

THE SILENT VOICES

KAGIRAG. MUIRURI

**A novella submitted to the Department of Literature, University of Nairobi in partial
fulfilment for the Degree of Master of Arts in Literature, May 2013.**

ABSTRACT

The Silent Voices is a novella that attempts to see things from the point of view of the girl child. Many are the times that children are caught up in adult conflict. More often than not, they end up suffering more than those who cause the conflict themselves – the adults. They lose parents, loved ones. And after the adults sit at a table and come to an agreement they pretend that things are normal again. Little thought is given to the effect of the conflict on children and where that conflict leaves them. This novella is an attempt to study the effect of the so-called Post-Election Violence of 2007-2008 in Kenya from this perspective. How deep are the scars left on children victims of this conflict? How far have their problems been addressed and what does this portend for the future of Kenya? *The Silent Voices* tries to examine and give insight to these issues.

DECLARATION

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

MUIRURI G. KAGIRA

C50/68569/2011

DATE

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

PROF. CHRIS LUKORITO WANJALA

DATE

DR. MIRIAM MUSONYE

DATE

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge here the contribution of a number of people without whom this project would not have been completed. First, many thanks go to my supervisors Professor Chris Wanjala and Dr. Miriam Musonye. Your criticism and direction, your patience with a first-time writer was very helpful to me. Thanks go to Mary Njeri Kimani of Pipeline Nairobi for the very useful contacts she gave me. Without them, I would have been completely lost in the labyrinthine estates of Shaabab and Kwa-Rhoda, Nakuru town. Many thanks to Wambui. Your insight into Eldoret and its environs and the journey through Burnt Forest to Nakuru was quite revealing. Chege of ICT department, University of Nairobi, Kikuyu Campus – I appreciate the new perception into the so-called Post-Election Violence that I got from you. It was the very igniting spark to this project. I can never be able to repay you for your insight and the time you patiently gave to my interviews. Madam Mumbi Muthusi of Starehe Boys Centre, thank you too for the insight into telling a girl story and seeing things from a woman's point of view.

DEDICATION

For you my daughters, Purity and Rachel.

I hope you find,

Within these lines,

An idea or two about human kind.

Table of Contents

Synopsis	1
Definition of Terms.....	2
Abbreviations	2
Introduction	3
Statement of Problem	5
Goals and Objectives	6
Hypotheses	7
Justification of Project.....	7
Scope and Limitations	10
Literature Review	11
Theoretical Framework	18
Methodology	22
The Silent Voices (i) The Happening.....	20
(ii) The Prelude.....	59
(iii) The Aftermath	92
Works Cited	128

SYNOPSIS

This novella is going to depict the effect of PEV in Kenya on the girl child through the lives of three teenage characters. In three parts, the narrative tries to depict the lives of these characters before, during and after the violence so as to show how as innocent children, they are caught up within an adult conflict, how this changes their lives and how eventually they are forced to live when the violence subsides.

The narrative starts within the period of the violence. Two sisters, Amy and Mary are attacked by violent youths as they go home. This results in their separation. The older of the girls ends up in hospital as the sisters get separated. Their mother loses her legs in a fire tragedy related to the violence and eventually dies as she and her daughter face the problems of living in an IDP camp. Elsewhere, Selina runs away from home to escape forced genital mutilation. She goes to live with an aunt and it is here that they are attacked by violent youths. This way, she loses her closest friend, Amy who she has come to befriend and confide in at school within the last one year.

The second part of the novella flashes back to the girls' lives before the violence. It follows them through their ordinary day to day lives and through their education for half a year up to the time of the violence so as to capture their lives as individuals and to show the impact of violence on their individual lives. It is here that we see the girl's families and learn of their interpretation of every day events and how this comes to affect the girls after PEV. It is here that Selina and Amy meet and become close. Here, we also see the developments within Selina's family that lead her to seek friendship in Amy.

Part three focuses on the lives of these girls sometime after the violence. Amy drifts through various challenges in life after she drops out of school. She is devastated for she has lost both parents and presumes that her sister is dead too. When she learns that her sister survived the PEV but is paralyzed and bedridden in hospital, her circumstances crippled by a hospital bill she can never hope to clear, Amy plans revenge on the people she holds responsible for the death of her family. She meets a group of extremists who are willing to clear the bill for her sister if she is willing to carry out some assignment for them. This is the first time that Amy feels she has a chance to do something for the sister whose present circumstances she blames herself for.

However, Selina becomes aware of her plot and comes in to talk her out of it showing her that the revenge isn't worth it.

Abbreviations

IDP – Internally Displaced Persons

PEV – Post Election Violence

UNICEF – United Nations Children's Fund

NGOs – Non-Governmental Organizations

DEFINITION OF TERMS

a) **Girl Child.** The free on-line dictionary defines 'child' as 'a boy or girl between birth and puberty.' It defines the term 'girl' as 'a female child; a daughter.' The term 'girl children' within the scope of this project will be used to refer to teenage girls – especially those between the ages of twelve and sixteen, for this creative project aims at focusing on school going girl children.

b) Since the term '**novella**' has had a number of controversial definitions, I would want to use it here as defined by the *Oxford Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms* (1990) as 'a fictional tale in prose, intermediate in length and complexity between a SHORT STORY and a NOVEL, and usually concentrating on a single event or chain of events, with a surprising turning point.'

c) The term '**Post-Election-Violence**' in this particular paper has been used to mean that conflict which followed the December 2007 general election in Kenya. Although a spilt of violent conflict has occurred in several areas of the country since then for various reasons, this paper would want to use the term to refer to that particular conflict.

d) The initials **IDP** within this proposal refer fully to Internally Displaced Persons. This term refers to people who were displaced after the 2007 general election and have been living in places which are not their homes, places which are not the homes they occupied before this election.

INTRODUCTION

Violence against women is one of the negative social mechanisms through which women are forced to submit into(sic) a subordinate position compared with men...in conflict situations, women and girls face a greatly increased risk of physical and sexual violence. Many women are subjected to rape including gang rape, forced marriage to enemy soldiers, sexual slavery, and other forms of violence...

- *Women Paid the Price*, Report on the Post-Election
Violence in Kenya, CREAMW INTERNATIONAL, Kenya Chapter.

This proposal is driven by the acknowledgment that creative writing can effectively be used as a tool to highlight problems that concern girl children especially against the background of Kenya's PEV. Problems of girl children are often overshadowed as people concerned with social issues, especially leaders focus on other issues which are deemed more urgent or which are seen to focus on the larger social good. For instance, during the PEV that characterized the beginning of 2008 in Kenya, girl children suffered untold horrors although they were innocent victims of adult conflict. After the violence and the re-establishment of a semblance of peace, priority was given to issues which were thought to be of wider social merit such as re-settling of IDPs, provision of food and such other humanitarian services. Little or no thought was given to the concerns of girl children who had lost their parents – with over one thousand people killed, among whom undoubtedly were parents - or children who had been forced out of school by ethnic displacement and shutting down of schools which resulted directly from the PEV. With the election of the new successive governments in February 2008 and March 2013, a lot of attention has been focused on the resettlement of the victims of that violence, many of whom are still not resettled five years later and provision of food by the government and non-governmental organizations. When IDPs are settled, what happens to orphans who cannot tell what is going on and where they do, can do little about their situation? Resettlement, for instance, is tagged on registration which means that any person eligible for registration must have an identity card. This begs the question, what happens to children who are displaced with everyone else but who do not have identity cards to allow them to benefit from compensation when it happens to come by?

Creative writing is a strong way of giving a voice to the voiceless. Through fiction, the reader's life is multiplied many times over as s/he goes through experiences which might never have been encountered. This way, the reader gets to meet and share in the possible lives of other people. Creative writing also has the capacity of predicting events that could happen. With the PEV in Kenya for example, Kinyanjui Kombani's *The Last Villains of Molo* has variously been hailed as having predicted the PEV of 2007-2008. This in itself shows the power of fiction in society – it is capable of predicting events and therefore, it is arguable that it has the potential to change the course of history. Another example of how fiction can be used to this effect is Ahmadou Kourouma's famous novel, *Allah is not Oblidged*. It graphically details the involvement of children in war which turns them into small robots, replicas of those who command them. Is it possible that if we do not address the horrors visited on innocent girl children during the PEV they might silently be turned into such robots and killing machines? In Kenya, the problems of girl children who were caught up in the post election violence have not received due attention as I will proceed to demonstrate. Indeed, even the many documentaries that have been produced since then have aimed at appealing to the society in general to avoid a repeat of the chaos. Little has been done to address the problems of these girls in particular. Evidence shows that the many documentaries produced on Kenya's PEV have focused on adult behavior. These documentaries have tried to emphasize why adults should not involve themselves in a repeat of the PEV largely due to the phobia that the same could happen in successive elections. This preoccupation has indeed done a lot to overshadow the millions of girl children who went through untold horrors during this PEV and whose stories have not been told. This was caused by the need to focus on the future – the attempt to ensure that the violence would not be repeated as we neared the 2013 general election. This effectively shut out the 2007-2008 PEV victims and their horrific stories. I feel that my novella can fill this gap. By focusing on girl children, my project will go a long way in raising awareness of the problems undergone by these children and thereby give a voice to those whose narratives were overtaken by events and point towards possible healing. In this novella, both Selina and Amy serve to show that many girls who were living ordinary lives were caught up in the adult conflict. It disrupts the education of the girls with Amy in particular being unable to rejoin school because of the death of her parents. This causes her to drift from one economic activity to another until she feels that the best way to tackle the problem is to take revenge on those who caused this change in her life.

The novella also demonstrates that the PEV caused additional problems to the day-to-day problems of the Kenyan girl child. Selina, for example, has to deal with genital mutilation which is done on her by violent youths. The irony is that she finds herself caught up in the violence in her attempt to escape genital mutilation at her home in Kisii.

