a set up from the upper classes lead by Wambugu, as they feared Kariara's involvement in the students' Drama Club and the fear of losing the leadership of the club to a perceived junior. Kariara was spared but shocked by the experience. He never participated again in Drama festivals.

Writing became Kariara's second hobby at Kagumo. Many of his colleagues brought letters meant for their girlfriends to Kariara for correction and additional vocabularies. The Journalism Club also entrusted Kariara to write the happenings of the week that were then read as news during the school assembly. During Kariara's final year at Kagumo, his literature and favorite teacher was recalled back to England. The replacement was a Mr. Hughes. Kariara was disappointed but, nevertheless, he journeyed on. Mr. Hughes introduced a writing competition at Kagumo for literature lessons, which aimed at helping to improve the student creative abilities. The competition was done termly and for the three terms in his final year, Kariara won all of them.

One of the stories he had written almost ruined his chances of completing school. He wrote a story depicting the plight that the Kikuyus at Nyeri and the then central province endured at the hands of the merciless white soldiers; he had begun his contribution in the liberation war. This didn't augur well with the school administration, but again he was rescued by his literature teacher. Mr. Hughes who argued that students had freedom to write what was affecting the society.

"I am proud of what my brother is doing at Kagumo. He may not have joined the freedom fighters but he is giving his contribution from school." Wang'ombe told his wife on hearing about Kariara's controversial story. Kariara was again spared.

Kagumo Government African School played a great role in shaping Kariara's life as a writer. In 1954, he sat for his Cambridge Overseas School Certificate examination. He scored Credit in English language, English Literature, Religious Knowledge, Geography, in Physics-with-Chemistry, and in Health Science. He also secured a Pass in Kiswahili, and a very Good in Mathematics. This guaranteed Kariara admission into Makerere University College, which was then an affiliate of the University of London. Kariara was among the few to manage

admission into Makerere University College from Kagumo Government African School. Kagumo played its part in shaping Kariara's life and career.

CHAPTER 9

LIFE ON THE HILL

This hill is called the fountain of knowledge or the hill of the learned – David Mills- author

The world is as silent as if it ended in the night. The sun is still resolutely below the horizon and the street is as dark as some old-school black and white movie. It is the end of June 1955, Kariara is leaving the colonial Kenya; the potter of his dream, for Kampala, Uganda. At Karatina Railway Station, many have come to see him off; among them is Waruguru his mother, Wang'ombe, Kinyua Ndarathi, his friend, and his sisters – Loise Wamuyu, and Rahab Nyanjau. The missing person was Kimamo – Kariara's father who had dreamt of this day.

Kariara had lost the traces of boyhood. An earthly scent swirled around him. He wore ritzy clothes-his siblings had bought him as a gift for making his family proud-and moved with a leopard-like grace towards the train bound for Kampala, Uganda, to enroll as a student at Makerere University College. Tears rolled down Waruguru's face. "It was the first time my mother was separated from one of her children. Though she was happy Kariara managed an entry to the University, she was worried about the uncertainty of the life ahead especially in a foreign country for his son." Recalls Ms. Wang'ombe.

Established in 1922 as a technical college, Makerere University was affiliated to the University of London until 1963 when it became one of the three constituent colleges of the University of East Africa. The University stands on one of the Makerere hills. "Standing at 4,188 feet above sea level, this hill is called the 'fountain of knowledge' or 'the hill of the learned'. This is because Makerere University, the first public university in the country, is located on this hill." [*Uganda Travel Guide*]

It is believed that the hill on which Makerere University stands was known as Bwaise but "One day, one of the kings of Buganda stayed a night out with a woman and forgot to sneak back to his Mengo palace under the cover of darkness. When he realized that dawn had come while still in the concubine's place, he reportedly exclaimed; "Gannon Makerere", meaning it has dawned without my realization. From then onwards, the hill reportedly came to be known as Makerere." [*Uganda Travel Guide*]

Before taking on oath, one could tell Kariara was a freshman together with other freshmen; Kariara wore regular clothes unlike others who wore red gowns. “No, not so fast, some of the seniors told us. We hadnot yet joined the celestial company of the anointed. We had yet to take an oath.” [*Birth of a Dream Weaver*]

In two weeks’ time, the oath was administered in form of a pledge. “I promise to seek the truth and study diligently; to obey the principal and all to whom obedience is due; and to keep the principles of the college.” With this, Kariara joined ‘the celestial company of the anointed.’ Kariara got his share of the red and learning began in earnest. The gowns were to distinguish learners from their lecturers who wore black gowns. “...There was an interesting visual division. All the Reds were Africans and Asians; nearly all the Blacks were white Europeans. Whites in black at the front, on the dais; Blacks in red on the floor, facing them. The black gowns signaled professors- lecturers...” [*Birth of a Dream Weaver*]

All the freshmen were attached to a Hall of Residence as part of their identity. Kariara’s hall of residence was New Hall. One early morning, Kariara woke up to the sounds of marching and shouting. He thought the Mau Mau fighters had followed him to Uganda. He looked closely past the curtain, to see a phalanx of sweat-ridden young men in camouflage trousers. They chanted as they jogged past, heckled by a sergeant-major type figure.

To Kariara’s surprise, it was Northcote Hall of Residence inducting their freshmen. “Northcote inducted its freshmen into its quasi-militaristic culture, complete with uniforms, marching songs and passing-out parades. Northcote prided themselves on their militarist sub-culture. They were ‘soldiers’-led by a ‘field- marshal’, and with a whole set of ranks within the hall, awarded, by a ‘supreme security council’ for bravery in action.’ Each male hall was wedded to a particular identity...” [*Life on the Hill: Students and the Social History of Makerere*]

Led by Peter Nazareth’s Makerere Jazz Club, Makerere resonated with the frenzied mood on weekends... “Apparently every social included live music, more often than not from Peter Nazareth’s band. Made up of only those students who could afford to buy their own instruments, it was first named “Teddy Bear”, after Elvis, before members settled on the Makerere Jazz Band.” [*Birth of a Dream Weaver*] Students met at the Main Hall, from other halls of residence and from neighbouring schools like the nursing school. Kariara enjoyed himself together with fellow students. He enjoyed dancing after taking three to four bottles of

beer. “In normal situation, Kariara enjoyed the music while seated at a corner in the hall but once drunk, he would raise up, pick a girl and dance to the tune of the music,” Comments Peter Nazareth. Kariara also joined other parties outside the campus in the pubs and bars around Kampala. This was famous with freshmen. “Many freshmen enjoyed themselves beyond what Makerere was giving,” recalls Peter Nazareth.

Though he took his time to enjoy life like any other young man, Kariara never forgot his responsibilities as a student. During the weekdays, when some students felt the need to miss their lectures for one reason or another, Kariara attended his lectures and worked extremely hard. This made him a famous student among his contemporaries. “Though he was two years ahead, when I joined Makerere, Kariara’s fame as a diligent student attracted me to him. We would meet in the library oftenly,” comments Peter Nazareth.

The first two years at Makerere were tricky ones for the freshmen. One had to study for preliminary Arts for two years. “When, after the terminal second-year preliminary exams, I was admitted into the three-year honors program in English” [*Birth of a Dream Weaver*]. Passing exams at this level was important for it determined whether one continued to the degree level or went back home. This fact made Kariara study very hard. After the preliminary Arts, Kariara did well enough and was admitted into the English Honours Program.

Now a third year and his academic life clearer than before, Kariara engaged in more meaningful activities in the college. He started attending plays showcased at the National Theater. This rekindled his love for drama. “Kariara’s role in my play ‘Brave New Cosmos’ set a stage for him as a dramatist. He did it so well and this added to his already famous status as a gifted student.” comments Peter Nazareth.

At the college, Allan Warner, a professor of literature, introduced the Inter-Hau English Department Competition for original short plays, short stories, speeches, and poems. This drove the ever competitive cohort of literature students crazy. The competition was also a source of pride for the halls of residence to whoever won. “Because of the place of English in the academic, intellectual, and cultural life of colonies, this annual inter-hall competition was the crown Jewel of all competitions,” [*Birth of a Dream Weaver*].

The competition was introduced in 1958 and had a great impact on famous writers in East Africa. It was held once in a year. In the 1960’s Inter-Hall Competition, Kariara’s New Hall

humiliated Northcote Hall, where another Kenyan, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, resided, and which was expected to win that year. "I was among the Northcorters present in the 1960 competition and experienced the humiliating loss of our hall's entry, which came in at the bottom." [*Birth of a Dream Weaver*] Kariara's short story. *The Green Bean Patch* co-authored with Ben Mkapa – who would later become president of Tanzania – won the coveted first position for New Hall. Kariara's career as literary writer had begun.

At Makerere and in his busy life as a scholar, Kariara never forgot his mother and siblings back home in Tumu Tumu. He wrote letters after letters updating them of his studies and getting to know what was happening back home. With his father dead, and his other brothers away in school, his mother always felt lonely and sometimes insecure, especially in the heated atmosphere created by the war between the Mau Mau soldiers and the colonizers.

One evening, Kariara received a letter from his mother. It read:

To my son Jonathan Kariara.

We are well by the Grace of God. But come home quickly. They are about to do my pieces of land and I fear, from what people are saying, that we might be moved from our present home to live with other clans. You must stop it, my son, for if I am moved from this house your father built for me when I left my father's house as a bride, I shall not be able to tell the direction of the rising sun.

God keep you well, my son, until we meet.

I am,

Tabitha Waruguru

His mother feared losing their ancestral land through land demarcation that was on-going in Central Province. Being a widow, and Kariara the eldest son, Waruguru relied on her son to fight for her in this battle. She could not imagine losing her matrimonial land and especially the grave of her loving husband and her father and mother-in-law.

Reluctantly, Kariara took off to Nairobi and eventually landed in Tumu Tumu. At the station, his mother was there to meet him. She carried Kariara's bag and this embarrassed him as they walked through the village. "Your grandmother was a special woman. She would meet me at

the Railway Station and carry my bag home whenever I came back from Makerere, I remained his child even as a grown up,' Dad used to tell me of my grandmother.” Responded Brigitte, a niece to Kariara, to my question in an interview.

After two days, an aunt of his visited them. Kariara enjoyed her company. She reminded Kariara about his reluctance in getting a wife like his *riika* – age mates. Kariara’s mother protested his aunt’s suggestion and reminded her that her son went to Makerere to get educated not to get a wife.

The following day, Kariara attended a meeting in the village centre that was to address the demarcation issue. The villagers argued; like Kariara’s mother, and the large number didn’t support the idea. The meeting ended without solving the problem. After two days, Kariara boarded a train and went back to Makerere. Later, as he came to know while at Makerere, his mother was moved from Kwa-Mbari-Ya Hwai Village to Ikonju Village. “Since my father-in-law’s death, I had not seen my mother-in-law so sad. The relocation from kwa-Mbari-ya-Hwai left her sad and worried,” says Ms. Wang’ombe. Coming back in one of his holidays, Kariara found his mother settled and moving on with life.

Beside the Inter hall English Department Competition for original short plays, short stories, speeches and poems, *Penpoint* – a literary magazine-proved to be a valuable asset to famous literary writers in East Africa during the colonial era. The *Penpoint* literary magazine was a student-edited and produced anthology, created for the students, by the students. “I should explain that it was in Makerere that I first had African classmates...I was placed on the editorial board of the new English Department Magazine, called *Penpoint* from the second issue. Kariara was on the editorial board from the third issue,” reminisces Peter Nazareth.

Penpoint not only honed Kariara’s skills as an editor, but also as a writer. “Kariara was then in his last year at college and was one of the stars in creative writing, having published some poems and stories in *Penpoint*, the signature product of the Department of English at Makerere. In years to come, he would establish himself as an editor in the Kenya branch of Oxford University Press, but he remained ever the stylist, as in the stories he wrote for *Penpoint*” [*Birth of a Dream Weaver*]. Among Kariara’s notable works published in *Penpoint* include: ‘Rahab at the funeral’, ‘The Distance’, ‘Kimathi’ and ‘A Girl’s Lament’-Poems- ‘Her Warrior’, ‘Evening out’ and ‘Karoki’ – short stories.

The first anthology of East Africa Poetry, edited by David Cook, consisted of works selected from *Penpoint*. The Magazine provided a platform on which literary students at Makerere showcased their talents. Having one's work published in the magazine was a big achievement. "*Penpoint* reawakened the desire to write, which I once experienced at Alliance, momentarily, but I had not yet done anything about it," Writes Ngugi wa Thiong'o in *Birth of a Dream Weaver*, on the impact *Penpoint* had not only in his writing but in other students.