STATEMENT OF RESEARCH PROBLEM

Over the last five years, issues of children who suffered during the post-election violence have been revealed from the point of view of humanitarian organizations such as UNICEF, Save The Children, and other non-governmental organizations whose primary focus has been provision of basic human necessities such as food and water. Indeed, in most cases, the problems of these children are not talked about or discussed as such but deduced from what is seen on television. For example, the suggestion that a certain number of IDPs has not been resettled presupposes that their children do not have shelter too. Resettlement being or appearing to be the major priority for the government, this presupposes too that children victims of such IDPs have not seen the inside of a classroom for five years and they have also lived this long with the psychological effects of the conflict. Pictures of IDPs marching to demand resettlement presuppose that they are driven by their as well as their children's need for shelter. Pictures of IDPs housed in schoolrooms suggest both the movement of children from elsewhere as well as the different uses to which the schools where these children are meant to learn have been put to. Humanitarian organizations have focused on the society in general and the problems of children only get to be revealed when they override the particular issues that these NGOs are normally concerned with. Even where they have revealed the needs of children, this has come out primarily as a social concern – not as a result of a deliberate need to focus on and highlight the problems of children in war or in post-war societies.

For this reason, there is need for fiction that can help focus on the problems of the girls who have gone through conflict in Kenya to portray the effect of it and possibly point the victims in the direction of help. Such fiction would particularize the problems of girl children in a way that the Kenyan society can be informed of the experiences of these girls – not of the society in general. The best modes of presenting these problems would most probably be drama and poetry.

Drama has a way of using the voice on stage to give life to the voice in a way that a novella cannot. However, the choice of the novella over drama stems from the realization that my project aims at focusing on a wide range of issues and looking at the lives of characters over a period of time. This is the only way to emphasize what they are before the PEV, what they go through and what they become. This would be cumbersome in drama because it would involve changing scenes many times which can cause perplexity. Also, parts played by description in the novella to bring out personal emotion, which are crucial in achieving my objective, can only have an equivalent in soliloquies in drama. I realize that soliloquy in drama needs to be limited for the effect of drama hinges on action. Poetry on the other hand would be good to portray issues that can be read and be understood in a single sitting. However, poetry suffers from an intellectual perception and may therefore ill portray the issues that I envisage here.

Another challenge would be that as much as a writer may want to rely on original data in this project, the current situation of elections is quite tricky. This means that the writer may have to depend wholly on documentaries and reports by people who have examined this field, such as the KHRC. It is also apparent that girl children who underwent harrowing experiences such as rape may be unwilling to open up to every Tom Dick and Harry. The timeline envisioned by an MA project may deny a researcher the patience to interview particular persons. This may mean that the researcher may have to heavily rely on documented information such as newspapers of the time, professional reports and the many documentaries on the net to piece together experiences that can allow creation of believable characters to portray the ideas projected here.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To capture the problems faced by children and to explore the question of how to heal emotional wounds of children in war or coming out of war.
2. To demonstrate how creative writing can be used to capture the aspirations of the youth in or coming out of war in as far as the problems they face, where they originate and how far the society is responsive to them during and after conflict.
3. To portray the role of rumours and stereotypes in perpetuating beliefs in society, how such beliefs can lead to social conflict and use creative writing to show how this can be corrected, by

for instance, encouraging the examination of social and national history among the youth rather than reliance on rumours and stereotypes from political figures.

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

1. A creative writer has the potential to capture problems faced by the youth in a society and to use this medium to change society by suggesting new ways through which social wounds can be healed.
2. A creative writer can capture a people's aspirations, explore and discover the problems that dog the society and their roots and how far the society is responsive to particular problems of sections of it.
3. A creative writer has the potential to portray the role of rumours and stereotypes in molding behavior and can suggest, through characters and events created, alternative ways of examining issues in society.

JUSTIFICATION OF THE PROJECT

The writings that have been done on Kenya's post election violence in the last few years underline the importance of this question to our country – and so does the number of documentaries made on the issue. Kinyanjui Kombani's novel, *The Last Villain of Molo*, for example, has been hailed as one of the most important writings to paint this kind of the violence and its regenerative nature. After the 2007 post election violence, many came to see the novel as having been prophetic in predicting this violence and many other vengeful acts that may result from the lackluster way in which this issue has been approached. Commenting on this novel, James Wazemba of McMillan Kenya says,

The Last Villains of Molo reminds us of the plight of people, especially children, caught in our vicious cycle of ethnic hatred. The author, probably without knowing it, focused on the long term impact that violence has on innocent, impressionable children. (The Diaspora Messenger, November 28, 2008)

This shows that many Kenyans have come to realize not only the importance of this issue to the history of Kenya but also the role that such literature plays in highlighting issues about such

violence that have not been addressed and especially portraying crime born of such violence as a legacy that can haunt the country for many years to come. This is the reason why many other documentaries – and even movies – are continuing to focus on this issue every day. Yet few Kenyans have gone into research with the purpose of coming up with works of fiction that demonstrate these issues especially issues such as rape within the context of war and the effect it has on the victim.

I feel that there is still need to focus on the girl children and the problems they have had to face in such conflict because, this far, no work of fiction has been done to focus specifically on them. I therefore use this novella to highlight issues that specifically affect girl children who find themselves in such conflict in Kenya today. In this narrative, we see children losing parents and loved ones and how this forces them to live. The death of Amy and Mary's parents means that the two girls are left with permanent emotional scars. It also means that their lives are disrupted in a way that they can little be salvaged. Tabitha also loses both a father and the father of her unborn daughter. Selaina has to run away from home and later change her domicile from Nakuru to Naivasha because of the violence. The novella is particularly suited for the purpose of discussing issues of the day because it is a more popular work of fiction as compared to drama or poetry. Anyone who hopes to sensitize the general public through fiction will therefore find themselves compelled to resort to the novel. Also, the novella is short enough to be read at a sitting. This means that one can count on a wider readership even for those to whom time is limited or those who do not have the attention span for longer works of fiction.

Since literature has the capability to change behavior, this novella has the potential to influence the behavior of those who perpetrate such crimes by highlighting the effect it has on their victims and calling on the justice system to focus on these forgotten voices. Failure to focus on these issues may result in problems of even higher magnitude. The novella also aims at sensitizing the society in general about the problems faced by teenage girls in such situations because, often victims of crimes such as rape do not reveal such harrowing experiences. This way, the novella gives them a voice. In this project, the jailing of both the young man who rapes Mary and Tabitha's father makes the point that such crimes must be punished even when peace is established. This will deter occurrence of such crimes and emphasize the rule of law. In this way, this project suggests that Kenya has a lot to learn from Rwanda where President Kagame insisted

on justice even if this meant filling Rwanda's jails. This is because no true healing can be achieved unless crimes, all crimes, are seen to be punished.

With few researchers who have wholly committed themselves to this kind of research especially in Kenya, this novella adds to the data available whose intention is to link the problems faced by children in or coming out of war (with a special bias to the PEV) with their lives in and out of such war. Such data should serve to highlight problems faced by such children which are caused by the nature of the interaction of human beings in such circumstances. It should also help reflect the influence of war on children during and after the war and it is hoped that such knowledge would be crucial in making the lives of such children a lot easier. In this project, the division of the novella into three parts, the prelude, the happening and the aftermath serves to give a forum for comparison of the lives of the three main characters, Amy, Selina and Tabitha before and after the violence. This serves to show the undeniable impact of the violence on their lives as individuals.

It is also quite clear that, such data and its collection is widely neglected. In my survey of the literature available on Kenya's PEV, I realized that few narratives have been written so far. To get a picture of the violence, one would have to rely on scanty photography and satirical cartoons which are available in various bookshops. The best that one comes to professional treatment of the subject has been the data commissioned by human rights groups and international organizations interested in the rights of the individual.

The recurrence of ethnic violence in the Tana Delta in the last two years suggests that the problems underlying ethnic conflict in Kenya are endemic. It means too that the few concerted efforts that have been directed at stopping a repeat of the 2007 conflict have had little effect on the real issues underlying this conflict. It is therefore necessary to increase the volume of literature on PEV especially that which focuses on its effect on children. Until the society is effectively sensitized this way, scenes like those recently witnessed in the Tana Delta can only be expected to recur. This project is a move in this direction.

With children in particular, it is important to sensitize the society on how they are faring five years after a conflict which definitely changed the course of many of their lives. Where do they go to school for example? How far did the changing of schools affect those who had to

undergo such changes? What happened to those who lost parents, close relatives and how did this alter the course of their education and their lives, their destinies in general? How much have attempts been made to focus on their particular problems? Narratives which broach these subjects need to be told.

SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

Although this project concerns itself generally with matters that concern children, it may be said here that the realization that problems of the girl child during war are a lot graver than those of the boy limits this research to matters that affect girls. Melanie Brooks of Care International records that thousands of women and girls who were sexually assaulted during Kenya's PEV with such abuse often being used to subject victims to ethnic based humiliation. These victims still suffer in silence. It is also apparent that problems caused by war are of a very wide scope and therefore there is need to focus on particular issues and to narrow one's perspective as much as possible so as to maintain one's focus and not only be in a position to effectively portray the issues envisioned but also to do so in a way that can be counted upon to change social attitude. It is also felt that apart from the fact that the problems of girl children need to be more readily addressed, the scope of the novella which is the genre that captures such issues here limits the writer to a single group of people – girl children – and only deviates where it is especially felt that other groups can come in readily to give a sharper focus to the problem at hand. This particularization of focus may at times be detrimental for it denies both the writer and the reader the possibility of seeing the wider picture which may at times be necessary in achieving verisimilitude.

Also, the scope of this project is limited to particular areas for certain other reasons. This project aims at collecting data about the effect of post election violence on teenage girl children from documentaries and other writing related to the subject and then use this data to create three teenage female characters through whom such problems can be articulated. Novel writing can be effective in disseminating the ideas envisioned here because the novel as a form remains the most popular among the reading public. The writer in this case is also aware that other forms such as the play or poetry are often viewed with bias. A large part of the reading public regards them as an intellectual domain. For this project to achieve its end in reaching and touching the wider public, it is felt that the novella is the most suited for this kind of pursuit.

Yet I do want to recognize that the larger majority of the reading public may take this novella at its most basic terms – an art form meant simply for entertainment. Many readers may deem only the entertainment element of the novella which might defeat its purpose. While the writer recognizes that little can be done in this regard, it is also apparent that a graphic presentation of such issues may help them resonate with the readers long after the reading. This, it is hoped is one way in which readers can be reminded of the issues that affect the girl children in conflict. This way, these issues can be made part and parcel of the reading public so that their portrayal can be used to persuade change in social behavior and especially social attitude to these issues.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Despite the world-wide attention that the post election violence in Kenya has drawn, there is still little that has been written so far to illuminate the chaos in general. Less even has been written to highlight particular problems. So far, the best effort in this pursuit remains Kwani? Trust's collection of writers and budding writers - Concerned Kenyan Writers - who published *After the Vote: Dispatches from the Coalition of Concerned Kenyan Writers*. Like the titles here suggest, their idea was a general portrayal of the violence, not an attempt to give the conflict a human face as fiction would. Creative writing is especially good in humanizing conflict exposed by social sciences. A good example of how creative writing can do this is Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*. In the novel, Singh puts fictional characters against the background of the partition of India and Pakistan so as to show that both Indian Sikhs and Pakistani Muslims were equally responsible for the violence that erupted. Creative writing presents the argument in this novel better than any argument or essay in law would. There is little literature that attempts to particularize Kenya's PEV by highlighting the tribulations of particular sections of the society or even particular people or individuals. Kwani?'s assembly misses a literary angle that might aim at an *exposé* or a cathartic healing for those caught up in the conflict. The best work so far on the subject remains Kinyanjui Kombani's *The Last Villains of Molo* written back in 2004. This in itself does not address the 2007-2008 PEV neither does it focus on problems of children as such because the characters it focuses on are in their thirties. Also, Kombani's novel romanticizes the possibilities of ethnic reconciliation by presenting children who suffer from violence as ideally so insensitive as to marry one another even with the full knowledge that their families have killed one another. In *The Last Villains of Molo*, Kombani

idealizes the characters in that Nancy, the heroine traces the men who had killed her father ten years before. Though she is extremely bitter in a way that she commits a large part of her education, resources and time to this endeavour, she unbelievably ends up falling in love with the very man she was hunting. The novel ends with the two building a new home in Molo. I feel that what the author should offer are the possibilities of social intervention, through, for instance, insistence on justice, legal or moral, that punishes those that perpetrate the violence. It is important too to paint Kenya's PEV for what it really is – a creation of the media that serves particular political agenda and hides the real issues behind such political violence. This sentiment stems from the fact that the media itself had a lot of influence in the lead up to the PEV and after. To give an example, a lot of people had been evicted from their homes before the ballots were cast. There is also evidence that there was election related violence as early as the morning of the election day. Also, it is clear that the issues that led to the violence were born of the division caused by the referendum in 2006. The media had also portrayed the impossibility of a free and fair election throughout the year 2007. This means that if one was to consider the violence from a motive point of view, the cause was not the vote – the vote only intensified it. It is also clear that the term PEV came from the media and it stuck after it had been repeated severally. Unless this is well articulated, the lack of violence in 2013 may only be a temporary relief under which a more virulent volcano is likely to be fomenting.

More graphic and less romanticized are Uwem Akpan's *My Parent's Bedroom* and Romeo Dallaire's *Shake Hands with the Devil* which focus on the Rwandan genocide of 1994. In the former, Akpan creates a story that helps one see what it feels for a nine year old girl to witness the death of her mother at her father's hand, which the father is forced by extremist *genocidaires* to do so as to save the children. The girl is traumatized by her lack of comprehension of the ethnic mechanics that lead to her mother's murder even more than she is by the prospect of being raped. Clearly, Kenya's PEV of 2007-2008 requires such creative writing so as to depict to the population not only what girl children went through then but also what they are living with. Lt. General Dallaire's *Shake Hands with the Devil* itself shows in more graphic detail the suffering of children in the Rwandan conflict from the eyes of the man delegated to save them but unable to even mitigate the genocide. One particularly disturbing detail is the horror of the children of Agathe Uwilingiyimana, the then Rwandese Prime Minister, as they watch the execution of their parents. Dallaire's accounts are however autobiographical,

not fictional. This denies him the ease with which a fictional writer may change the hue of both character and event to suit his/her own purposes depending on the point s/he might require to make. A similar discussion of the effect of violence is Philip Gourevitch's *We Wish to Inform You that We will be Killed with our Families Tomorrow*. The book is a graphic portrayal of the Rwandan genocide which also discusses the complexities of ethnic conflict. It is however a journalistic account, not fiction. In this forum, the writer is forced to portray general accounts of the violence with particular emphasis on the role of the characters he feels are accountable to the genocide. It fails to particularize the effect of the violence on particular individuals or pockets of society. As observed before too, Gourevitch focuses on real stories by victims and killers in the genocide in an attempt to unearth the psychology of both the perpetrator and the victim. It therefore requires journalistic truth and denies the writer the possibility of passing judgment even where the guilty are clearly afraid. An intervention of a fictional writer would be particularly necessary for the lay reader here because the lay reader wants to see all events lead conclusively to moral points, rather than be left to make conclusions on his or her own. This is the one thing that gives fiction its power, the one thing that all lay readers of fiction expect to see.

While autobiographical and journalistic attempts to expose trauma of conflict victims is laudable, some critics of witness literature have viewed it with mixed feelings. While some believe it is the most authentic source of data to learn the true feelings of victims of conflicts, others feel that the very depth of trauma may cloud the victim's perception and thus cloud the authenticity of their narratives. Elie Wiesel, a Holocaust survivor thinks that autobiographical witness literature 'tends to persuade the reader to understand the nature of a historical tragic experience from the perspective of the narrator.' (Wasena 2010). This means that all conflict witness confessions need to be subjected to intellectual bias before they can be presented as truth. Wasena (2010) argues that often, the victim of trauma may not necessarily be the perfect source of such confessions. The victims himself/herself may compromise the authenticity of the narrative either due to the effect of the trauma or due to a tendency to exaggerate. The latter may especially occur if the victim sees the confession as a way of getting back at his/her torturer whether the said getting back is psychological, legal, political or otherwise. In *Narrative as Self-Portrait: Socio-Linguistic Construction of Identity*, Deborah Schiffrin argues that many narrators of witness literature may indeed use the forum to emphasize their own identities at the expense of both truth and the narrative itself. A more or less similar argument is carried in Horace

Engdahl's *Philomena's Tongue: Introductory Remarks to Witness Literature*. This means that a fictional writer who listens to many confessions and sees them from the side of the victim, the perpetrator as well as the go-between may be better placed to present a more factual, more believable account of the truth. To this end, this novella comes in handy in presenting the effects of Kenya's PEV on the girl child from a more objective, more intellectual perspective – a point of view which many outsiders interested in the objective truth may be looking for.

Though a lot of work has been done by the government itself, jurists and Non Governmental Organizations in Kenya with regard to PEV, the sensitivity with which this data is held demands that it still remains out of the public domain. The rest can only be conjectured from the media. The Kenyan public has been waiting for that kind of literature that could furnish information as to what exactly happened as witness the expectation with which the *Waki Report* was awaited and the enthusiasm it generated when it came out and the general fervor which underlies the proceedings at The Hague. Though this may not be the particular concern of this study, it is important to portray the picture of expectation that constructs the lack of information to attend to this matter. Literature being cathartic as psycho-analysts emphasize, a good supply of information especially to the victims of this violence is necessary to give relief to these people. A cathartic effect may also be attempted by telling these narratives on behalf of the victims as envisioned in this project.

Again, the necessity of this project is captured by the need to highlight the horrors undergone by girls during the post election violence in Kenya. Several NGOs and church organizations have documented the effect of the violence on women and the response of the government for the last five years. Beatrice Spadacini of CARE INTERNATIONAL, for example, explains that a big number of women were either raped or sexually assaulted with sex being used as a weapon. She decries the poor response of the government both in the failure to deliver justice or to offer counseling services to the women victims and explains that many of these victims have had to silently live with the effects of this assault.

“Women who were raped did not immediately report this crime for fear of being stigmatized by their communities or chased out of their homes by angry husbands...there was also fear of reprisal from the perpetrators, many of whom are still out and about or are men in uniforms” (Beatrice Spadacini 23rd February 2009)

According to the Federation of Kenya Women Lawyers the number of rapes committed was well over 3000. CARE INTERNATIONAL in collaboration with Kenya Gender Commission and the UN agency UNIFEM collected more than 300 testimonies of women who were raped during the PEV period and presented them to the Commission of Inquiry investigating crimes that were committed during this time. Out of the three hundred testimonies from victims collected by CARE itself, '60 of them reported being raped by General Service Unit (GSU), a Special Forces Unit of the Kenya Military'. (CARE, 23rd February 2009) Spadacini who, with some of her staff testified on behalf of the victims to the Commission of Inquiry led by Justice Philip Waki and whose efforts led to the inclusion of a specific chapter dedicated to Sexual Violence (Chapter 6) in the final report known as the Waki Report says, "in the process of documenting rape cases, what became clear was that women and girls were often raped regardless of their ethnic background." With so much silence surrounding this subject even now, one can only conjecture the pain and suffering that raped girl children have had to endure. This novella captures these issues. Mary's rape and her resultant loss of memory in this narrative symbolizes both the lack of voice for the girl children to tell their narratives caused by lack of a proper medium as well as their gagging by the effect of shame caused by rape. The fact that she cannot remember these incidents again serves as a healing because with the loss of memory also goes the trauma caused by the violent events.

Five years later, many of these victims are still slowly being eaten up by the effects of this violence. According to Spadacini, Janet, a resident of the informal settlement in Kibera was gang raped in front of her 20-year-old son by four young men, notorious in the neighborhood and who had been recruited by militias during the post election violence. Another concerned humanitarian team, *Timeline*, documents how girls are willing to use even sex so as to go back to school and 'avoid abuse, rape, molestation, and other gender violence that plagues the IDP camps.' The team records that there is also a lot that never gets to be talked about especially that which relates to information deemed sensitive and a lot of sexual abuse and assault undergone by women. Many women, for example, confess to either being afraid of going for HIV tests because of what happened or even admitting to themselves as well as to others that they were ever raped.