By the end of April 1960s, Kariara sat for his final exams at Makerere. "We had to take exams at the end of the year and take the final exams, for the degree, at the end of the third year; three years of study tested in just over one week of final exams," recalls Peter Nazareth. Kariara graduated on May 16th 1960 with a Bachelor of Arts in English and Literature; Lower Second. "I expected Kariara to get a first class. To my astonishment, and dismay, when the grades were out, Kariara got a lower second," comments Peter Nazareth.

That Kariara did not secure an Upper Second in his final exams meant that he could not pursue further studies. This failure would affect him later on in his life. The 'hill' had set Kariara's future in motion.

CHAPTER 10

DREAM WEAVER

Our fingerprints don't fade from the lives we touch – Judy Blume [1938]

In his final year at Makerere, Kariara was among the famous students in the college. “Kariara was then in his last year at college and was one of the starts in creative writing, having published some poems and stories in *Penpoint*,” Writes Ngugi wa Thiong’o about Kariara in *Birth of a Dream Weaver*. Many junior students and his contemporaries revered Kariara. This though, never prevented Kariara from making himself available to whoever wanted or needed his support or advice. This made him even more likeable around the campus.

One of the many students to reap from Kariara’s literary generosity was another Kenyan student; Ngugi wa Thiong’o, who joined Makerere University College in July 1959. Kariara was three years ahead of Ngugi and already a star in the literary sphere. One day, Kariara stopped Ngugi in Queen’s Court- “This was the center of the arts complex which housed, among others, the English Department” [*Birth of a Dream Weaver*]. Kariara was from a lecture and Peter Dane-a professor of literature at Makerere University College- had just read Ngugi’s essay to the honors group to demonstrate how to write an academic paper. Ngugi was shocked that Kariara had heard about him and that one of his essays was read to an Honours class. “He knew me? Heard about me? Me, a first-year? It was the first time I was hearing about my essays being read by anybody.” Writes Ngugi about his encounter with Kariara.

Meeting Kariara was an opportunity many students in the English Department never took for granted at Makerere and so Ngugi seized his opportunity, but his mouth failed him. “...And here I was face-to-face with Jonathan Kariara. I stand there in awe. I wanted to talk with him further, but I didn’t know what to say. Talk of one’s mouth drying up! We went our different ways, I feeling that there was something, whatever it was, I should have said but didn’t” [*Birth of a Dream Weaver*].

Good luck is when opportunity meets preparation. Ngugi was lucky again. This time he never wasted his opportunity. Few days later after the first meeting, Ngugi met Kariara again outside the main Hall of Makerere University College. He told Kariara that he had written a short story and wanted Kariara to have a look at it. “I couldn’t pass up the opportunity. I

blurted out the first words from my mouth. “Excuse me, I have written a short story, would you care to look at it?” [*Birth of a Dream Weaver*] To Ngugi’s surprise, Kariara asked Ngugi to give him the story there and then. He was willing to have a look at it and give his advice where needed. “Yes, give it to me, anytime; he said without hesitation, and left. After a few steps, he stopped and looked back; “Do you have it with you?” [*Birth of a Dream Weaver*] Ngugi asked for a day to put the final touches on it, something Kariara agreed.

The fact of the matter was that Ngugi had not written the story but had thought of it. “I should have said that I’d been thinking about writing rather than that I had started doing it.” [*Birth of a Dream Weaver*]. To avoid letting Kariara down, Ngugi wrote the story over-night and took the draft to him the following day. “I went back to my room in Northcote and immediately began the draft...otherwise, how would I face him the next time?” [*Birth of a Dream Weaver*] Upon receiving the draft, Kariara read and gave Ngugi the feedback in two days’ time. He praised him for the quality of writing but also educated him on the difference between an episode and a story. “You cannot simply say, ‘I went to Nairobi and back.’ What happened there and why? Did the experience change the character in any way, even a small way?” He talked of Irony, change, the invisible logic behind fiction where nothing happens by chance or coincidence” [*Birth of a Dream Weaver*].

Kariara’s willingness to listen and read Ngugi’s draft had transformed a vague desire into a fact that Ngugi had yet to actualize. The unwritten short story that Kariara was willing to have a look at turned out to be Ngugi’s first short-story and the beginning of a long literary journey. “I went back to my room in Northcote and immediately began the draft of my first short short, “The Fig tree” [*Birth of a Dream Weaver*] Kariara had awakened the writer in Ngugi.

JK, as his relatives and friends called him, was a man who lived for others. He went out of his way to ensure the people around him were happy and comfortable. His job in different publishing houses made him rich. This placed him in a different class in the society, the working class, but his work and money never alienated him from his family and friends.

Any friend or relative from Ikonju who came to Nairobi for an errand or any other business was hosted at Kariara’s house in Westlands, Rhapsa Road. His house was always full and packed. “You know the things with villagers. We can tell a neighbor who lives in Nairobi when we realize he or she is not frequently seen in the village. People knew he lived in

Nairobi and whenever one needed to undertake an activity that required more than a days' time, Kariara hosted them joyously and never got tired." comments Ms. Wang'ombe.

He didn't forget his mother and relatives back at Ikonju. He always recalled the adage; Charity begins at home. During the weekends, he drove to Nyeri to see the now ageing Waruguru. He took all sorts of gifts he thought would please his mother. On arrival, he would cook her delicious food some of which he brought from abroad since he was well travelled. "From an early age, mum told me uncle loved cooking. He was so good at it. Whenever I visited him at Westlands after school, I asked him to cook for me because I knew I would really enjoy. Every time he visited grandma at Tumu Tumu, he insisted on cooking her favourite dish." says Gatungo.

Though his brothers were also well established and financially stable, when Waruguru could not survive on her own anymore, Kariara instantly took her in his house back in Nairobi to monitor and take a close and good care of her as she was suffering from hypertension. He personally made an effort of waking up very early, prepared breakfast, fed her and ensured she took her medicine before Kariara reported to work. He also drove her to hospital for her clinics and therapy. The once strong woman, who became a pillar for her children and family after the death of her husband, now depended on her favorite son. Kariara never disappointed her.

As Waruguru's healthy deteriorated, Kariara decided to hire a nurse to assist him in taking care of his mother. "We tried our best to assist Kariara in taking care of my mother-in-law. We persuaded him to bring her back to Tumu Tumu but mother insisted on staying with his son in Nairobi." recalls Ms. Wang'ombe.

On 8th of March 1988, Waruguru's condition worsened and Kariara took her to Aga Khan Hospital. She was admitted but on 11th March 1988, she died. "Dad was shocked and sadden by my grandmother's death. It was the first time I saw him shed tears. To celebrate her life, dad painted her portrait. I inherited the portrait." Responded Brigitte to my question in an interview. Waruguru was buried in Ikonju on 14th of March 1988.

Rahab Kimamo- Kariara's sister- worked as a secretary in a private firm in Mombasa. Whenever she visited Kariara in Nairobi together with her young daughter, Brigitte, she would refuse to go back with her mother to Mombasa and cried to stay with Kariara in Nairobi. In many occasions, Rahab refused but later gave in to her request. "When mum

visited her brother – Kariara – in many occasions I cried to force my wish of remaining behind in Nairobi but she always had her way. One day she left me behind and every attempt to get her relatives take me back to Mombasa failed. So from week, it turned months, and mum decided that Nairobi had better schools. So I stayed in Nairobi with my ‘dad’ and her younger sister.” reminisced Brigitte.

Two years after Brigitte left Mombasa, Rahab fall ill and died. After her burial in Ikonju, Kariara and Brigget came back to Nairobi to start a new life- Kariara became a father and Brigitte found a father. Kariara adopted her. He enrolled her to Westlands Primary School and took care of her as his own child. Until her marriage, Brigget used Kariara’s name as her surname. This opened a door for other family members into Kariara’s house. The nieces and nephews who came to school in Nairobi lived with Kariara.

It was also at Kariara’s house where great writers would converge to let off steam after a week’s hard work. The likes of Ngugi wa Thiong’o, Micere Mugo, John Ruganda, Rebecca Njau, Ama Ata Aidoo, Doctor Spackey, David Rubadiri, all met at Kariara’s house. They would have parties and in some cases read books and formed something like a book club. The frequent visit of these literary writers in his house exposed his nieces and nephews to great intellectuals who in turn influenced their intelligence and performance in school. “One thing made many of us run to uncle’s place whenever a chance came by. We knew in one way or the other, a famous person will visit him. I personally met Ngugi wa Thiong’o and Ama Ata Aidoo for the first time in my uncle’s place. We also knew that a gift would come on our way for doing well in school and for speaking good English; I actually owe my fluency of English language to my uncle, both spoken and written,” comments Lois Wambui- a niece to Kariara.

Though he was not married, back at home, his house was always full of laughter, people, parties and children. Apart from Brigget, Kariara always had his nieces and nephews visit him in Nairobi. “He was a unique uncle from the other uncles.” Recalled Elizabeth Gatungo, one of his nieces, we looked forward to meeting him after school. He was close to us and our mothers – his sisters. He told us stories about Mau Mau and their contribution in the liberation war and about his life at Makerere University as a student...”

He introduced theatre to his nieces and nephews and taught them art exhibitions. He was always accompanied by children at the Kenya National Theatre as he went to watch or take part in a play. He also contributed in motivating and shaping their academic life. “Uncle

influenced my life in many ways. His choice of music had an impact to my taste of music hitherto. The first time I stepped into a theatre was to watch him act in a play at the National Theatre. We accompanied him with other of my cousins. I really enjoyed myself. It's a pity I have not gone back to the theatre again," reminisced Nyambura laughing.

He laughed and giggled at them if they failed to pronounce the words properly or if they missed a tense or a verb here and there. As they went back to school, he demanded to receive a letter at least once in a week from them. When schools closed, they found their letters marked and corrected. "*Wa-kiawa*, if you're going to learn English, learn proper English; the queen's English..." Kariara always reminded his family members. Brigitte recalls the many letters they had to write. "I owe my writing skills to Dad. My cousins and I were made to write him letters at least once a week to update him of our progress in school. When schools were closed, we would find our letters marked and the grammar mistakes corrected. If you repeated the same mistakes in your next letter, he would scold you and make others laugh at you. When I left for Germany, he made me write him an email every week. I have passed the same to my child who always wish they met their grandfather."

He communicated to them his love of music, reading and painting. Everyone looked upon him as their father. Though he supported them, he never spoilt any of them and he always demanded discipline from everyone. During meals time, he ensured that everyone sat down and together as a family, enjoyed the meals. He was the focal point, the promoter of unity in his wonderful, loving and mutually supportive family. He took the keenest interest in the lives of members of his family, gave them his time, his love and generous help, shared their joys and sorrows, and took pride in their achievements. He was a mighty tree under which his family sheltered.

"When, in 1959, I was sketching the Muranga murals for the Anglicans Fort Hall Cathedral, Kariara offered me immense support. He offered his opinion on different sketches, hosted me at Ikonju and Westlands...I mean...he was just willing to offer his support whenever I needed him..." reminisced Elimo Njau.

Kariara spared time for personal development and leisure. In the afternoon, after taking lunch, he always had an afternoon siesta whenever time allowed. During off days, he strictly followed this routine. "At home, after taking lunch, Dad went to his room for an afternoon siesta. Nobody dared to interfere in this for he strictly observed the routine. 'For your

afternoon to be productive, give your mechanism time to digest what you have eaten for lunch. Always have an afternoon siesta my child.' He would tell me." comments Brigitte.

During off days, he went out to meet his friends and enjoy their company while taking beer and smoking. "Kariara loved drinking in the company of his friends. Rarely would you meet him drinking alone. He would buy beer for his friends just to have good time and discuss issues affecting the country," says Mbure. On many occasions, he drank too much beer and left his mind dull-witted. Goons took this advantage and stole from him. In Straight Club Nairobi, he lost many expensive watches, many of which he had bought abroad or were sent to him by his friends as souvenirs. Since he loved wearing watches, he bought more and more, but kept losing them whenever he was drunk, especially in night clubs. "One thing I didn't like of Dad is when he went out to drink with his friends. He always lost a personal staff. His watches suffered the most. He loved wearing watches and always bought the best but whenever he went out I would realize, the following day, that his watch was missing," says Brigitte

Kariara was a selfless man who always wanted the best for people around him. Juma, a former student of Kariara, comments of Kariara's personality. "In class, he could yell, laugh heartily and loudly, talk softly, advice wisely, counsel diligently and joke freely. Yet in him you could see a person who cared so much about other people's feelings that he would rather be hurt than hurt others." This personality extended to his writing. "Kariara's poetry is written in such a way that many people would comprehend his poems. He always told me that poetry is our way of life and that we live it day in day out. In the class I had invited him, he told my students that poetry should not be for the educated only but should serve humanity in different levels of live," comments Amuka. Kariara's selflessness could inform the smile that was always in his face for only those who have learnt the power of sincere and selfless contribution experience life's deepest joy.