Emily Poster reports that sexual violence against women and girls took the form of individual and gang rapes, many of which were ethnically driven, as well as female and male

genital mutilation. According to the Commission of Inquiry into the PEV, there was a lot of documented cases of gruesome sexual violence including genital cutting among women and forced circumcision among men and boys. The investigation reported cases where families, including children were forced to watch their parents, brothers and sisters being sexually violated. This kind of violence is captured here in the fact that Selina is forcibly circumcised by violent youths.

Currently, there is a gaping hole as far as the literary treatment of the PEV as a subject is concerned. To begin with, there is a need to address the question of the tribulations of girls which the society has been silent about. Where the silences result from the victims feeling of victimization, anonymous portrayal of their problems through fiction may help them to psychologically relieve and even point them in suggested directions where it is possible to get personalized help. In fiction, this can happen in the creation of characters who embody the suffering these victims underwent and the treatment of such characters to suggest the direction they themselves should take. In this novella, this is suggested through what happens to the three girls and also in their coming together eventually to suggest that ethnic communities have more to gain through unity than what they stand to lose.

An examination of witness literature also underscores the need to bring out the narratives of victims of war if healing is to be achieved. One good example is Ishmael Beah's *A Long Way Gone*. Here, Ishmael Beah, an ex-child soldier relates how he is conscripted into war, how the changes him into a killing machine despite being a mere boy and how he eventually achieves healing. Of importance is his meeting with Esther, a nurse, who encourages him to talk. The boy not only comes out of his cocoon eventually but also succeeds in his education. This culminates in his writing his autobiography, *A Long Way Gone*. The importance of this book in this context is to emphasize the need to get victims of violence to open up with their stories so as to move towards healing. It also lays down in graphic detail the changes through which children go during conflict in a way that emphasizes the need of healing before they can be fully reintegrated into society. Reviewing the book in EW.com, Gilbert Cruz says;

“(A Long Way)Gone finds its power in the revelation that under the right circumstances, people of any age can find themselves doing the most unthinkable things”. One wonders how many such tales of the Kenyan PEV are yet to be told and how many girl children out there are suffering in

silence. This novella suggests the effect of healing after opening up in the narrative of Tabitha. She suffers from loneliness as a result of the breaking up of family relationships at home. Her opening up to Selina and Amy helps change her life.

Carolyn Forche argues that witness literature plays a big role in provoking thought and sustaining the fervor started by people who die in the line of political conflict. Quoting, Antonio Machado, she posits that witness poetry especially paints graphic scenes of horrors lived through;

In a high wilderness/ I see some cold Papyrus and a white road/ In that stony place,
landscape of the moon/ Does no one remember it?/ The gusts of February reap through
the lemon trees/ I don't sleep so I won't dream.

This poem strongly captures the effect of the Spanish Civil war on the persona. It goes a long way in emphasizing the effect of witness literature on the audience. Forche argues too that when people get used to killing, they become more and more insensitive. She quotes from Bertolt Brecht to illustrate this;

The first time it was reported that our friends were being butchered there was a cry of
horror. Then a hundred were butchered. But when a thousand were butchered and there
was no end to the butchery, a blanket of silence spread. When evil-doing comes like
falling rain, nobody calls out 'stop!'

To her, witness literature is important for it helps to keep the fire alive. It helps to keep the society reminded of the depths of evil into which it has the potential of sinking and thereby keeps it sane. For Kenya's PEV in particular, it is necessary to generate literature that underscores the horrors of this incident in a way that we can keep Kenyans reminded. My novella is a response to this necessity. This attempt is made here by the graphic detailing of the extent of violence and its effect on people during Amy's journey from Eldoret to Nakuru. This is also done through the description of her mother's death. It is hoped that such scenes will keep the society reminded of the potentiality of evil.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

There are basically two conceptual frameworks that inform this creative work: sociological theory and feminist theory. According to the sociological theory, literature mirrors the society. It is based on society while it has the potential to inform and construct that society. All writers base their writing on the society from which they draw material and change it to suit their purposes. Also, all writers are part and parcel of society – it is the society which moulds them and it is society they aim at changing through influencing the thoughts and behavior of people in the societies to which and about which they write. This means that it is the norms, the values and the conventions of such societies that govern the work of these writers. In this way, literature is also seen to contain a potential guiding force capable of directing society. Literature never happens in a vacuum. As Ngugi wa Thiong'o observes;

...the product of a writer's pen both reflects reality and also attempts to persuade to take a certain attitude to that reality. The persuasion can be a direct appeal on behalf of a writer's open doctrine or it can be indirect appeal through influencing the imagination, feelings and the actions of the recipient. (Gachukia, Akivaga 1978)

Because it is the product of individuals or groups in society and reflects man's fears and hopes and conflicts within society, literature has a social relevance and purpose, otherwise many of us would not spend time studying it hoping to find not only gratification of the senses but also the possibilities of living. It is also necessary that literature deals with the real issues of the society. It was George Orwell who observed;

In cultured circles art-for-art's-saking extended practically to worship of the meaningless. Literature was supposed to consist solely in the manipulation of words. To judge a book by its subject was the unforgivable sin. (Orwell, 1954)

Also, apart from the fact that the best literatures of the world emerge in societies and at times when such societies are faced by the greatest tests of their time, it is also true that it is the duty of the writer to depict the realities of the society during the society's moment of crisis. This is well attested to by the literary outbursts of colonialism in East and West Africa as well as the proliferation of literature in South Africa as a result of the apartheid experience. The worst possible moments that can be so identified with Kenya are the fight to liberate the country from

colonialism and the PEV of 2007-2008. It is therefore our duty to respond in literary ways to this call. As Ngugi wa Thiogo intimates;

Literature results from conscious acts of men in society. At the collective level, literature...embodies in words and images, those tensions, conflicts, contradictions at the heart of a community's being and process of becoming. (Gachukia, Akivaga 1978)

Further, Wellek and Warren contend that, '...the writer is not the discoverer but the persuasive purveyor of the truth.' (Wellek and Warren, 1949) It is also quite clear that the early novel was geared towards reflecting the society which fashioned it and which it purported to inform and thus it is apparent that the modern novel must continue to propel issues that provoked it in the first place.

...the new forms of the modern novel were of course *provoked* by real-world social and political problems and events. Social change was one of the main provocations for the novelist's sense of new opportunity. (Matz, 2004)

It is true too that it is the realities of the real world that has turned many writers to the novel over time. It was the horrors of the industrial revolution and the emphasis on 'fact' that propelled Dickens to write. It was the excesses of Leopold in the Congo that inspired Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Ireland's servile kneeling to its British master that inspired James Joyce. In the same breath the novel should continue to inspire us to write so as to change society. The pragmatics of the novel are well understood in the way, for example, E. M. Forster's *A passage to India* helped to build a skepticism towards imperialism by laying bare the hypocrisies and inauthenticity underlying British colonial government in India. (Matz, 2004) In the same way, the Kenyan novel must continue to be inspired by issues of the day and it must attempt to present those issues in a pragmatic way as to underline and emphasize the critical role and duty of the novelist to his society. I use the image of the novel here because the novel and the novella are driven by similar purposes. It is hoped that this project will not only raise these questions but it will inspire other writers in this direction.

Sociological criticism also emphasizes that 'all human beings are the products of a particular time and place.' (Wellek 1949) An examination of the society such as the one postulated here will help inform the problems which girls in Kenya underwent during the PEV as

well as those they are living with and trace how they are constructed. This may be the first step towards understanding them and seeking solutions.

Feminist theory on the other hand holds that the patriarchal nature of society especially in Africa is one big source of the problems undergone by women and girls and results to misrepresentation, underrepresentation and exploitation. With underrepresentation of women and girls in a conflict-less world, it is expected that the situation is worse during conflict – that their issues are little or never highlighted. With the PEV in particular, a lot of injustices against women were documented by NGOs and Human Rights Groups during and after the violence. It is clear, for example, that women underwent harrowing experiences as a result of sexual assault and rape – because of their nature, being women – and that sexual violence was one of the things seen as handy weapons of the moment. As reported by CARE INTERNATIONAL, many women are still living with the effects of these horrors for various reasons ranging from fear to the attempt to preserve the little dignity they still have left. Since feminist criticism is also concerned with the ways in which culture leads to social political and economic underrepresentation of women, this project may help to highlight how the perception of women may have led to their circumstances during the PEV and how the effects of this violence may have emphasized these circumstances during and after the violence. Amnesty International, Kenya reports;

‘...women and girls continued to face widespread gender based violence and limited access to justice. In march, a study by the International Federation of Women Lawyers in Kenya documented that women and girls with disabilities were three times more likely to be subjected to gender based violence than those without disabilities, and that the violence was unlikely to be reported’ (Amnesty International report 2010)

Because of the unlikelihood of these crimes being reported, it is important to give voice to those girls who are silent for various reasons by projecting their problems to the society through literature. A portrayal of this through fiction may go a long way in changing certain cultural as well as political perceptions and thereby changing the social political and economic situation of women in Kenya today.

With this in mind, this project intends to investigate problems faced by girls during Kenya's PEV and highlight them through the power of the novella. Also, social psychologists maintain that fiction is often cathartic – it allows she who relives similar experiences to purge them. It is therefore hoped that this project will be an outlet for emotions for young women who might have undergone the problems highlighted here. It is also important to recognize the fact that, girl children are less likely to come out in the open with the problems they go through during conflict. Rape for example is not only a harrowing experience but it is also demeaning in its being enforced on the victim and in the social repercussions that may follow its revelation. This leads many girls to keep quiet and suffer silently. It is necessary to treat this as a feminist issue. An intellectual understanding of the nature and effect of rape can help a writer of fiction deal with it in writing in a way that helps victims of rape. A good way of doing so would be suggesting ways of coping with the psychological effects of rape by oneself or pointing victims in the direction where help is likely to be found.