CHAPTER 11 GRASS WILL GROW

*If you should take my child Lord give my hands strength to dig his grave –
Kariara, “Grass Will Grow”*

*The practice of devoting ourselves to the bliss of nature is soothing and
reviving. The serenity of nature calms our hearts and everyone loves to escape
away in the mysteries of nature.*

Though Kariara had experienced the pain of losing a beloved person through his father, the death of Loise Wamuyu- Kariara’s sister-was too hard for him to bear.

Loise was born on 4th August, 1936 as the ninth child in Kimamo’s family; she followed Kariara who was eighth in the family. “Loise was a very intelligent child and had a great sense of humour which made her adorable to everyone who met her.” Recalls Ms. Wangombe. She went to Tumu Tumu Mission Primary School and later joined Alliance Girls High School in Kikuyu. After Alliance, she trained as a nurse.

Losing a loved one is like having the rug-swept from under one’s feet. We make plans for the day, and do not think twice about how those plans can be taken away in the blink of an eye. It happened on 10th May 1963, Loise who was working at King George VI Hospital, died after a short illness. “In early 1962, Kariara and Loise travelled to Britain. Kariara went to further his skills in editing and Loise went for her midwifery training at Cambridge University and Kariara at Oxford University. The two were very close. Loise’s death shocked Kariara to the nerve. He took two days in his house without talking to anyone, even his beloved mother.” Says Nyambura- a cousin to Kariara.

The two siblings were very close and shared a lot in life; being close in age, they competed in school and shared their father’s love who really cherished education. When Kariara joined Makerere, Loise, Rahab and his mother-among others-had escorted him to the railway station. Loise and Kariara embraced and cried as they parted ways. Loise wrote letters to Kariara updating him of the progress she made in her studies. Kariara would also update her on his going at Makerere.

To escape the pain and agony of losing his sister, Kariara turned to nature. He would go to Tumu Tumu hills and spend some time alone. In one of his quietude, Kariara wrote the all-time favourite poem *Grass will grow* to lament Loise Wamuyu who died at a tender age of 27 years. “He read a poem *Grass will grow* as a tribute to his sister during Loise’s burial. We thought he would collapse. He was so emotional,” Recalls Nyambura.

Shaken, heartbroken and separated from his loving sister, Kariara gathered the courage to move on. The lord sent him a little rain and the grass of his life continued to grow.

Brought up in the hills, Kariara valued his environment and nature and since we value what we know, he made efforts to educate the young ones around him about the value of nature. Brigitte recalls the beautiful compound Kariara had created in his home at Westlands “We had a farm for flowers back at Westlands. Where once were lawns, wild flowers grew rainbow freckles to adorn the green. It started out as free honey when folks converted their grass to native species, anything to help the bees...but then it became a trend, a really good that we all enjoyed... our home was like an amazon jungle.”

He loved planting flowers in his garden at Westlands. His idea of planting flowers was to plant different kinds of seeds in no order, so that the flowers would grow wildly. So there was this beautiful mix of roses, sunflowers and many other different kinds of flowers growing in wonderful colors and heights. Basically letting nature takes its course. “As a kid, I would often go to this huge patch in our garden, where he planted the flowers and he would describe them to me, but also made me look at each flower very carefully and acknowledge the beauty of its petals, form, and the colors... and he would end up saying, how grateful we should be to our mother earth...” Brigitte recalls with nostalgia.

On his way to Nyeri and many of his up country trips, he would stop on the way to admire and appreciate a new tree or a plant he had not encountered. He took time to even distinguish the different green colors in each tree or plant. “He taught me to be very appreciative with what God had given us and just be still. As I got older, he said...” ‘You people really don’t take the time to connect with nature. Nature is so rewarding if you just take time to enjoy it...” he would tell Brigitte.

An artist must possess Nature. He must identify himself with her rhythm, by efforts that will prepare the mastery which will later enable him to express himself in his own language. “Dad as an artist possessed nature and all that made it.” I remember as a

teenager during those beautiful trips to Nyeri to see *Cucu*, my Dad took me for nature walk around the Tumu Tumu Hills together with my cousins.” “Hey! Brigitte, do you know the name of this tree or that weed?” “This one is the sacred *Mugumo* – sycamore fig tree – the other one there is *Mukuyu* – cape fig –and that behind the *Mugumo* is *Mutarakwa* – cedar tree,” He surprised us because he seemed to know the name of every bird and tree we passed. He named the weeds in the ditch and left us in awe...” recalled Brigitte.

To ensure he knew exactly where his food came from, to save money and to eat clean food, and ensuring the compound and the house remained green, Kariara had made a kitchen garden in his house. “He not only taught my mother to save money, but also to make our house beautiful, and us his nieces, responsible and caring, by tending the kitchen garden in our house. The vegetables in hanging planters of different type and size were easy to tend and to water. It is an idea I have carried throughout my life and one I have passed to my children...” recalled Lois Wambui- a niece to Kariara.

Kariara’s love for nature saw him develop love for painting. His paintings reflected nature and captured the beautiful landscape of his native hilly and mountainous village but also captured and imagined the African continent- this also reflected in his poetry. The poem, ‘*Aberdare Ranges*’ is a good example. He was also a connoisseur and an art collector. He had an assemblage of East African fine art.

In 1965, together with Elimo Njao, Terry Hirst, Hilary Ng’weno, Philip Ochieng, and James Kangwana, they co-founded the *Paa ya Paa* art Gallery. To demonstrate the importance of this art gallery that Kariara and his friends founded, Terry Hirst wrote “For me, the discovery of *Paa ya Paa* Art Gallery, in my first weeks in Nairobi, was a revelation. It was the place I had been looking for all my working life. Here was a freedom to exhibit, and thus a challenge to create, that I had never before encountered. It simply was not possible, where I had come from, to walk into a gallery run by artists and writers in the capital city, tell them about an exhibition you would like to make, and book it without a cent in your pocket...”

The very first East African paintings in *Paa ya Paa* Art Gallery were donated by Kariara. He had painted the huge Mount Kilimanjaro and Mount Kenya while still a student at Makerere. “He didn’t like the arrangement for our first paintings in our rented gallery house and he personally took a day designing and arranging the gallery and when done, he invited us for

our opinion and we all unanimously agreed on the arrangement, leaving us in awe of his meticulousness.” Njao recalls.

In his grave, Kariara might have turned when fire gutted *Paa ya Paa* Art Gallery in Nairobi in 1997, four years after his death. His love for Africa and its young energetic people could have saddened Kariara. The founders of the gallery had not only sought to preserve East African Art, but wanted to use the gallery to stimulate creativity both in painting and writing in East Africa to its young and upcoming artists. “He loved painting, the African painting and loved young Africans in whom he saw potential and always stimulated us as young Africans and Kenyans to do our best,” reminisced John Githinji, a former student of Kariara.

Though the big numbers of his collections were mainly East African, Kariara collected art from nearly everywhere he travelled. He had over thirty paintings collected from United States of America, Europe, and Asia. His all-time great was a painting he did for his mother. In his writing, Kariara treated nature in a groundbreaking way, dwelling in its localities, praising its nurturing powers – like in ‘The Red Eye of the Sun’, a short story – and spiritualizing it.

CHAPTER 12

IN THE HOUSE OF LETTERS

A good editor doesn't rewrite words, he rewires synapses. S. Kelley Harrell- An author.

In one of his great quotes, Malcom X said “Education is our passport to the future. Tomorrow belongs to the people who prepare it today.” Makerere University College had done exactly that to Kariara; it had prepared him for the future. Through *Penpoint*, Kariara’s skills in editing were honed. After graduating, Kariara worked for several publishing houses in Kenya. From 1960, he worked for East Africa Literature Bureau {E.A.L.B} as an editor. In 1966, he resigned from E.A.L.B and joined Oxford University Press {OUP} as an assistant senior editor. In 1985, he resigned from UOP and joined Jomo Kenyatta Foundation {J.K.F} as a chief editor.

After graduating from Makerere, Kariara joined E. A. L. B. as an Assistant Book Production Officer (trainee). He rose from a trainee to Book Production Officer and to Senior Book Production Officer. He was responsible for both editing and designing book covers. “At Jomo Kenyatta Foundation, I was responsible for both editing and designing the books under my care.” writes Kariara in his resume. He edited and proof read in English, Swahili and Kikuyu.

At E.A.L.B, Kariara gained experience in publishing for illiterate adults and books for children in the local languages, healthy manuals covering a wide range of subjects, history books and texts on customs and traditions of many communities. In his resume, Kariara says: “I also proof-read already edited scripts in 14 other east African Languages ranging from Acholi to Runyankore/ Rukinga and including Kamba and Kalenjin. I also attended workshops for publishing illiterate adults and children books.”

Kariara’s desire to grow in his field saw him resign from E. A.L.B. in May 1966. “The Bureau did not publish central textbooks and my interest in education was growing, I decided to resign from the organization and join a private and commercial publishing firm.” wrote Kariara on his resignation from E.A.L.B. In June 1966, Kariara joined Oxford University Press Nairobi branch.

Through Kariara and other editors at Oxford University Press Nairobi, in 1967, *Zuka: A Journal of East African Writing* was founded. “At U.O.P., I was responsible for starting a

creative writing list with the aim of encouraging East Africans to express their hopes and aspirations in writing now our countries were free of foreign domination.” writes Kariara. Ngugi wa Thiong’o and Kariara were its first editors and they contributed a lot in laying a firm foundation for the prestigious journal. Although the majority of writing in *Zuka* remained East African, the two editors accepted any writing that reflected the Journal’s needs in an effort of encouraging writing in the country, especially from young people who did not have money to publish their works in the already established and expensive publishers such as the East African Literature Bureau, or Oxford University Press Nairobi.

Zuka opened the way for other journals of creative writing such as *Ghala*, *Umma*, *Busara*, *DarLite*, and *Dhana*. The objectives of the journals were to develop East African intellectual and creative imagination through well laid strategic literary interventions. The journals promoted books and provided platforms for young and established writers. Though skeptical, Kariara accepted any literary writing for consideration. Through him, high school and college students published their works in *Zuka*. Charles Khaminwa, an Upper Hill High School student, and Charles Owuor, an A-level student at Strathmore College, had their poems published in *Zuka* in 1969 and 1968, respectively. Pheroze Nowrojee’s *Spoiling our Celebrations I and II*, David Rubadiri’s *Christmas’ 67*, Yaduta Chisiza’s *A Remembrance*, John Ruganda’s *Flywhisk*, Khamadi Were’s *They Ran Out of Mud*, and Charles Owuor’s, *The Negro*; Yoor Cigarette *Burnt the Savannah Grass*, and *The Bond*, all appeared for the first time in *Zuka*.

Under his watchful eyes, U.O.P. published: *New Drama From Africa*: a series of plays by East Africans which launched the famous Tanzanian writer, Ebrahim Hussein, author of *Kinjeketile*, *Mashetani*, *Arusi...* *New Fiction From Africa*: a series for novels and short stories in which the Zimbabwean author, Charles Mungoshi’s short stories {*The Coming of the Dry Season*} were first published as well as novels by Kenyans Marjorie Macgoye {*Murder in Majengo*} and Miriam Were {*The Boy in Between*} and {*The High School Gent*}.

U.O.P moved on to academic and general books publishing and was responsible for issuing bestsellers of the 1960s and 1970s. “We published bestsellers such as Professor Muriuki’s classic *History of the Kikuyu 1500 to 1900*, Professor Yash Ghai’s and Dr. Patrick McAuslan’s *Public Law and Political Change in Kenya*, Justinian Rweyemamu’s *Underdevelopment and Capitalist Development in Tanzania* and Michael Wright’s *Buganda in the Heroic Age*.” writes Kariara.