Fiction has been especially effective in articulating feminist issues in Africa. African feminists have seen both the spread of literacy and the emerging social structures in Africa as a good forum through which to educate the society about feminist issues. This has also opened a wider platform via which feminists can castigate parochial perceptions about women. This forum, for example has helped define both sex and gender so as to properly help define the roles of the sexes in Africa and expose how this has for long been used to subjugate women. Ogbodah (2003) for example distinguishes between sex and gender defining sex as 'biologically determined' and gender as 'socially determined' characteristics of men and women. This has helped to demystify the roles which women are born with and those which are socially sanctioned. This is important because it is this misconception- and sometimes deliberately socially sanctioned perceptions in androgynous societies - that has institutionalized misogyny. It must be seen that all other issues that affect women especially in Africa flow down from such foundations. In tackling the problems of girl children in conflict for example, it is important to define the two roles for those who subjugate women in war take advantage of this ill-defined divide. In Sierra Leone and Liberia conflict as in many other parts of Africa, women were sexually exploited including being confined as wives for soldiers and being forced to give birth to future soldiers because they had the ability to give birth and because they were perceived as cooks and bed warmers for soldiers in war. In Eritrea, girls as young as six were conscripted as

soldiers together with boys. This shows that the androgynous society will find reason to take advantage of girls for both gender and biological reasons. This is the perception which fiction on war and conflict in Africa must labour to change.

It must be accepted too that the nature of sex crimes on girls leaves them even more open to exploitation. As mentioned before, women who undergo traumatizing experiences such as rape choose to keep quiet about it to safe-guard their families. Many documentaries of Kenya's PEV for example show a cross section of women who live with traumatic experiences because they could not tell their husbands for fear of the consequences. Others were raped in front of their families yet they cannot reveal their experiences because of the perception of their families that might result from such action. It is my view that fiction needs to be written which can capture the experiences of such girls and where possible, suggest ways of coping with such trauma apart from those which may be obvious to them.

METHODOLOGY

This projects aims at a two-tier approach. First, it aims at collecting data about the effect of Post Election Violence in Kenya on girl children. This will be done through library research which will focus on reports by NGOs and child rights organizations that have over time been involved in recording the experiences of children during and after the 2007-2008 post-election violence in Kenya. It will also involve an examination of fiction, films and documentaries on girls and ethnic, national and racial conflict in Africa and around the world to get a picture of the global and continental problem. The project will use this knowledge to contextualize involvement and effect of Kenya's PEV on the girl child in the country. This will be followed by an examination of documentaries made on the Kenyan situation during and after the post election violence so as to build a picture of the kind of problems envisaged here.

In the second part of this project, the researcher will use the data so collected to compose a narrative which will be told through a novella that reflects the lives of three fictitious teenage girls at intense moments of their lives during the PEV. Because of the scope of this research, the data collected will be used to reconstruct the lives of the three fictional characters during this period so as to reflect the events as part of their lives in general and to show how these particular

events alter their lives. It is projected that the first part of this project should take 30 – 45 days. The second part should be completed within 30 days.

THE SILENT VOICES

Part I - The Happening

The leaves rustled amid the eerie silence. The night bird called somewhere. Too early. A *Kamuchoroge* – a green caterpillar - with two front legs at the anterior end, and two at the posterior end - jerked. It closed, then stretched. It closed, then stretched again. Closed, then stretched along the broad yellow-green leaf as it made its journey to God-knew-where. It seemed little concerned about anything else as it made its way along the broad county of the yellowing green leaf. Silence reigned. The night bird called again. The only motion the world knew was of this peaceful green caterpillar. Then...the broad yellow-green leaf lowered slowly to reveal two big white eyes at the base of a wide brown forehead framed by long jet-black hair combed back and held by something behind the head. The black peas at the centre of the whites of the eyes moved slowly as they followed the carefree caterpillar, fascinated, envying its freedom. The eyes watched the caterpillar make the several-kilometer-journey across the broad yellowish green leaf. Did it know there was God? Then its watcher remembered her grandfather's popular theme – *thi ndiigana ruhi* – the world is not your palm! But the world for this little insect was just that, she ate here, slept here and laid her eggs on the underside of the leaf. Its watcher stretched a small index finger out at the edge of the leaf, in front of the caterpillar, so that in its next jerk, the front legs landed on the index finger. The caterpillar stopped. There was a brief pause. Then the rear moved as the caterpillar landed on the index finger and continued on her journey. The little hand moved and pointed downwards so that the caterpillar found itself climbing. The hand then turned, now this way, now that way so that the caterpillar must have reeled and lost her directions. She stopped. Then she moved again, slow and unsure. She turned to go back the way she had come. Another small finger touched the end of the one on which the caterpillar walked as it got nearer and nearer to the finger nail which was cut so low the horny end was totally missing. The caterpillar climbed on to the other finger and continued. The girl watched smiling, fascinated. She moved away watching the small caterpillar and humming *Merrily Merrily unto Jesus* to herself. The parting brush of the undergrowth now revealed her.

She was a healthy young girl, about twelve or thirteen. She was in a pink frock in a fall-back color and white buttons from the neck down to her middle, the last two hidden behind a wide belt

with an unbelievably big shiny buckle. Her brown feet were in white pumps. She was slim in body with keen serious eyes and a Madonna of a face. When she smiled, her serious eyes disintegrated into sparkles of mirth. As she came out on to the road, she stealthily crept behind another girl who was bending and examining her knee.

‘Ha!’

The second girl jumped as she straightened. She was a little taller than the one who had emerged from the bushes. She turned abruptly and regarded the newcomer.

‘B, I swear this is the last time I’m telling you. These jokes of yours are going too far! You could have given me a heart attack!’

‘Come on Amy, are you tired of our little game even before I’ve started? Come on, you can’t wear such a long gloomy face when the only sister you have, the only sister who loves you like honey, the only person who apart from Mum and Dad and Jesus cares dearly about you, the only human being who...’

‘Come on B, I’ve had it up to here with your twiddle twaddle games. We should have been home a long time ago if it hadn’t been for your little hide and seek. I’ll tell on you once we get home. You know Mum very well regards it my responsibility to look after and even discipline you and...’

‘Yeah, yeah, yeah and to make sure I don’t play on the road and I do my homework and say my prayers the right way etcetera etcetera Mother Hubbard. Look sis, a little play hurts no one.’ She smiled sweetly as she held her hands behind her.

The two girls resembled so much that apart from the slight hint of height, it would have taken one who knew them very well to tell them apart from a distance. A closer examination also proved Amy a little older, probably fifteen going on sixteen and a little plump. Her hair was done in braids which fell over her shoulders and her eyes had a penetrating excited look that left you feeling she could see through you – the kind of person to whom it would be quite difficult to tell a lie and the attempt of which would definitely leave you edgy. Her easy blue dress which stopped short of her knees, her white cardigan and blue tennis shoes emphasized her beauty in a subtle way.

‘Seriously, you need to be a little selfless, at least for this once,’ Amy said.

‘But I am considerate. Like for example, I have brought you a little present, want to see it?’

Mary said as she brought her hands, the palms balled, from behind her.

‘Please do not start that again,’ Amy said beginning to back away.

She was only in time to confirm her fears as her sister’s hands opened to reveal the green creature. Then she gave a little scream as she shot off raising a little dust from the red recently-leveled road. Her sister followed with mock speed for the distance between them quickly increased and Mary slowed as her sister rounded the bend. It was an open family secret that Amy feared nothing else more than creepy crawling things for which she had a morbid fear which teenage had done little to mask or shake off. She had taken off with the agility of a Thompson gazelle with a cheetah hot at her heels and only slackened her speed when she was sure she could not hear her sister’s footfalls behind her. Then she slowed down, turned and shot a quick look over her shoulder to confirm Mary wasn’t in pursuit like she was often wont to be. She leaned forward panting her lungs out and with her hands akimbo looked back waiting for the faintest hint of her sister to take off again. Then she walked to the roadside and warily sat by the grassy footpath beside the road and waited, throwing furtive glances here and there as she listened to the drumming of her heart in her ears.

Five minutes later, her sister had not come round the bend. She shouted her name twice, loud enough to be heard across the ridge. Nothing happened. Beginning to get worried, she shielded her eyes against the setting sun and peered at the corner. She knew their mother must now be getting concerned about their lateness. Giving a maximum of an hour to wash the church after choir practice ended at five, they should have been home an hour ago give or take a few minutes. She was beginning to get angry with this girl now. What the hell did she think she was doing? And getting home her mother would only direct the tongue lashing at her! Then she thought she heard a faint scream. Muffled but definite. She called out again and the dark empty wood echoed her words at her. As the sun sunk behind the trees, she felt a cold icy fear clench at her heart. She began to retrace her steps slowly, calling her sister again and again. Her anger now completely forgotten, she was vaguely aware of her heart thumping in her ears. As cheeky as B was, she was unlikely to play such a stupid game. Her instinct, her trust in God, something hanging heavily in

the air told her all was not well. No longer with courage to call, she was just beginning to round the bend when she saw the bushes on the side of the road which first appeared to her rustle like something had disturbed them. Then she came round the bend and saw the stretch of road. A band of youths with rugged clubs and stuff that looked from afar like guns were standing in the middle of the road looking this way and that. She stood stock-still. Her sister was nowhere in sight and her knees were beginning to give when one of the youths looked in her direction and pointing shouted;

‘There she is! I told you there was another one!’

That and the adrenaline that swept through her veins decided her. She took off as the youths came after her in pursuit. She ran with all she was made of, but the athletic youths whose speed and shouts told her they had the advantage of more than anger and athletic build were quickly gaining on her. Something wheezed past her right ear and from the corner of her eye she saw an arrow implant itself on the roadside. She could clearly hear their thumping footsteps behind her as she neared a second bend and surrendered her fate to God when something hit her between the shoulder blades sending her sprawling on the ground. As a sharp pain shot through her chest, she was vaguely aware of the sound of an approaching vehicle amid the thumping of angry feet in her ears when all went black.