Kariara was also responsible for commissioning all textbooks in arts and sciences for both the primary and secondary levels as U.O.P. progressed to hardcore textbook publishing. “I was responsible for commissioning all textbooks in the arts and sciences except for English Language Teaching projects, which were a specialty of a fellow editor.” writes Kariara of yet another milestone at U.O.P.

With the help of his friends, Kariara sponsored many literary workshops within and outside Nairobi. He personally set up the writing workshop framework. He wrote and showed his work to use as a tool for discussion during sessions in the workshop. Many writers such as Sam Kahiga and Sam Mbure benefitted from this workshop.

Kariara was an uncompromising editor whose meticulous insistence on standards and dislike for mediocrity rubbed many authors the wrong way. “Behind the OUP desk, Kariara was all business, no nonsense. I once let out a bit of my own fury as he had snubbed my manuscript, my first attempt at Dedan Kimathi, the Real Story. He really slashed my manuscript, leaving me angry.” Sam Kahiga reminisced. These character traits made him one of the best editors in the region and many young and upcoming writers looked up to him for guidance and moral support. “I met Kariara many times as I improved on my fine art and went into book illustrations. I took a lot of my work to Kariara at the Oxford University Press in the heart of town.” says Kahiga of Kariara’s inspiration to upcoming writers and scholars.

As an editor in Oxford University Press Nairobi, Kariara attended a conference in Mombasa that brought together writers and editors from East Africa. Together with his colleagues from Oxford, Kariara spent four days contributing and discussing issues affecting writers, especially the young ones, and challenges that editors faced in their work. Sam Mbure, a close friend of Kariara and Ngugi wa Thiongo, was a participant at the conference, as a writer and an employee of Oxford University Press Nairobi. Sam Mbure, Kariara and two more, shared a room and remained together throughout the conference. The trio was shocked by Kariara’s love for English language. Though the quartet shared a mother tongue, it was only on one occasion; in a hotel, during lunch hour, did Kariara spoke to them in Gikuyu. For the four days, he communicated in English even when his colleagues talked to him in another language. His love for English was unrivalled among his peers. “Kariara’s love for English language contributed a lot for him being an established editor,” said Mbure, Kariara’s friend former colleague.

At Oxford, Kariara was an assistant Chief Editor. One day, the Chief Editor went on leave and so Kariara assumed the office in an acting capacity. A member of the editorial staff went to the office with a need of some money. He had requested an advanced salary from the accounts office but the cheque was to be signed by Kariara. When the cheque was brought to him for signing, he shocked everybody by refusing to sign the cheque. “Why do you need an advance? You should wait for the end of month for your salary.” He had responded. The young gentleman responded by explaining the dire need of money at the moment. His wife was due and so he needed money to cater for the medical bills. Laughing loudly Kariara asked “What were you doing for nine months’ young man? You ought to have saved enough money in preparation for this...” Though he reluctantly signed the cheque after two days, the whole affair shocked everyone at Oxford. “Initially we thought it was a joke. When the day went without him signing the cheque, everybody in the editorial office was shocked,” Sam Mbure recalls of the incident.

The one month he was in charge of the editorial team, things were done meticulously and to the required standards. He set the bar high for his boss and after his return, things continued as stipulated by Kariara’s short term leadership. This made people in the office develop a negative attitude towards him but he was not willing to compromise. He turned down many manuscripts that never met the standards even after some editors had approved them. “Staff at Oxford thought Kariara was a difficult man to deal with but with time, they adopted and cherished his dedication and meticulousness in his work...” recalled Sam Mbure.

Despite his sense of humour and the fact that he was a sociable man, Kariara was not one to push and blackmail into what he never believed in. Giles Lewis – Chief Executive Officer at Oxford University Press from 1983 to 1989 – flew in from England and assumed the leadership at Oxford University Press Nairobi. “When Giles arrived, some of his decisions affected the quality of our work at the editorial department,” says Sam Mbure. This affected the service delivery hence lowering the standards set by the workers and his predecessor. This angered Kariara so much.

One day, Kariara confronted Giles on a manuscript Kariara had rejected but was nonetheless, published. There ensued a heated argument and the two felt a bitter taste for one another. Unapologetically, Kariara resigned from Oxford University Press Nairobi the following day. This shocked the staffers, especially fellow editors who had not expected this. They tried to persuade him into reversing the decision but in vain. Many of his friends didn’t like the idea

but he had made up his mind. Ngugi wa Thiong'o tried to force him to create a big issue on his resignation by calling for a press conference but Kariara was not ready to do that. "Mbure can't you convince Ngugi that Oxford is not my property or end of my life..." Kariara told Sam Mbure who together with Ngugi and few friends were enjoying beer at Kariara's house. "Personally, I never expected Kariara to resign. I knew him as strong man who fought for what he thought was right. His resignation caught me by surprise. We tried to drive sense into his decision but all was in vain. He had had enough of Giles," comments Sam Mbure.

After resigning from U.O.P., Kariara spent the rest of the year freelancing as an editor before flying out to America to attend a writer's program in Iowa. "I resigned from U.O.P. in September 1981. I spent the rest of the year freelancing as an editor and reading intensively into the history of Kenya," writes Kariara.

Before flying out, Kariara saw an advert for a Chief Editor's job at Jomo Kenyatta Foundation (JKF) and applied. He was successful but he didn't start working until he came back from America. In his resume, he says this about securing the job at J. K. F. "Before leaving, I saw the job of Chief Editor advertised at J.K.F. and I applied. I was interviewed, accepted for the job but deferred until February, 1983." He joined the foundation on 11 February 1983. Together with the management team, he was required to overhaul the whole systems of entire operation, putting them on more professional bases, as a result of which trading had soared and product quality had been much improved. "To overhaul the system, I had to plan the expansion of the editorial department by training editors, book illustrators and designers, to pass on my experience in publishing for the improvement of the foundation." Writes Kariara on the responsibilities he had at J.K.F.

During his tenure at J.K.F., the foundation expanded and improved significantly in sales and published books. "During his time at the foundation, Kariara was instrumental in re-organising publishing at the foundation, as a result of which the parastatal's turnover increased dramatically." reflects Kanini – a journalist.

In 1985, the then President Daniel Arap Moi introduced the 8-4-4 system of education, which adopted eight years of primary education, four years of secondary education, and four years of university education. Jomo Kenyatta Foundation was tasked with publishing of the textbooks to be used in the new curriculum. "On return to Kenya in 1993, Kariara joined the

Jomo Kenyatta Foundation as a chief editor, and was responsible for its publishing program for the 8-4-4 system of education,” writes Evans Kanini in *The Daily Nation* of August 1993.

One of Kariara’s greatest contributions to Kenya was when he was the Chief Editor at Jomo Kenyatta Foundation. His dynamic roles, together with his team, in the developing the ‘mountains of materials’ required for the smooth take-off of the 8-4-4 education system, was unrivalled. The system has served the country since 1985. “Being the chief editor, Kariara and his editorial team were expected to aid in implementing curriculum change quickly and efficiently, deliver quality content and produce learning resources that were based on research and trials, and are designed to stimulate academic success, adapted to the changing needs of learners and their teachers.” It was a unique experience for Kariara who had majorly concentrated more on literary works at Oxford. At Jomo Kenyatta Foundation, he had to deal with different disciplines ranging from Art, Science, and Agriculture among others. I was very happy for him when he joined JKF,” comments Sam Mbure on Kariara’s role at JKF.

Many of Kariara’s contemporaries’ feels that Kariara’s weakness was his lack of published volume of poetry but Marjorie Macgoye – a poet and a friend to Kariara – always observed that: “... reading other people’s writing all the time, leaves little room in the brain for one’s own creative work.” {*Nyarloka’s Gift: The writing of Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye*. Though Kariara was always busy taking care of other people’s work in the publishing houses, he spared his time for his literary growth. While working at U.O.P., Kariara published his first anthology of poems: *An Introduction to East African Poetry*, which he co-edited with Ellen Kitonga. He wrote *The Coming of Power and Other Stories*, a collection of eleven short stories; the collection was published in 1989. While at J.K.F., he wrote: *Roots and Sky*, a collection of poems. The collection will be published posthumously; “We are working on *Roots and Sky*, a collection of poems. Joyce Nyairo is working on the forwarding and soon the publisher will release the collection to the market.” comments Brigitte Koenig, a niece to Kariara.

Working in the publishing houses changed Kariara’s life. First, the work rewarded him with money. This put him in a class of his own in the society. It also provided him with the ability to support his family especially his mother who was now growing old and needed support from her children. Secondly, working in the publishing houses provided a platform for Kariara to meet other people in different fields and of differently ability. One of the many people he met and improved him as a person and writer is Ellen Kitonga.

Kariara and Kitonga worked as editors at O.U.P. While Kariara was in charge of different responsibilities in the editorial team, Kitonga was more in editing English Language Teaching Text books and projects. “I was responsible for commissioning all textbooks in the arts and sciences except for English Language Teaching projects, which were a specialty of Ellen Kitonga – a fellow editor,” writes Kariara of responsibilities he had at O.U.P.

Kariara’s working relations saw him develop a strong friendship between him and Gitonga. “Those who worked with Kariara ended up forming a great friendship. He would consult widely before making any decision in his editorial team. This saw him develop a big network of friends. Among his colleagues, Ellen Kitonga – another lover of English language – had a close friendship,” recalls Mbure. Kitonga and Kariara would end up publishing an anthology of poems – *An Introduction to East African Poetry* – in 1976. Later as Kariara moved on in different publishing houses, Kitonga pursued her PhD and later joined University of Nairobi as a lecturer. In the house of letters, Kariara made a name as a great editor in the country.

CHAPTER 13

LOCKED EXPERIENCES

The world is a book and those who do not travel read only one page. – Saint Augustine, a theologian.

Working in the publishing industry for thirty years opened the world for Kariara. At Makerere, through *Penpoint*, a literary Magazine, Kariara's editorial skills were honed but polished at Oxford University Press. "Oxford University Press Nairobi branch was a private and commercial publishing firm. To be competitive in the region, it developed mechanisms to attract customers. One of the strategies it used was to train its employees who were expected to be extra competitive, creative and adoptive to the changing and raising economy." Comments Sam Mbure. After resigning from East Africa Literature Bureau, Kariara joined Oxford University Press as an Assistant Senior Editor. The company sent him to London at Oxford University to train as an editor for three months. This was in line with the company's strategy of equipping its employee's with the necessary skills to enhance productivity.

The three-month stint at Oxford University left a mark in Kariara's life. "As an editor, one must have an eye for detail to ensure that content is free from errors and complies with the editorial style of a magazine or publishing house. Good language skills are essential to ensure published content has correct grammar and punctuation. All these skills Kariara exhibited before leaving for London. But coming back, he was a different person and editor. He improved his writing skills in re-organizing a draft to achieve clarity and momentum. Personally, he was like the 'wazungu's – white men. He became punctual and meticulous," responded Sam Mbure to my question on the impact the short stint at Oxford University had on Kariara's life.

Before rising to the rank of Chief Editor, Kariara travelled to Mauritius, New Zealand and India to experience publishing in these countries. On coming back in 1975, Kariara was promoted to the rank of Chief Editor. "We experienced a person who understood the reader's base and the type of content readers wanted. He guided the editorial team to the latest trends and news that affect target readers to generate and publish timely and compelling content. The company really benefitted from his leadership," comments Sam Mbure.

Still at Oxford University Press, Kariara travelled to Britain, France and Germany for a cultural tour sponsored by the company for its employees. He experienced different cultures in these three countries. “In England, he enjoyed the ballet and art exhibitions more than any other country.” says Mbure. His love for art was rekindled. He collected different form of arts; sculpture, drawing and paintings, and kept them as souvenirs. “He would collect art from nearly everywhere he travelled. I believe he had over 30 paintings. I inherited 10-12 of his favourite ones.” reminisce Brigitte – Kariara’s niece.

In September 1981, Kariara resigned from Oxford University Press and spent the rest of that year freelancing as an editor and reading intensively. This opened another opportunity for him to travel again. “I was invited to join writers from all over the world from August to December 1982 on the International writer’s program at the University of Iowa, Iowa city, U.S.A as a recognition of my work as a poet, short story writer, dramatist, and editor, and as a promoter of arts in East Africa,” Writes Kariara in his resume. Reflecting on the impact the International writer’s program had on upcoming writers of their era, Peter Nazareth says “The participants spent their days in creative writing workshops and global literature seminars designed to broaden their literary horizons and deepen their empathy for and understanding of one another’s identities and stories.” The program enriched Kariara’s writing skills. While attending the program, he wrote *Stories from Kenya’s History*- a collection of five short stories and *Tonight we shall pray to my My Gods* – a one-act play.