The tall elegant woman emerged from an interior part of the house onto a modest, working-class sitting room built at two levels. The higher level contained the door out of which she had come, a chink window in the middle of the wall and a dining area to the right. The dining area had a large round table with eight straight backed dining chairs hugging it. On the lower level were two coffee tables and several arm chairs. Built into the wall right were cabinets with various electronic equipment the most central of which was a large television. As she dusted the tables, she came across her husband’s mail and wondered who had left it there. She leafed through it. Among the many letters was one from the bank. Definitely a mortgage reminder. She felt grateful to Daniel for his wisdom. It was two years since they had taken the mortgage and things were beginning to look up. With the re-election of the new government, they would surely be through with the mortgage before its five-year term was out and the stability that would give

bring would work to reduce the economic stress that had had everyone reeling. The farming on their six-acre farm was helping with the girl's school fees which left Daniel's salary for other emergencies. She hoped she could get herself a better job to help him – the growing economy would definitely create jobs for the needed nurses, she mused.

She moved over to the large windows and adjusted the curtains still in her reverie and was about to move away when a speck in the distance caught her eye. A vehicle was coming up the road with its headlights on although the evening was quite early for that. Its swaying from side to side suggested it was speeding – and that and the blaring headlights spelt some trouble. As it came closer and closer, it began to take shape – and colour – and...it looked like Father Piaggio's battered Ford Pick-up...it definitely was. So unlike the priest to drive that fast especially on a road as bumpy as this. As it came closer still, she noticed that it was headed straight for their gate. She moved towards the door to find out what was going on as the car came to a screeching halt. Father Piaggio came out quickly and hailed her with a raised right hand. He opened the driver's door and jumped out leaving the door open and engine running.

‘Hello Julia, sorry to come in like this but there is some problem and you need to come with me.’

‘Problem? What problem Father?’

‘I'm sorry but there is no time. Get in the car I'll try to explain on the way’.

‘Is it the girls? Are they in some kind of trouble?’ she asked as Father Piaggio's firm hand urgently guided her into the car. He then went quickly round to the driver's side and slid behind the wheel then shifted the car into gear. The car raised dust as it turned to head the way it had come.

‘Sorry again Julia but...but... it's Armelia...I think she got into some trouble with some youths. I arrived just in time to save her.’

Julia suddenly felt her stomach contract then her heart fell into a deep pit that has grown somewhere in her stomach.

The police constable was trying his best to send the mad woman away but try as he did, he only made things worse. She had been standing opposite him from across the long high desk which formed the Report Office. Now she was threatening to open the small half-door that marked official territory. His colleague was teasing him, between mouthfuls of dry bread.

‘C’mon, we know it is your long lost wife who has come to complain to the OCS that you are not supporting the family. Give her a hundred bob before it goes too far.’

Indeed he had tried to give her money- not because of his colleague’s bidding of course – but she had declined the money and had brandished the rags she was holding in her right hand in the direction from which she had come and shaken her head vigorously. Although he was baffled by what this could possibly mean, he was just thinking of getting a good whip when the OCS came through the door drawn by the commotion.

‘What’s going on here?’ She enquired as she approached the old mad woman.

Sally Jepkoskei had been working for three years at the same police station. Though she had been working for eight years in the vicinity of Kericho, she was glad to come nearer home three years ago. She had only been promoted to OCS a year ago after completing her degree. She had also known the old mad woman for as long as she could remember. Having been born and brought up here, she could remember how she and other school children used to tease the old woman on their way to school. She would run after them and tell them how they were wasting valuable school time. She would chase them up to the school gate and call one of the teachers though no one would ever take her seriously. She had watched her grow from bad to worse and only now realized that something could probably have been done to stem her deterioration. She could not remember ever having seen her in such mirth. Something, a woman’s instinct or something like that stopped her from dismissing her the way her colleagues had done. She held her by the elbow and gently edged her outside and was surprised by how quickly she yielded. Outside, she called Corporal Kilonzo for the car intending to take her to the town which was a kilometer up the battered murram road.

Halfway up the road, the mad woman who was sitting with Sally in the back seat became so excited that Sally ordered Corporal Kilonzo to stop the car and followed the woman as she got out and led to the thicket. Some distance into the thicket, they came upon a clearing where

something told the mad woman to calm down as she pointed Sally ahead. Within the clearing, a number of young men were actively engaged in burying something in a shallow grave that was freshly dug. Sally was just in time to duck as a bullet whizzed past a moment before she heard the gunshot. She dived to the ground as she reached for her gun. The gun report also brought corporal Kilonzo quickly, his gun pointing. The young men scattered reckoning themselves outnumbered and the two officers approached the grave their guns ready. It appeared that the youths had been in the process of burying the body of a young girl. She had been battered beyond recognition, that is what could be seen of her legs and lower torso for the chest and head were under a mound of fresh earth. Sally radioed the station for another vehicle to remove the body as Corporal Kilonzo jumped into the grave and uncovered her face to see whether he could identify her. Her face was badly swollen with the eyelids and lips big and shapeless. She was likely to have bled to death for her nostrils were still caked with dry blood. It was clear she had died a violent death. Corporal Kilonzo could not help crossing himself as he looked up at his senior.

A few minutes later, the police pick-up arrived and Sally gave instructions for the body to be removed to the local hospital mortuary for post mortem. In its state, it would take some time to identify it.

It was six hours and thirty nine minutes later when Amy finally opened her eyes. She was in a hospital room in which everything looked alarmingly white. Her mother who had been sitting on a chair beside her bed hurried to her on noticing her hand move, the nurse was at her heels.

‘Mrs. Njenga, please don’t talk to your daughter just yet. It could excite her condition.’

But it was Amy herself who spoke.

‘Mum I’m so sorry. Did you find B?’

‘Don’t worry about her Amy. Tell me what happened as briefly as you can.’

‘Mum, she took too long behind and when I went to check... a group of men ran after me.’

‘Did you see her?’

‘No, but I think she had just been dragged into the bushes when I came upon the men. The bushes were shaking and...’ she faltered as her eyes filled up and she began crying.

‘Madam, please give...it is not good for her in this condition.’

‘Now go to sleep Amy. We will talk when you are feeling a little better,’ Julia said .

The following day, Amy was well enough to relate what had happened. She narrated to her mother everything she could remember about the fateful day. It was now eighteen hours since her sister had been reported missing. No information had come about her whereabouts but her mother, not wanting to break her heart as she so keenly felt responsible for what had happened only told her that the police had been notified and they were doing the best they could and that her sister would be found soon.

As the nurse took charge, Father Piaggio came over and held Julia by the arm and led her to the door. Just outside the door, he turned to her.

‘I’m sorry that your husband is not here yet. You’ve been able to inform him?’

‘I’m still trying to reach him. Any indication of what this might be about?’

‘Ah...there are rumours in the air,’ Father Piaggio chose his words carefully. ‘There is a smirk of politics to this...something to do with the coming elections. I have heard it said that Sampoi is behind it but you can’t talk loudly of these things.’

‘If you know anything else, please be open with me. It’s the best you can do for my children,’ Julia said seeing that the man of God was a little hesitant.

‘I’ve just met two men who confirm that Sampoi and some other politicians are trying to cleanse the area of people from other communities to ensure their re-election. It would appear that your daughters stumbled into some kind of meeting and there are people who believe they were being pursued for what they are believed to know.’

‘You mean that Amy is still unsafe?’

‘We must do all in our power to protect her as we look for her sister.’

Julia's mind was reeling. Did that mean that Mary might have been killed? Oh God, please don't let this be! Her eyes were clouding with hot tears. Father Piaggio led her to the waiting room bench and helped her sit. She sank into the seat and held her head in her hands. It was just then that her husband's old VW Variant screeched to a halt at the small hospital's parking lot. He got out and walked quickly towards the entrance of the hospital then broke into a run when he noticed his wife in the waiting room, her teary face in her hands. Father Piaggio walked quickly to meet him and tried to brief him on what had happened as they both approached Julia.

'Sorry Julia, it's the best time I could make,' he said sinking on one knee and holding his wife by the hands as father Piaggio briefed him on his daughter's condition. The three then walked towards the ward but found that Amy had relapsed into sleep induced by the heavy medication. The sister in charge advised them to wait outside and they returned to the waiting room. As delicately as he could, Father Piaggio related to Daniel the scanty details he had gathered. It appeared, he said, that it was tribal clashes as usual just when everybody was beginning to breathe a sigh of relief – that they would live through the first peaceful December in fifteen years. There had been tension since the referendum that had been held over a year ago with rumours of people preparing to attack others heavy in the air. Nobody had taken them seriously and the fact that the incumbent whom everybody expected to be re-elected was Kikuyu made the remoteness of tribal clashes even more convincing. It was however undeniable that there was something that had always felt wrong since that referendum. There was some kind of Mexican standoff in the political arena which no one was willing to talk about. It seemed that everybody hoped that God would intervene and that everything would miraculously turn out alright. And then there were those who had taken advantage of this silence.

'It would appear that all our fears are actually being realized. Mr. Sampoi and his cohorts appear afraid of losing their parliamentary seats and the power that goes with them. It looks like they've started an organized campaign to ensure the incumbent isn't re-elected for should that happen, their fate will hang in the balance.' Father Piaggio said.

'So where does my family come in?' Daniel asked him.

'I believe your daughters stumbled onto something knowingly or unknowingly. You remember that there were reports of meetings and training in the surrounding forests?'

Daniel did not bother to reply. These rumours were only too loud and several reports had appeared in the press. The words of his father came back to him.

When Amy woke up again, she could see her parents talking with Father Piaggio in the waiting room. She was very glad that her father had finally come. She tried calling out to him but she didn't have enough strength and the attending nurse had left the room. Suddenly, she saw her father stiffen. Beyond him, she saw Jay walking quickly as he was about to enter the waiting room. Her father raised his hands and Jay stopped in his tracks dropping his hand which he had proffered in greeting. There appeared to be some kind of argument but she could not hear what was being said, then her father suddenly slapped Jay hard across the face and her heart gave a sudden leap. Jay moved back reeling as Father Piaggio hurried forward to intervene and led Jay out of her line of vision. Then her mother appeared and pulled her father away so that she could not see them any longer. She felt hot tears trickling down the sides of her cheeks and into her pillow as she wondered what madness had got into everyone.