Before going to America for the International Writer’s program, Kariara had secured a job with Jomo Kenyatta Foundation as a Chief Editor. “Before leaving, I saw the job of Chief Editor advertised at J.K.F. I applied, was interviewed, and accepted for the job, but deferred joining until February, 1983, after winding up from America,” wrote Kariara in his résumé . When he came back, he joined the foundation on 11 February 1983, and started working. While at the foundation, another opportunity to travel availed. He travelled to Singapore, Indonesia and India, on behalf of the Foundation to discover ‘what changes are taking place in publishing and printing as occasioned by the new mass media technology and how these changes may affect publishing in East Africa, and to investigate the problems of multi-languages in education in India and Indonesia. This would later prove important. The foundation was tasked with preparation of a new curriculum in 1985. Kariara as a chief editor had a huge task on the table. The travels and experiences gained would prove vital.

According to David Barry – a humor columnist and author, “The wonderful thing about travel: it provides you with experiences that will remain locked forever in the scar tissue of your mind.” Kariara’s travelling experiences not only shaped his literary life, but also his personal life. From Kariara’s travelling experiences, it is true to say ‘if you are travelling towards the East, you will inevitably move away from the west.’

CHAPTER 14 AGAINST THE GRAIN

Yes, I have gone with the flow, but, in the main, I think you'll find I much prefer to go against the grain – Denys E.W. Jones

The boy born to Kimamo and Waruguru with a shrewd mind, raised in Tumu Tumu in a staunch Christian family, one who never lost his individual voice, lived a life against the grain. He was not only her mother's favorite son, but a darling to many siblings, friends, and other relatives. One is left wondering what he would have been to his own children and wife if he had lived to have.

To Brigitte, a girl he adopted after the death of his sister, Kariara was a good disciplinarian; he ensured they took supper together and that everybody was seated in the dining room and ate quietly. He allowed her to make mistakes; he was open-minded; "He actually encouraged me with any of my ideas. He would say, believe and love what you're doing, and don't let anyone discourage you, but just do it. Though he loved poetry, he never forced me to follow his line of life. I actually never loved poetry ...". He led by example, he spent quality time with me, he was supportive and loyal, he protected our family and showed us unconditional love.

Though Kariara had many friends, both in the literary and social worlds, two of his greatest friends were women. The two female writers; Ama Ata Aidoo and Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye were always by his side to the very last days of his life. Aidoo worked as a lecturer at Kenyatta College. Kariara was the first friend Aidoo made while new in Kenya 'I came to know Jonathan in 1968 through Primila Lewis of Oxford when I was teaching at Kenyatta College, and from then we kept close connection with him and his whole family.' comments Aidoo. During her maternity leave, Aidoo stayed at Karira's house in Westlands. The labour pain caught Aidoo unawares and when the water broke, Kariara took her in his vehicle to the hospital for delivery. When he came back, his house help had refused to clean the mess and he took the initiative and cleaned the house. In the hospital, when the girl- Kina- was finally delivered, the nurses, assuming Kariara was the father, warmly congratulated him when announcing the birth to him. He responded with a sly smile. 'Jonathan stood by me in so many moments of need in my life that I could hardly do anything else but to come as quickly

as I could.’ Aidoo responded to a journalist when she flew to Kenya from America after receiving news that Kariara was seriously ill.

In *Nyarloka’s Gift: The writing of Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye*, Kurtz writes “If Okot p’Bitek was Macgoye’s brother and foil, Jonathan Kariara was a true friend, and they held each other’s work in the highest esteem. Macgoye calls Kariara one of Kenya’s finest poets ever, describing his work as “close-knit and jeweled...” The two poets were always seen together and they regularly exchanged poems and shared ideas. Kariara’s *Grass Will Grow* is comparable to Macgoye’s *A Freedom Song*. The tone of the two poems is sympathetic and the mood sorrowful:

Atieno soon replaced

Meat and sugar more than all

She ate inn such a narrow life

Were lavished in her funeral

Atieno’s gone to glory. {Freedom Song}

In Kariara’s poem, we see the same tone towards a similar subject:

If you should take my child Lord

Give my hands strength to dig his

Grave

Cover him with earth

Lord sent a little rain

For grass will grow. {Grass will Grow}

When Macgoye came to Nairobi, the two organized the famous bookstore readings-established and upcoming writers met to discuss books and poems, read and expressed their opinions, likes, dislikes and offered suggestions on areas that needed to be improved. Kariara also included Macgoye’s three poems – *A Freedom Song*, *For Miriam*, and *Letter to a Friend* – in his first anthology – *An Introduction to East African Poetry* – in 1976.

Diagnosed with cancer, Kariara felt the need to write a will. He contracted the help of Lois Wambui, his niece, and Macgoye. Together, the three wrote the will meticulously. When he could not teach anymore at Moi University, the boxes carrying his personal effects were brought back to Nairobi. The documents were thoroughly scrutinized and all the manuscripts of unpublished poems and short stories were consolidated by Macgoye. In the will, Brigitte inherited his unpublished works; she plans to publish what she calls ‘juicy’ work, posthumously.

When he died, Macgoye, wrote two poems in his memory. One was entitled *Overshooting*. In this poem, she compares the biblical relationship between David and Jonathan to their own friendship. The title also refers to Kariara’s own vision, which allowed him to surpass Macgoye and his other contemporaries” (Kurtz 70). The second poem Macgoye wrote was entitled, *Command Performance for Jonathan*. “This poem recalls Kariara’s poetry, his musical talents, his role as an editor and his ability to inspire poetry in Macgoye, to chastely let my labour pangs commence – a particularly moving line given his relationship to both Macgoye and Aidoo....” (Kurtz, 70)

“Apart from a good wine, beer, laughing and smoking, Kariara really liked women...an interesting issue considering he never married or had any relationship with women...” recalled, in one of the interview, a friend and a colleague of Kariara. In an anecdote, Prof. Peter Amuka, a professor of literature and a friend to Kariara narrates of a beautiful girl he taught literature at Moi University. The lady was about five feet tall with a dark complexion. She was a beautiful mystery. Her smile was so infectious that she’d light up everyone around her with it. Kariara met this girl when he was invited to introduce poetry to an undergraduate class. “The smile must have infected JK” after the class, he asked the girl to see him in private. They had a tête-à-tête and from the corner one could see the two laughing; probably enjoying the conversation, and since he was a great story teller, he might have bamboozled her with his great stories.

“Later on, he always reminded me of the girl, teasing me to get her as a second wife.” “Why don’t you take her to be your second wife? The girl is beautiful and has great mind...” he would say. I found this fascinating and in one occasion, I was tempted to ask him to propose to the girl but having known of his sexual orientation, I restrained myself. In her third year, the girl deferred to attend to her baby she had delivered while still a student. When I broke the news to Kariara, we sat in his office; he was dominated by a profound sadness. “No it

can't be true...how...are you serious...how can I communicate with her about this issue? This girl was a gift to this university and to literature she ought to complete her studies..." when sad, Kariara lost his appetite and on this day, I never saw him in the staff cafeteria." recalled Peter Amuka.

Despite all this; good relationships with women, a father figure, one who brought up Brigitte like his own daughter, his concern for his friends, students, family; especially his mother, his 'huge' and welcoming heart, Kariara never married. He was gay.

During the second semester of 1982, Kariara attended the University of Iowa's International Writing Program. He was awarded the title of honorary fellow in writing. During this period in America, Kariara visited his friend Peter Nazareth and his family. The Nazareth's lived in an apartment in the Mayflower. When he arrived, Nazareth was in his office in the English Philosophy Building of the University of Iowa. His wife worked with the International Writing Program and used their apartment as a base. His wife called him to say Kariara was home to pay them a visit and when he finally arrived, he found them in a deep discussion.

After Kariara left the Nazareth's for his apartment after a two hours visit, Nazareth's wife noticed something. "Did you notice anything about Jonathan?" she asked Nazareth. "I thought about it and she drew my attention to the way he spoke, strange as it may seem. He was almost like an African-American friend and colleague of ours named Jonathan Walton, who was gay. They had the same way of speaking except that Walton had an American accent."

In a British Council Creative Writers Conference held at Goethe Institute Nairobi, many writers across the country attended. Among them, was David Cook, who was a visiting lecturer at Moi University from Makerere University. Among the students who had attended on the invitation of their universities, Kariara managed to seduce one of them. Cook and Kariara had known each other from their days together at Makerere; Kariara as a student and Cook a lecturer. During the conference, they could be seen interacting seductively, happy that they had managed to get a 'catch' for a night. "The two, Cook and Kariara, looked extremely happy as they interacted, each introducing the new catch to one another..." The boy he managed to seduce never recovered and never attended his lectures again...he was one of my very best students..." laments Indangasi.

On his death bed, Kariara never allowed the pain to stop him from reading. One of the literary critics had written an article in a daily newspaper criticizing gay movement in the country. Fortunately or unfortunately, the writer was his friend and whether by coincidence or not, the following day he went to visit him in the hospital. Kariara had read the article and was very furious. When the said friend visited, Kariara really quarreled him. “What was the purpose of writing this; showing him the article? Don’t you think homosexuals deserve more than you’re stipulating?” What was intended to be a courtesy call ended up in a heated argument. He didn’t take kindly of him and the article.

What amazed many was the fact that Kariara liked women and children so much. He joked limitlessly and was extremely friendly with his female friends, his nieces and nephews. “I wondered why he didn’t desire to have his own children...” posed a friend of his. In one of his invitations to a neighboring school, Peter Amuka requested Kariara to join him. Together, they visited a secondary school within Eldoret town to help students in poetry. Kariara encountered a touching story. One of the female students looked uncomfortable in school and paid no attention in class. He approached the girl wanting to know what the problem was but the girl could not respond. After class, he enquired from the teachers what the problem was. The girl was in a state of depression. She had lost a mother in car accident and the father, out of denial, ran to alcohol. This left the girl susceptible to many problems, including risking dropping out of school due to lack of school fees. This left Kariara stupefied for a minute. Before leaving, he paid the girls school fees for one year and left some money in school for her upkeep. This too, left many wondering what kind of a father he would have been, had he decided to have his own children.

“Though I would never have minded Kariara leaving behind a child or children to continue his legacy as a poet and writer, the beautiful poems, short stories and plays left to us by him will inspire more writers whether related or not, to continue his school of thought that was founded on meticulousness, dedication and nature. Though society will always be judgmental and skeptical, we should be attracted to what writers have to offer and not use their sexual orientation to discredit them. We should remember Kariara as a special human being who was kind, humane and accessible,” Amuka argued in an interview.

As a lecturer at Moi University, many people avoided his company away from class for fear of being associated with his sexual orientation. This never bothered him and life moved on as he wanted. “He loved partying and on many occasions, he held, together with Dr. Spackey, a

visiting lecturer at Moi University, and who Kariara had an affair with, parties for ‘Boys’ only in his house,” comments Amuka.

“We have heard and read in the newspapers, what people say of Kariara as the founder of homosexual movement in Kenya. We know for a fact that he didn’t have a family; wife and children, but we have always been his family. To many of his nieces and nephews, Kariara was like a father to them. He was a family man who kept his family happy and always went out of his way to ensure all was well. He hosted us in Nairobi during our school days. He even paid school fees for some of us. We didn’t know of him being gay and we didn’t care about it. I always feel that people should not bother about someone’s personal and private life. Whether he was gay or not, that was for other people to judge. To us, he was the best uncle, brother and son a family would desire...” responded a niece of Kariara to my question on him being gay.

What Kariara could not confront physically, he confronted it in his writing. The issue of homosexuality and gender relationships informed the bases for his writings especially poems; a good example is his famous poem *A Leopard Lives in a Muu Tree* and *A Sometime Worry*.

CHAPTER 15

INVISIBLE WOUND

Broken dreams scattered, pieces of shattered glass, some dreams were never truly meant to be – Karl James (2017)

When Kariara sat his final examinations at the end of the three years in Makerere, he was convinced he gave his best and expected to do well when results were released. Being a ‘master’ of the English language, one who many turned to for help, many people at Makerere expected Kariara to pass his examinations with a Second Upper. “When I was leaving Makerere, my professor had told me that I was getting an upper second,” Kariara, disappointed, told Peter Nazareth when the two met in America. Kariara had attended the International Writers Program at Iowa University. The external examiners who came from the University of London could have lowered the then famous student’s degree. “My wife and I were both working for IWP and when Kariara attended the program; we had a chance to spend a lot of time with him. One of the things I asked him was about his degree. He was astonished when the results were announced that he had a Lower Second. I think what happened was that when the external examiners came from the University of London; they decided to lower his degree. My own feelings were that they were not willing {at the time} to have an African get a good degree in the field of English,” Comments Peter Nazareth. This meant the end of the journey for Kariara’s education. He could not continue with his studies though he dreamt of earning a PhD. It was not only disappointing but hurting at the same time.

Established in 1956 as Royal Technical College; renamed Royal College Nairobi in 1961, University College Nairobi in 1964 and finally University of Nairobi in 1970 – when the University of East Africa was split into three independent universities- University of Nairobi is one of Kenya’s oldest universities. Teaching at this university was Kariara’s dream. Many of Kariara’s contemporaries from Makerere taught at the University of Nairobi. The likes of Ngugi wa Thiong’o, Micere Mugo and Kariara’s friend Okot p’Bitek taught literature at the University of Nairobi.

Either envying his friends or genuine desire, Kariara dreamt of teaching literature at the University of Nairobi. Even after securing envious jobs at different publishing houses in

Kenya, Kariara was always seen at the corridors of Literature Department at University of Nairobi.

He attended public lectures and was on many occasions seen in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's lectures. He assisted Ngugi's students in different ways and was open to offer any assistance to whoever approached him. Peter Amuka – currently a professor of literature at Moi University, who was then Ngugi's student at University of Nairobi – says “At the university, I interacted with Kariara in his frequent visits at the department.” Later, the two, Kariara and Amuka, would work at Moi University, Eldoret.

The Travelling Theatre benefitted a lot from Kariara's generosity. Okot p'Bitek always invited him to assist in improving the group. Kariara offered his expertise in editing and contributed in rehearsing. He had acquired the skills as a student at Makerere. The fact that he participated in plays at the Kenya National Theatre, allowed him a chance to get involved with the university's theatre club. On many occasions, he hosted parties for the travelling theatre students at his house as a way of motivating the group. “I was among the students who enjoyed Kariara's generosity. After a great performance, we were entertained in his house,” reminisce Amuka.

When Elizabeth Gatungo – a niece to Kariara and a lecturer at the University of Nairobi's Department of Literature, joined the faculty as a lecturer, Kariara could not believe it. Gatungo who teaches French language at the faculty is one of the beneficiaries of Kariara's generosity. When she broke the news of her employment, Kariara was ecstatic. He quickly arranged a party to celebrate the good news. “My uncle was this happy man; always jovial, sociable, and, always laughing. When he heard the news about my employment at the faculty, he congratulated me and prepared a party to celebrate the achievement in his house. Any time he expressed himself, he did it poetically. The only thing that took away his joy and peace was the lack of a PhD and his failure to secure a job at University of Nairobi.” recalls Gatungo. Kariara always complained to his family and friends that his lack of a PhD denied him a chance to teach at the University of Nairobi.

Kariara died before fulfilling his dream of teaching at the University of Nairobi. In his will, he requested the family to ensure that his funeral mass was held at the Great Court of the University of Nairobi. Though he was respected as a seasoned editor and writer among his contemporaries, he lived a life of a teacher -expert communicator, superior listener, deep

knowledge and passion for his subject; literature, friendliness and approachability, excellent preparation and organization and strong work ethic. Sometimes life gives you a second chance, or even two!

CHAPTER 16

ANOTHER WHITEMAN AT THE DOOR

Having a second chance makes you want to work even harder – Tia Mowry

In life, second chances are basically new opportunities that we should take advantage of. Life had once dealt Kariara a blow. He failed to attain a Second Upper in his time at Makerere University College and instead, attained a Lower Second. Consequentially, Kariara could not continue with his education. He saw his lack of a PhD as a reason for his failed dream of teaching at the University of Nairobi.

A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush. For Kariara, all was not lost. His love for teaching would be fulfilled in a different institution. In 1990, the faculty of Information Sciences, Moi University, saw the need to start a new department that sought to teach Book Trade and Publishing. Diana Rosenberg- the pioneer dean of the faculty of Information Sciences at Moi University, played a key role in bringing Kariara to Moi University. She recommended him to the senate and took the responsibilities of convincing Kariara to join the University as a lecturer. On 1st of April 1990, Kariara resigned from Jomo Kenyatta Foundation and joined Moi University as the head of the new department that taught book Trade and Publishing. Until

Moi University decided to implement the “harmonized approach” promoted by UNESCO, degrees in the area of Information Sciences were in distinct and separate areas; for example, librarianship or archives. Undergraduate degrees in publishing and book trade barely existed.

Says Sam Muniafu – an alumni of Moi University.

Resilience and determination, commitment, action orientation and clarity were among character traits that made Kariara a cherished editor in the country. All these accompanied Kariara to Moi University as he began his life as a teacher. “We just liked how Kariara did his things. He was always on time for his classes and the meetings. Never did we hear a complaint from the students that he missed classes. The only thing said of him is that he was thorough and demanded them to attend his classes on time and without fail. In his office, he had a closet. After lunch, he took a one-hour siesta. Not even the dean, would disrupt his

siesta. To us, Kariara was another ‘white’ man next door. He was meticulous; orderly and always on time.” A colleague of his observes.

In class, Kariara yelled, laughed heartily and loudly, talked softly, advised wisely, counselled diligently and joked freely with his students. He wanted his students to concentrate only on his teaching and never allowed straying minds in his class. “The first time I sat in his class, I was irritated. Here was a lecturer who wanted one to concentrate only on his teaching and would not let your mind stray. And he would admonish you like you were a little child!” recalls Mike Juma – a former student of Kariara.

Kariara commitment and dedication in his job as a teacher was admirable. He talked highly of his students and his department. He was always focused and could not condone wanton waste of time. Juma argues that:

Little by little we acquired Mr. Kariara sense of pride and always looked up to him for professional guidance. But he believed in first things first. I remembered when we went to him to ask for his assistance in getting jobs. “No! No! No! Finish your projects first and prepare for your final examinations. After that, we may talk about jobs. He said.

Kariara’s wealth of knowledge and experience, his understanding of education system and his ability to combine stimulating anecdote and his teaching made him a popular teacher among his students and colleagues. “But as time went by I realized Mr. Kariara’s teaching gradually filled us with pride. Our colleagues in other departments could not stop talking about him and we felt jolly good about it,” reminisces Juma.

‘Jonathan Kariara was moved to Moi University for a teaching job’, wrote Evans Kanini in the *Daily Nation* of August 6, 1990. As if teaching was a missing piece in a jigsaw puzzle of Kariara’s life, many were excited by his appointment. The excitement was not in vain for many benefitted from Kariara’s intrinsic gift in teaching. One of the many beneficiaries was Peter Amuka and his students.

One day, Amuka shared his worry for a course he was to introduce to a new group of students but which students in the past found it difficult and never enjoyed the lecturers. The course was East African Poetry. “Amuka you don’t need to worry, when time is due, let me know and I will help,” Kariara told Amuka.

At the beginning of the new semester, Amuka approached Kariara and invited him to his new class. Even in his busy schedule, Kariara managed to attend the first lecture and actually he introduced the course.

At the entrance to the lecture room, he burst into a Kikuyu lullaby and sung it all the way to the lecture room even as some students joined him. He sang for some ten or so minutes and then invited them to chant lullabies in their many languages. He sang other songs for different occasions and rituals and involved students in the drama. He made the class so interesting and we all looked to the next lecture. Five of my students from this class went ahead and specialized in literature for their master's degree.

Recalls Amuka.

In November 1990, David Cook joined Moi University as a visiting professor for the second time. Kariara was David Cook's student at Makerere University College. When Cook realized that Kariara was teaching at Moi University, he quickly went looking for him.

"Cook was very happy that Kariara was finally living the life Cook saw in him while at Makerere. Most of his free time at Moi was spent in Kariara's office or his house," says Amuka. Kariara and Cook made themselves available to many budding writers in the country and the literature students at Moi University. They helped them read and edit their manuscripts and organized regular meetings with them in Kariara's house. "The friendship between Cook and Kariara was made in heaven. The two were extra-ordinary human beings. They were selfless and always wanted to assist. When Cook was at Moi, our students really benefitted. Kariara's house where they often met was turned into a seminar hall," comments Amuka.

Kariara's teaching talent was felt beyond Moi University. Together with Peter Amuka, they went to different secondary schools like Moi Girls High School and Tembelio Secondary School upon invitation, to teach poetry in these schools. "Some of the teachers in the neighbouring high schools were my former students. In many occasions, I received invitations to give lectures on poetry in these schools. Likewise, I would invite Kariara to accompany me. In our visit, Kariara always carried gifts in different forms: exercise books, pens, novels..., and he always offered his car to be used. I sometimes failed to understand him," recalls Amuka.

In December of 1992, Kariara left Eldoret for Ikonju to celebrate Christmas with his family. In Ikonju – his ancestral home, the laughter, the joy, the *nyama choma* and good wine portrayed a frenzied mood among the Karuoros. After spending the holiday with his family, Kariara went back to work in Eldoret as the New Year kicked in. He didn't know the year would be eerie. The streets in Eldoret, where he loved taking a walk in his free time, should have thronged with commuters by this time of the day when he was rushed to Moi Teaching and Referral Hospital, but it stood as empty as any desert. The silence pressed on him and all that could be heard was the beating of his own heart and the scuffing noise of his friends who had accompanied him to the hospital.

A few days in hospital and after a lot of tests, Kariara was diagnosed with hepatic cancer. Being a malignant disease, he needed specialized treatment. His brother, Wang'ombe, travelled from Nairobi and transferred Kariara to Aga Khan Hospital.

After three months in hospital, Kariara requested the doctors to let him recuperate from home and permission was granted. Few days after coming back home from hospital, Kariara did the unthinkable. He requested Wang'ombe to drive him back to Eldoret to help his students prepare for end of semester exams. The family tried their best to prevent him from going but he didn't heed their advice.

He was driven back to Eldoret after convincing his siblings of his wish. At the University, he took his duties as if nothing had happened. He attended the final lectures and demanded the best from his students. "When we saw him back, we were all shocked. The man was selfless and even in pain, which you could rarely tell, he attended his duties for two weeks without fail," Recalls Juma. "I will not let this disease stop me from offering my help to my students. Seeing them do well in their exams and life makes me happy," Kariara told Amuka.

Kariara's love for young people and the upcoming generation was unrivaled among his contemporaries as demonstrated by his short stint as a lecturer. The break from the publishing house gave him an opportunity to show-case his other talent apart from writing and editing. The break also provided a chance for his literary growth as a writer. During this period, Kariara managed to write two books: *A Teacher's Manual on the Teaching of History Creatively to Young Children in Kenya* and *Scarlet Seeds* – a novel. He never published these books but his niece- Brigitte, is on course of publishing them posthumously. He only taught for three years. His health failed him and students at Moi didn't enjoy him as he would have wished.

CHAPTER 17 THE LEOPARD, THE GRASS AND THE MUU TREES

Creativity is intelligence having fun – Albert Einstein

It is February 28, 1992. Mothers of political prisoners are staging a strike at Uhuru Park's Freedom Corner in Nairobi. They demand their detained sons released. Police are unleashed to disperse them with batons and teargas. The mothers in return, strip naked and shook their breasts at the cops. Kariara was in Nairobi, not for the weekend as he sometimes did, but to celebrate his mother's 4th anniversary since her death. What a coincidence.

One thing that surprised many of Kariara's friends and relatives was his creative mind. Being so social, he found himself in the company of people or in social places like the bars. During this socialization, his creative mind never stopped. He carried tiny papers in his pocket and a pen. In the gatherings, and when an idea struck his mind, he would be seen scribbling something on the paper. A niece of his reminisced "We were gathered in our sitting room; our relatives and few of his friends. We had gathered to celebrate and remember *Cucu*; it was the fourth anniversary since her death. Music was playing loudly and everybody was in this frenzied mood. This time we decided no more tears but celebrating the good times we all enjoyed with our grandmother. 'Dad' was seated in a corner – Brigitte referred to Kariara as her father – there was political discomfort in Kenya, though I don't remember clearly what it was all about, I think it was something to do with the assault on mothers of political prisoners. This had really annoyed him and on this occasion, seated in his favorite chair at the corner of the sitting room, in the midst of all the noise, laughter and the merry in the house, to respond to the government for mistreating mothers of political prisoners, he wrote the poem: *Are the Waters So Bitter?*"

Another instance of death brought Kariara's poetic ability into manifestation. Lois Wamuyu died at a tender age of 27 years. Kariara and Wamuyu were like twins for the two were separated by one year's time. When Wamuyu died, Kariara wrote another famous poem; 'Grass Will Grow' as a tribute to his gone sister.