The following day was Sunday, a day before Christmas. Amy was feeling quite alright. The doctors had discharged her but her father had insisted that she spend two more days in hospital for observation. Her parents came to see her every day, her mum especially came several times a day. Martha kept her well supplied with food from home so that she did not have to worry herself about the hospital's tasteless food. Her family spent as long as they could with her and the partings were reluctant. She pestered them for news of B but they assured her that she had most likely been rescued by somebody. It would only take time before they found her. She however read a ghost of a shadow in her father's eyes and it was clear that he was trying very hard to convince himself of what he said. He said it as much for her benefit as for his own.

She eventually left the hospital on the afternoon of Boxing Day. Her departure from the hospital had itself felt hurried – like the doctors were being arm-twisted to get her out at all costs. Out in the town, everything had changed – not physically, but there was a great tension hanging in the air that told her things were different from what they'd been when she'd gone to hospital. People no longer looked you straight in the eye especially the neighbours. The businesses looked different. A number of them had closed down and she felt it had little to do with the Christmas

holiday. When they got home, the home itself looked and felt empty without B. Martha, the house girl, did all she could to help her including moving in to their room when Amy's dreams became unbearable. She comforted her and assured her everything would be all right. Outside, the campaigns continued although the campaign period was officially over. Vehicles with mounted speakers continued moving through the towns and the villages with music blaring and the voices of the campaigners booming through the speakers, sometimes late into the night.

And there were other news. It was now clear that there were people creating tension in order to compel some people to leave Eldoret. Her father had confirmed that leaflets had been spread warning the kikuyu to leave the area before they were compelled to. Her mother had been insistent that they leave since the beginning of December but her father argued that those were only empty threats. This was a Kibaki government. People did not only have nothing to fear but they were also waiting for him to give them justice for all the wrongs that had been visited them in the last twenty four years. And they knew they would get justice. Kibaki was going in for his last term. His development record would ensure his re-election after which people would expect him to review the wrongs of the past two decades. After all, he would no longer need any balancing act, it being his last term in government. Her mother was apprehensive but the confidence with which her father believed in the president allayed their fears somewhat. Besides, he argued, their pre-occupation with the search for B left them no alternative. Nobody could remind him now that the suggestion to leave had come long before the children's tragedy had happened.

There were already rumours of eviction of people from Olenguruone, Molo and Kuresoi to the south of Eldoret. People had been streaming into the town from the areas around the town especially from Kericho and Kitale. Camps of the displaced homeless were beginning to come up in various parts of the town. The papers reported that people's homes had been torched in several areas, the worst of which were Molo and Kuresoi. But that wasn't really news. Evictions of the kikuyu especially in Molo and Kuresoi had been going on for the better part of the year. That worried Amy. Since the government had not been able to stop those evictions, what guarantee did they have that it would act if anything happened here? Why was it that people could be evicted from land they had bought, livelihoods it had taken them a lifetime to create and nothing could be done about it? Where was the famous rule of law? But the evictions occurred in

the rural areas. Amy felt that this could not happen in town – especially not in Eldoret which was so cosmopolitan. And she believed in God too.

Boxing Day for her was a boring anxious day. While she spent it indoors with Martha, her parents visited various police stations to enquire about B. Amy was eager to see them return with news of B, even, God willing, with B herself. But when they eventually came, there was nothing about B. But her father had other news. He had changed his opinion about leaving. He said that they would watch how the following day, election day, began. If there was any slight indication of deterioration of things, then they, Amy, Martha and her mother, would leave at the first opportunity. He himself was not going anywhere – not without his daughter. As she went to bed, Amy's heart had not grown any easier. She could not imagine leaving the town without B or any news of her.

As it happened, there was no going anywhere. Violence broke out in several parts of the town before eleven o'clock on day of the election. Transport was paralyzed especially between Eldoret and Nakuru. Vehicles were not coming in. There were no newspapers and people had to wait to see whether they would come by plane, that is, if the planes flew into Eldoret. Her father said that people especially business people were avoiding the rift valley like the plague. There were rumours that the road to Nakuru had been destroyed by raiders. Her father said that he had seen vehicles coming back to town from the direction of Nakuru. They were loaded with belongings of people who had been trying to flee the night before. Evicted people were congregating at Eldoret stadium.

The next two days were spent in great tension. While everybody felt that there was something waiting to erupt, the results of the recently concluded election had delayed so long that people had began speculating the reasons behind the delay. Some said that the incumbent government was in the process of manipulating the results and that was why the results could not be released. The supporters of the Party of National Unity – PNU – especially the Kikuyu eagerly waited for the confirmation of a Kibaki win. If he won, they thought, they would not be evicted. That would assure them of their security. Supporters of Raila Odinga's ODM were as eager, though for them it appeared like they were looking for a pretext to cause worse chaos; the decision to evict people especially the Kikuyu had long been taken. Homeless people continued pouring into town. The residents were beginning to show lack of ease with the many people who were camping

especially at the stadium. They looked guilty and were eager for some action to drive the reminders of that guilt away.

By thirtieth, it was a common sight to see people walking along the highway with the little luggage they had been able to salvage. They congregated in churches and schools where they spent the night in the open.

Election day at Kwa-Rhoda, Nakuru west. The day had started like any other day. Nature did not seem to mind the tension that had fallen over Nakuru town over the forthcoming elections. The town sulked like it had always done. The day had received an early sun, the traders in the open air market were about as usual. Everyone expected the heat of the sun to start dusty wind in the town, as usual. And the rise of the wind would stir the breeze from the lake and this would probably result in an afternoon shower. As usual. It was clear however that the turn of the vote would determine a number of things. For Wangari and other landladies like her, it was what would determine whether she continued to own her property or not. The opposition ODM had promised people free land and property. It called it socialism. Many of their supporters had not paid rent for over a year. They were waiting for the title deeds to be handed over. So they could be landowners too and enjoy the fruits of Uhuru. For Selina and her sister, the vote would determine whether they continued to live in Nakuru or not.

So it was an all out silent war. Through the vote. People turned out early at the polling centres. By five, long queues had formed outside classrooms in polling stations. And the pushing and shoving had begun. Selina's sister left her daughter in the care of her aunt. She hurried to Mwariki Primary school. She had to cast her ballot quickly and return to her house. She couldn't let her husband know she was voting PNU – the Party of National Unity. He was ODM ndamu. *Orange Democratic Movement to the bone*. But he would vote in the Industrial Area. At Mwariki Primary school, supporters of the different parties stood singing and chanting for their preferred candidates. They raised posters stuck with glue on cartons and tied to long poles so they could be raised high above everyone to be seen. It looked like Selina's sister wasn't very lucky. The voting had started at six sharp but it was slow. The long queues told her she would have long to wait. She opted to leave and try later. The nine o'clock sun was already hot. Across Ndarugu

River on the way to Baruti West, she could see smoke in the distance. Though it was unusual, she didn't give it much thought. She rushed back to her house.

'Selina, mtoto amekunywa uji? *Has the child taken porridge?*' she asked her sister who was still struggling with her niece. Selina had turned eating into a game for the child so she could get her to eat. At first it had worked. But now she had to chase the kid all over the house as the kid extended the game in her own fashion. 'Leo kunaweza kuwa kubaya. Today things might turn ugly,' her sister said. 'There's a lot of noise at the polling stations. I don't think things will end up all right.'

'But there isn't any fighting is there?'

'There isn't. But it feels like this is a fight to the tooth. It isn't just about electing people,' she paused as she put some tea into a cup. 'It is like a sizing up of muscles.'

'Between who and who?'

'The Kikuyu and the Luo. It doesn't even feel like it has anything to do with the candidates themselves. It looks like a tribal battle for supremacy.'

'So where does that leave the Kisii?' Selina wondered.

'That is the problem. Though I'm voting PNU and my husband doesn't know, I feel like the two tribes should probably go out of Kenya to square their issues elsewhere. They have carried on and on until other tribes feel like they are Rwandese or Congolese.'

Selina was silent. She did not know how to tell her sister what she felt.

'You know what? There is nothing like tribe. That word was created by the British to divide the country at independence. And after that the various regimes have taken advantage of the term in their own ways. But the real tribes are only two. The poor and the Rich. People should be using the ballot to vote out the rich who know nothing of the common man's troubles. Not thinking of Kikuyu or Luo.'

'But even the people poor they vote in today will eventually become rich once they get into that parliament. And then what?'

There was some noise outside before Selina could think of what to say. Then a voice.

‘Mama Atieno? Uko? Mama Atieno, are you home?’

‘Yes I am,’ her sister replied.

‘Things will heat up today,’ the voice said. ‘Come out and see for yourself.’

Selina accompanied her sister out of the house. A big black woman was standing outside. She had her left hand to her waist as she used the open flattened right hand as a visor for her eyes as she peered in the distance across Ndarugu River. Billows of smoke could be seen in the general area of Kaptembwa.

‘Oh Akinyi, what’s going on?’ Emily asked as she followed her neighbour’s gesture and looked out towards Njoro Road in the distance.

‘I think it is even unsafe to stay in the house,’ Akinyi said. ‘It is wiser to go up there to the road and monitor what is going on. It looks like the violence is coming this way.’

Emily agreed. They locked their houses and the three walked over to the junction of Yala and Baringo streets.

When it was clear that there was no going back to their houses, Selina and Emily walked up Baringo street to General Kariba Street then trudged the six hundred metres to the stadium. They found that many people had already congregated there. Her sister called her husband. Daniel was in town looking for them. He arrived at the stadium at dusk. The family huddled close to the podium where other people were.