In *An Introduction to the East African Poetry*, which Kariara co-edited with Ellen Kitonga, he recounts how he wrote his well-known poem, 'A Leopard Lives in a Muu Tree.' He starts by describing the huge, ever green Muu tree. "The Muu tree has a greyish white trunk and

branches, and the leaves are a deep dark green. In the spaces between the leaves, the blue sky shows through and forms fantastic patterns”, he observes.

He goes ahead and explains how one day on the way to their shamba, stood an enormous Muu tree in a pocket above a broad and shallow valley with no houses until the next ridge. “My sister and I would contemplate the tree from the top of one ridge with great trepidation, for the valley below had to be crossed, which meant fleeing past the Muu tree in which a leopard was supposed to live. It was a beautiful tree, and it was in July when maize crop flowers and the sky is over cast and breathes mist on the land, that the Muu tree was most daunting. Then it was decidedly sinister and the metallic sound of rain drops pattering on the leaves added to the effect...”

Kariara recalls how the encounter with the Muu tree and the possibilities of leopards living in the Muu trees contributed to the writing of the poem. “One day years later, I was sitting at the counter of a smart bar in town talking to a Sikh friend. In front of us was a cheap calendar with a photograph of a leopard arching over the black figures of the days of the month. The poem was ripe. I asked my friend to stop talking – obviously reinforcing the image of the poet! Borrowed pen and paper from the barman, and wrote the poem...”

One evening, Kariara, Kinori, Wang’ombe – his brothers – and a few friends were walking from Karatina. The majority wanted to use the main road as they headed back to Ikonju. Kariara disagreed with them and insisted on using the short cuts across the forest. Though they agreed, they didn’t like the idea but eventually they followed Kariara. On reaching home, they all went inside the house and Kariara was left outside. Being his mother’s favorite son, food was brought to him and he sat under a Muu tree to enjoy his mother’s delicacies. As he enjoyed his lunch, an idea struck his mind. He went to his house and brought a pen and a paper. “He had forced us through the forest on our way home. I knew he was avoiding the noise in the busy main road. When we went home, he wrote a poem and I knew something was disturbing his mind on our way.” Wang’ombe told his wife. It is here he composed his favorite poem, ‘The Song of the Warrior.’

Treated with affection by his lecturers at Makerere, Kariara developed an avid interest in European literature. This catalyzed his creative germ. At the end of his last two years though, Kariara was deeply involved in the study of black American literature and that of the African diaspora. “It was a kind of counterpoint in his intellectual life,” Elimu Njao observes. “He took to the works of black Americans with an almost religious intensity, and was particularly

fascinated by the works of James Baldwin...” His new and experimental ideas and methods in black American literature and writers marked his emotional life for good. This not only laid a foundation for Kariara’s journey as a poet, but also to his contemporaries. “After reading my short story,” Kariara asked me, “have you been reading James Baldwin...” Ngugi wa Thiong’o says of Kariara.

This period was very important to Kariara’s life as a poet and also to his contemporaries. It was a period before and after independence. This period shaped the direction a writer took and the approach they used to tackle the social problems encountered by the citizens in the society especially in the newly formed independent African states.

Kariara chose his pen and paper instead of going to the forest to fight for liberation from the colonial and post-colonial harsh regimes. His poems – including ‘Aberdare Ranges’, ‘The Boat’, ‘A Leopard Lives in A Muu Tree’ – are like a spear and a shield on which he fights on. The poem, “A Leopard Lives in a Muu Tree”, though loved by young people for the sexual overtones, is a good example of a poet satirizing the effects of colonization in Africa. To manifest his political consciousness, Kariara wrote an ode to Thomas Joseph Odhiambo Mboya – a Kenyan Trade Unionist, Educationist, Pan Africanist, and Cabinet Minister and one of the founding fathers of the Republic of Kenya– “The Boat.” Mboya was assassinated in 1969. This period in Kenya, writers and politicians sang to the tune of the ruling regime.

Kariara was adept at presenting the internal suffering of individuals in the fact of blind society or community in his poems. Gestures of humanity are frequently not appreciated by other people. People are often trapped in roles they cannot dodge; roles they had thought wonderful when they dreamt about them. Kariara and Ngugi’s work share some similarities, such as ending with a shock, or with hope for the future. Kariara though, never travelled with Ngugi towards social revolution and Marxism.

In 1981, Kariara left Oxford University Press and for one year he free-lanced as an editor, took time to enrich his knowledge in literature and for four months, attended the international writers program in USA at the University of Iowa. “At the International writing program, he was like a big brother to the writers who had problems they did not know how to deal with ...” recalled Peter Nazareth, a literary scholar of Goan ancestry now based in the USA, where he once hosted Kariara. This writing program, contributed to Kariara’s growth as a poet. He encountered the black Americans in America, and somewhat experienced some of the

problems they go through first hand. This helped him in understanding and actualizing whatever information he had at hand hence provoking his creative mind.

In 1962, Kariara attended a writer's conference at Makerere University. The conference was called a 'Conference of African Writers of English Expression'. This proved to be an important ground for Kariara. In this conference attended by other African writers including Chinua Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Obi Wali, Christopher Okigbo, Wole Soyinka, among others, Kariara's work and that of Ngugi were read and critiqued by the panel. This boosted Kariara's confidence and encouraged him in his literary journey.

The other important issue discussed in the conference, was the use of language. Some writers like Chinua Achebe were of the opinion that Africa should embrace the use of English language to write literature. Others like Wali felt that for Africa to address its literature, Africans must write in their local languages. Kariara's stand was clear on this. He had chosen English as his language of expression. "I wish Kariara were still alive. I would have loved to listen to him argue with Ngugi on the use of English and Gikuyu language in writing of their work. Their argument never seemed to stop even though they were friends, they argued to appoint of annoying each other. I know this issue would bring a heated debate had Kariara lived to see Ngugi write in Gikuyu..." observed Sam Mbure.

The first anthology of East Africa poetry, edited by David Cook, consisted of works selected from *Penpoint*, a publishing journal of Makerere. The journal was not only edited by the literature students, they also wrote the stories, poems, essays, and plays that made up the once famous literary journal. The journal published the first writings of Kariara among other famous writers from East Africa, like Ngugi wa Thiong'o.

Penpoint contributed significantly in making Kariara a writer. The journal provided a platform on which literary students at Makerere showcased their talents. Having one's work published in the journal was a big achievement, and many looked forward to publishing what would be their first works. The competition was stiff. Before publishing his first poem in *Penpoint*, Kariara's few drafts were rejected. After trashing several drafts, Kariara's two first poems were published in *Penpoint*. This was a start of a new journey all together.

Kariara's mastery and command of the English language made him a darling of many at Makerere. Peter Dane, a Professor of English at Makerere then, always talked highly of Kariara. This in turn built confidence in the young scholar. Kariara's appointment as the

editor for *Penpoint* was an important move for Kariara's literary journey. It gave him an opportunity to write more and more and ensure, as an editor, that the journal delivered the very best.

The Inter-Hall Writing Competition was everyone's favorite. First, because it was done in English and second, because it provided the students with a platform to test their ability in writing and for fame and prestige for the winning hall of residence among the students. Kariara was obsessed with the writing competition.

The Inter-Hall Writing Competition would also prove vital in making of Kariara as a writer. Students were expected to write short stories, poems, plays, and speeches. The fame and test of one's ability made many students participate in the competition but the monetary prizes were also a big motivating factor. Kariara always had an eye for the monetary prize as it proved vital for his survival as a student in the campus. "Apart from the fame and a chance to exercise one's literary ability, the writing competition also rewarded the best winning student with money. Many participated in hope that they would make some money at the end of the competition." comments Peter Nazareth.

Winning the coveted first position was very tough. The level of competition was unrivalled since the competition attracted the very best within the campus. In the 1960 competition, Kariara co-authored a short story – *The Green Bean Patch* – with Ben Mkapa, who would later become president of the United Republic of Tanzania. The short story won on this occasion. The win brought glory to New Hall, Kariara's hall of residence. It also placed Kariara, who was by now a popular figure, in the limelight again.

Other students idolized Kariara. In his room, students flocked in as they sought his guidance. In return, he reciprocated by reading their drafts and guiding where necessary. He was welcoming and felt like a brother to many students despite his status in the literary sphere at Makerere. This in return shaped him and contributed in development of his literary skills. "Many of his colleagues wondered what was wrong with him. He was always seen reading something or writing on people's drafts; maybe correcting a mistake, commending or suggesting an idea. Though he went out for parties, most of his time was spent in the library or discussing literary works..." Nazareth reminisced.

Many instances and situations contributed into making Kariara the poet the world came to know, but the outstanding factor was Kariara's willingness, determination and the effort he

put in polishing the innate ability in writing. His insistence in using the English language the right way, both written and spoken, attending literary seminars and workshops, participating in drama as a character, reading widely, and his love for literature saw him become the man many loved to cherish. “My uncle expressed himself poetically. His choice of music would easily associate him with poetry. Harry Belafonte’s “There’s a Hole in the Bucket” is a good example and was one of his favorite,” comments Nyambura – Kariara’s niece. Though the leopard watched from a Muu tree, the grass grew through watering, sweat and sacrifice.

CHAPTER 18 A GENTLE GOOD NIGHT

As the tide of life recedes, and the crest of foam scatters to the wind, all that's left on the sand are dying bubbles of dreams and wishes – Vijay Fafat, an author.

After preparing his students for two weeks and administering the exams, Kariara's health deteriorated. Wang'ombe came back to Eldoret and drove him back to Aga Khan Hospital. "When he called me, at that time I was living in Germany. I knew instinctively that this was not a "how are you doing" call. I remember my heart pounding even before he said a word. After telling me he had cancer – he didn't mention it was terminal – I knew this was it. So I took the next flight with my baby boy and my niece to Nairobi. I stayed with him in the hospital for a whole day. He was in great pain. My life completely changed, it was as if a part of me was in pain too. I cannot put in words the pain; although I know he wouldn't have wanted me to be in that kind of pain..." recalls Brigitte.

Seeing Kariara's health, Brigitte called Kariara's friends in Kenya and abroad to inform them of his worsening condition. One of the many people to respond to Brigitte's call is Kariara's best friend Ama Ata Aidoo. On receiving the news, Aidoo quickly made travel arrangements to Nairobi. She flew from Ohio to Nairobi to see her long life friend. "Proceeding straight through airport customs to Aga Khan Hospital, Ama Ata couldn't wait for visiting hours to see the VIP patient she'd travelled half way round the world to spend precious moments with." wrote Margaret wa Gacheru in the *Daily Nation* of December 5, 1993.

"My coming here was the least I could do for Jonathan after all he has done for me," said Aidoo. "Jonathan stood by me in so many moments of need in my life that I could hardly do anything else but come as quickly as I could." 'Aidoo added, clearly distraught at the thought of losing one of the best friends she had ever had,' wrote wa Gacheru. Aidoo spent the weekend with her best friend and flew back to America on a Monday.

Realizing the damage done to his liver by the cancer and chances of survival reducing as the days went, Kariara started tidying up his life. He ensured things he had planned to accomplish were accomplished. He told his family of a pending loan he had secured and ensured the loan was paid. With the help of his niece, who was on maternity leave, and his

confidant; Marjorie, Kariara embarked on writing his will. The will had fifty-two beneficiaries. He gave out everything he had owned. The tea spoons, plates, clothes, albums... “Wambui, this chair was your mum’s favorite. She sat on it every time she visited me here. So after I am gone, let her have it...” he would say as they wrote the will. He ensured that at least everybody in the family received something from him. Brigitte received ten of his favorite paintings (including a painting of his mother) as well as the house.

Being a unique person, in a way, Kariara organized his funeral and celebrated his own death. “I have always insisted on brevity and simplicity in my entire career. The family to please see that this wish is respected.” He said of his funeral. “Only one short presentation from family about my relationship with you all, a few well-chosen hymns sung by the girls, more reading from the Bible, especially Psalms, than preaching – The clergy allowing – The Reverend Joseph Mworira at Moi University, would I’m sure be willing to officiate, and I had a fanciful idea that a service from the steps of the library, University of Nairobi, with mourners on the great court lawn, would be most appropriate to a lover of books. Avoid all those appeals for old sinners like me to be sent off from a church. I am enjoying myself.” wrote Kariara on his will on how his funeral should be conducted.

Being a master of the English language, both written and spoken, Kariara drafted his own eulogy. Even in death, he could not condone the misuse of English language. For a good eulogy, he asked them to write; “...people are the children; sons, brothers of, not to, which is 16th Century usage, and certainly I come (Not Hail) from Tumu Tumu and corteges belong to royalty and such fancy people. Keep it straight and grammatical... and remember eulogy is not pronounced as you-o-logy...”

Though educated and a man of means, he remained humble and his simplicity was unrivalled. For the grave he had wished to be buried next to his mother at Tumu Tumu, Ikonju Village, Kwa- Mbari- ya- Njora “instead of flowers, a donation could be made to the Nairobi Hospice for terminally ill cancer patients. One family spray only, nice box though...finally, in a small carton of records in my room is a 45 rpm record of Paul Robeson’s songs; including the lovely African- American one – *Sometimes I feel I like a Motherless Child*. A good dabbling and reproduction of this would give me much pleasure, otherwise do not play a creating version...”

For the obituary, and on radio, Kariara wished the following to be said. “The death has occurred of so and so... a writer, actor and teacher. He comes from a large, loving and loved

family and leaves behind two sisters and two brothers. He joins the many more that went ahead of him. The funeral service will be at...on...from...Burial the same day at his home in Mbari- ya- Njora, Tumu Tumu at Ikonju....”

When it became clear that he could not manage on the well-wishers of his family or depend on nieces, his family felt it was time to return the favour to a man who gave his all for them. The doctors, upon his wish, at Aga Khan Hospital had allowed him to ‘recuperate’ from home and so nephews and nieces alternated in helping him at his house in Rhapta Road, Westlands. But it came a time when he needed close attention. The family agreed to relocate him from Westlands to South C where he lived under the watchful eyes of Nyambura and her family. Nyambura in conjunction with the entire family, devoted time in taking care of him. This became a source of happiness to the ailing man.

After two months of pain and agony, surrounded by his loving nieces and nephews, grandchildren and his friends, Kariara summoned Nyambura to his bedroom. “Nyambura, I have had my breath in a pool before, but the pain isn’t like that. I feel like I am having a gun to my head and being told not to let my heart beat...” he told Nyambura. “In moments, I will float like the sea weed, nothing more than flesh and bones ready to decay in the currents. I can’t allow your children; my grandchildren, my loved family to see me dead in your house. I am ready to go back to the hospital...” He didn’t want to die in Nyambura’s house but before he left for the wards, he had a final request to Nyambura. “Please, before you people take me there, get me a religious man you trust, that I can talk to.”

“The pain that once burned like fire, when I looked at him, had faded away to an icy numbness. Black filled the edges of my vision and the only thing I could hear was my own heartbeat...” Nyambura recalled the event that she endures to this day. After listening to his request, she looked at him, not knowing what to do. She called her neighbours, a man and two women, elders in their Anglican Church, and together went to see Bishop Njenga – The former presiding preacher at ACK St Paul Parish, Nairobi South C. They explained the situation and the bishop agreed to visit him the following.

To witness the occasion, Nyambura invited two of her Christian aunts and together, they hosted the bishop. Kariara requested to have a tete- a tete with the bishop in his bedroom. “They talked for two hours in his bedroom. What they discussed only them and God know. What surprised us was the announcement from the Bishop, of the partaking of the Holy Communion after their private meeting,” recalled Nyambura.

Christians take the Holy Communion in remembrance of the body and blood of Jesus that was broken and poured at the cross. It not only reminds Christians of the suffering of Jesus Christ at the hands of the Pharisees but also shows the amount of love Christ has for humanity. “Kariara is ready to take the Holy Communion,” the Bishop had announced. It was an indication that Kariara had given his life to Christ-he was born again.

Very quickly, Nyambura, being an Anglican who understood the seriousness and procedure of the Holy Communion, arranged the dining table, changing it to an altar and together, the Bishop administered the Holy Communion. They sang and praised God. Kariara was happy. He smiled to everyone, a smile that came from deep inside to light his eyes and spread into every part of him. He was now ready to go for the intensive care of the doctors and nurses as this could not be provided at home. Plans were made and he was driven back to the hospital.

“What I am doing in this bed, eehh? What am I...? Can’t we have one last party? Can’t we?” Kariara had asked Nyambura who had visited him one hot afternoon in the wards. “I thought my uncle was going mad. How on earth did he expect the doctors to allow him leave the hospital in his condition? How? ...” Nyambura recalls. Knowing who he was, the family never bothered to argue. They secured permission from the doctor in charge and the service of a nurse; who was to accompany Kariara in this last party. “Please invite many of my friends and let everybody from home come. I really need to enjoy myself in their presence...” he had requested.

From the hospital, in an ambulance, Kariara was taken to Mountain View Estate in Nairobi, to one of his niece’s house where the very last party was to be held. Harry Belafonte’s *A Hole in the Bucket* welcomed Kariara in the house. He laughed from the humor in the song and this resonated well with the guests who hitherto wore sad faces from the worry that he was in great pain. He looked jovial and smiled throughout.

The party was graced by his friends; Elimo Njau, Marjorie Macgoye, Sammy Kagwana, among others, and his family members. At the party, he reminded everybody in attendance to always give the best to whatever they do. “You all know I gave my best to whatever I did. You all know I gave my best to everything I purposed to do... I challenge you; especially the young ones... always believe in your ability and give the very best of your ability...” he said. About his life, he told them that he had really enjoyed his life and didn’t have any regret whatsoever. “I have lived my life and have no regrets. I have really enjoyed myself and I’m satisfied with whatever I have achieved... if I were given a chance to live again, I would not

change even a sentence of the life I have had so far...” Accompanied by his nurse, after the party was over, Kariara spent the evening in the house and especially with Brigitte before going back to the hospital the following day.

He was then taken back to hospital to continue with his recovery. The following day, his friends went to see him again. Among them was his all-time great friend, Elimo Njau, who together had shared many experiences in the literary world. “Of all his friends, and he had many, Elimo, as we called him, emerged to be more than a friend, he was like a brother to him, he almost spent much of his time encouraging and visiting JK at home and in the hospital.” comments Lois Wambui.

The nurses thought that Elimo was Kariara’s elder brother...” observed Nyambura. A day after going back to the hospital, Kariara requested his old friend, Elimo, to pray for him. “Though not common in Kenya then, like it is today, cancer was still as dangerous and scaring as it is today. Though he fought courageously, in his last few days he looked like he was ready to give up the fight...Together with his brothers and a few other friends, we held our hands together and I prayed for him asking God to help him soldier on...” recalls Njao. Overcome by emotion the others joined in the prayer and in turn prayed for their dying brother and friend.

The very same day, in the evening, Jane, wife to Wang’ombe, Kariara’s brother, managed to visit Kariara in hospital. During the interview I had with her, she recalled that she was overcome by emotion “Oohh! That day... (Wiping her eyes...) mmmh! I had not seen him for a month after we had decided as a family to relocate him to South C, to Nyambura’s family. He looked worn out and exhausted. When he saw me he smiled, hiding the pain he was enduring. “*Wa-Kiamaitu, niwoka...*” [My sister, you’re here...] he asked. Amidst the somber mood that had engulfed the room, he suddenly lit my heart with joy. He told me he had accepted Jesus as his personal savior. My brother died a born again Christian...” Jane is a born again woman and hence the joy.

“A day before his passing, I remember being in the hospital and he was sitting on a chair looking outside, then he said that I needed to let go of him for this was not his life anymore. So, I asked him, how do you let go of someone you love? And he said, by living your life to the fullest. He said that he loved his life, family and friends and he wouldn’t change it for anything, because it made him the man he was. Then he took my hand and said he was so beautifully at peace within...” said Brigitte of Kariara’s last moments.

Kariara had the right to task Moi University, where he worked as a lecturer, with the responsibilities of ensuring his funeral service was held outside their library, he had wished to be surrounded by books in his final farewell, but instead, in his will, wished to be given the privilege of his funeral service being conducted outside the library at his dream institution; University of Nairobi.

To date, Kariara's funeral service remains the only activity or celebration of this kind to be ever held at the University of Nairobi. In 1993 when Kariara died, universities in Kenya were facing a huge problem. The lecturers had withdrawn their services to air their grievances to the government and so learning was not taking place. This could have aided in fulfilling Kariara's wish. On the other hand, Francis John Gichaga was the vice chancellor. He was a great friend to Wang'ombe, Kariara's brother, a friendship that had blossomed from their early days in high school.

This, combined with the fact that Elizabeth Gatungo – Kariara's niece – was also a lecturer of French Language at the university's Department of Literature, could also have aided in making possible what on paper looked to be an insurmountable task. "It was not easy fulfilling his wish about the funeral service. My other uncle, Wang'ombe, was a close friend to the then vice chancellor. He took the will to him and pleaded with him to allow the family to conduct the funeral service at the university. It called for a courageous act from the vice chancellor to let this only and a life time celebration happen in the main campus," said Gatungo in an interview I held with her.

Being their son and worker, Moi University took the responsibility of ensuring a great sendoff was given to Kariara. Reverend Joseph Mworira from Moi University presided over the memorial service. He ensured, as Kariara had wished, that more reading from the book of Psalms was done. The funeral was like a celebration. From all over the country, many people came to witness as Kenya bid farewell to one of its sons. The Great Court proved to be too small to hold the huge number of people who came to bid farewell to Kariara. The corridors at the Education Building and at Gandhi wing filled to the brim.

Before he died, Kariara himself had selected Paul Robeson's 'Sometimes I Feel like a Motherless Child' as the recessional. As if praying, the congregation was seen bending down as the handkerchiefs came out as they were overcome by the strains of the song. "The pain was unbearable... people cried and cried, having in mind he had chosen that song; an

emotional song for such an occasion already engulfed by a somber mood...” Lois Wambui – a niece to Kariara – emotionally recalled.

After spending the two days with Kariara at the hospital, Ama Ata Aidoo flew back to America the following day. Three days later, she received the sad news of the demise of her close friend. From America she wrote:

Jonathan, I shall always be grateful to God and all the forces that made me cross your path in this life, so that I could experience you; your great generosity, your brilliant intellect and creativity; your single minded devotion to everything you considered worthwhile; your never-ending celebration of life and living. Above all, your great capacity for loving; how sensible, sensitive and considerate of us your loved ones. You always were – even in the way you chose to leave us! Jonathan, my brother, this was just to say goodbye. Like the rest of the family, Kina and I shall miss you very much. I miss you so very much already. Good-bye.

This was read during the service amidst sobs after sobs.

Though he had wished the family not to bother buying flowers for his funeral but instead buy a standing spray – an arrangement of mixed flowers hand-designed on a wire stand and normally positioned near the casket-for the day, some people felt the need to bring flowers and many were brought. In his will, he had requested the money intended to buy the expensive flowers be donated to the Nairobi Hospice for the terminally ill cancer patient. Even though many friends bought the flowers, the donation that was to be made instead of buying flowers was still made and delivered to Nairobi Terminal care center. “The family made one huge standing spray that covered his grave. There were people, though, who still felt the need for flowers and bought many of them...” said Brigitte.

To celebrate one of them, the poets were not left behind. Sam Mbure, who represented Oxford University Press at the funeral, and also a very close friend to Kariara wrote and read a moving poem:

*He who knew what poetry is,
He who knew what literature is
He who knew the beauty of Art;
JK's hand writes no more*

As they lowered the beautiful brown casket, before covering it with a little red soil, the voice of Gacheche – a poet and a friend to Kariara – broke mourners down into tears as he recited his poem:

Kariara wa Ikonju kwa mbari ya Njora
Go back to the ancestors from where you came
You've been abroad too long, give it a rest.
Was't Makerere enough of an experience?

Instead of hymns and songs, the poet was sent back to his ancestors with a poem, and exactly at four in the evening, December 4th 1993, the poet was covered with a little red soil, watered by a blessing drizzle and the grass continued to grow as the curtains fell and his life chapter closed. The night was gentle and the leopards continued hunting at the Muu Trees.

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