When Daniel arrived, it was already dark. Selina was left to tend the baby as Emily and her husband went to look for something the family could have for supper. When they returned, they had a bag of chips they had received from a well wisher in a town cafe. Emily took off her jacket and covered her daughter. They huddled together as they tried to sleep. Most of the other people sang hymns to encourage one another. Others implored God to remember them. Selina spent one of the longest nights of her life. Because of the cold, it was impossible to sleep. By the early hours of the morning, she was debating what was better between braving the knife and sleeping outside indefinitely for political quarrels she had had nothing to do with. But she gathered

courage from how her sister was coping with the baby. It felt selfish for her to even think of her own misfortune when she considered that of her sister and her niece.

They were very thankful when daylight finally came. Daniel went to the industrial area at eleven. At noon, he came back to report that the factory where he worked had been closed down because, the Indian said, there was no way of either getting raw materials or moving the finished products. It was also dangerous to continue working while mobs rioted in the town. Daniel had not even received his pay.

The irony of dawn. It was darker in the east than in the west although the sun would rise in the east – the light from the east first touched the higher hills in the west. The clear January sky promised a lot more frost than what had already changed the early morning into a cheek-freezing serenity. The thick cold air which felt heavy in the nostrils hung solidly in the air. A few stars still shone in the sky, the most prominent the morning star just above the horizon in the east. Up in the west towards Eldoret town, it was lighter with a promise of an earlier dawn. The clear cloudless sky was bluing slowly by slowly. In the Njenga family house, they had barely slept. Amy's father had gone to Nakuru the day before. A pastor at the KAG church across the road had informed him that his daughter was likely to be among a group of evictees who had gone to seek refuge in Nakuru. Among them had been two girls who had been muted by experiences of the week before and two who had been transferred to a Nakuru Hospital for the hospitals in Eldoret couldn't take in any more. Somebody had whispered to him it was the Kikuyu who were being denied medical attention. He had not even come to change the grey trousers, white shirt and pink tie he had worn to work. He hoped that Mary was one of those two girls. Amy's mother had spent a sleepless night. Although her daughter had recovered somewhat, the experience before Christmas had left her with harrowing dreams. When she went over to the girl's room that morning, Martha was perched on a stool drowsing, her head propped up on her hands. She started up as Jacinta entered.

'Sorry to wake you. How is she?'

'The fever's gone down a little. I think she will come out of it soon.'

‘I want you to go get her some medicine as soon as it is light. Please prepare. It will be light enough within a short time. I’ll get some hot water ready,’ she said as she left the room. She walked over to the main door and opened it a little. It was light enough to see. She started to close the door, then hesitated. In the distance across the valley, she could see forest fires here and there. They were common especially in the dry months of January to March, some starting as early as December. What a welcome to the new year! She closed the door and told Martha it was light enough to go. She headed to the kitchen to prepare an early breakfast. Martha came over to get money for the medicine. Jacinta reminded her to get some bread as she went out of the door. A moment later, Martha called her from outside. She drew her attention to the fires across the valley. They had grown to five. How odd. Forest fires normally occurred together. These ones were scattered here and there. In fact only two appeared close enough to form the usual image of a forest fire. With the lightening morning, the yellow fires were becoming less distinct to be marked by the shadows of smoke that rose above them to form serpentine tails against the yellowish-blue background of the early morning dawn.

‘Must be forest fires. Bad omen so early for a hot January,’ she dismissed them as Martha left. She went back to the kitchen where the kettle was already boiling. She fetched some clean water from the tap, added some to a small sufuria and set it next to the fire. She checked the cupboards above the small window. There was still some flour, enough for some porridge. She set the kettle down on the kitchen table and replaced it on the stove with the small sufuria of water. It was the silence left by the removal of the kettle from the fire that revealed the noises. She heard cries. Like those made by rowdy spectators at a traditional dance. She drew the curtain of the small kitchen widow aside and peered outside. The steam from the boiling water had blurred the widow and she couldn’t see much. She went to the front door, opened it and went outside. It was already light though the valley below was still in mysterious semi darkness. Across the valley the billows of smoke had increased. There were now more than a dozen serpentine sails of blue-black smoke issuing from several places across the valley. That could only mean one thing. She peered carefully at the ones closest to her and her deepest fears were confirmed. She could clearly make out a number of houses on fire. The noises she had heard from the kitchen were now clearer. They sounded like war cries. And they were coming nearer. She didn’t wait. She hurried to the house and roused her daughter.

‘Amy, wake up quick. Wake up, we have to leave immediately.’

She touched her forehead as she raised her to a sitting position. Amy woke up in a panic. She hurriedly dressed, putting on a jacket over her as her mother quickly packed a few clothes into a sisal basket. The noises were coming even closer. They could clearly hear screams. Jacinta supported her daughter and led her out of the house in slippers. They did not even have time for shoes. She retrieved the heavy Viro lock from the door frame above the door, locked the door and led her daughter away. Amy thought she heard Kitty meow behind her. What an irrelevant thought. They hurried up the path that led to the gate, out of the gate and down the bumpy earth road that led to the highway. Her last thought was what would happen to the cows – and Brooks who was barking furiously as they hurried down the road. Cold morning frost bit into their cheeks and nostrils as they walked down the road towards the highway, their feet already browning in the red dust. A white mist clothed the valley below, snaking its way in the shape of the meandering valley. It promised a hot day, Jacinta thought.

At the highway, she did not know in which direction to go. Common sense told her to head to town but she didn’t know whether they would meet with more attackers on the six kilometer stretch to Eldoret town. Then she remembered that there were people sheltering in the church down the road. They had been arriving in hordes from various outlying regions of the town over the past week. If she could count on numbers, that was her best bet. And nobody would be crazy enough to attack the house of God. She headed that way without a second thought. There were no vehicles on the usually busy Eldoret-Nairobi highway. Even the matatus and early milkmen who were usually up and running and cycling in both directions of the highway long before this time were nowhere to be seen. It seemed that the violence of the last few days had sent everything off schedule.

The first rays of the January sun appeared on the eastern sky just as they got to the church compound. The long rectangular mud-and-wattle building looked subdued in the early morning. The old tin roof shone here and there with morning dew. Its timber windows were shut and it was difficult to tell what was going on inside. Hugging the church at the back was a row of similar mud-and-wattle rooms with corrugated tin roofs sloping to the back to keep rain water away from the small corridor running the length of the church wall. Next to the rooms themselves were a dozen or so bicycles witness to the nature of the new temporary inhabitants of

the church. Also strewn all over the compound were various articles of clothing, cooking utensils, clothes, shoes, old mattresses and a wide variety of plastic household ware. It was an evacuation scene in a war movie. When she got to the timber plank-gate, three men who appeared to have been keeping guard hurried to her when they noticed she was supporting her daughter. She recognized one of them – the one in an old woolen cap, heavy overcoat and baggy corduroy trousers – as a farmer who lived next to the church.

‘Wa-Wanjiru nikii kiuru? *What is wrong mama Wanjiru?*’ he asked her as she held her daughter on the other side and both walked her over to the grey wooden door of the church and sat her down.

‘It is the Kalenjin,’ she said in kikuyu. ‘They are burning houses this way from across Thothioni.’

‘Is it? About how many?’

‘I didn’t see them because of the darkness. But I saw the billowing smoke from several scores of houses across the river.’

‘Thoithi,’ the man shouted. Immediately, a man emerged from behind the church. He had a machete in his right hand, a spear in the other.

‘Muihaririei niguke! *Prepare yourselves they are coming.* They might come up to here,’ he addressed him. The newcomer immediately withdrew. The two men lifted Amy and led her into the church whose door had been opened from inside to their coded knocking.

In the semi-darkness inside the church was as good a mess as she had ever encountered. Women and children lay all over the floor on old mattresses. Others simply sat leaning their backs against the earthen walls. Some had threadbare blankets over them. Others, especially the boys simply lay on the earthen floor in a myriad of desperate angles. Many were still asleep, those leaning against the walls supporting their drowsy heads in their hands. A mucky smell of age, desperation, neglect and helplessness hung thickly in the air. They made room at a left corner near the door where Amy sat down.

‘Hey, tathikiririai! *Hey listen.*’ The man who had welcomed them said. There was general commotion as many rose suddenly alert. ‘Mutumia uyu arauga ona tona Karinjini chiukite uu. *This woman says she thinks she has seen the Kalenjin coming this way from across the river.* I want everyone to be absolutely quiet. We will hide outside and watch.’ There was total silence as the man went to the door, opened it and went out shutting it behind him.

‘Kari we Jesiida? *Is it you Jacinta?*’ a woman next to Jacinta whispered. She nodded. The woman reached out to Amy and hugged her. She rocked her silently. ‘Pole! Sorry! We heard about her encounter.’ Her mother nodded her thanks.

By then, Amy was fully awake to the dangers they were in. She knew very well that she had to pull herself together in spite of her condition in readiness for whatever was to come. Her heart drummed in her ears with fear and she tried hard not to think about the fear itself. It would only make her more afraid. She realized too the stress that her mother had undergone in the last few days and determined herself to be stronger for both of them. Soon, the rays of the sun were peeping through the eaves between the roof and the top of the earthen walls and between the spaces where the pieces of timber which made the windows met. A half hour of subdued whispers later, the man who had left came back.

‘It seems they aren’t coming this way but we must be careful. I’ve dispatched a number of the men to the road so they can warn us in time in case something happens,’ he said. ‘Meanwhile, *atumia no mathii magirire ciana cai. Women can go and get tea for the children,*’ he went out leaving the door whose two halves opened on either side half open. Several women rose and went out after him. A number of other women crowded around Amy’s mother to console her calling her ‘dagitari’ or doctor. Several women from the neighbourhood also brought them food to go with the tea – sweet potatoes, cassava, arrow roots and ripe bananas. Somebody even brought three loaves of bread. The children were ecstatic.

Around mid-morning, the three men who had been dispatched to the road came running.

‘Muihithei! Muihithei! *Hide! Hide!* They are crossing the road on their way here,’ one of them announced. An electric silence followed as the men went to guard outside. Some children started crying as their mothers tried to silence them by breast feeding them. Several women moaned and

prayed silently. There followed a good twenty minutes of hanging silence in which the tension steadily grew. Then there were muffled voices outside in Kalenjin.

‘Let’s go. There is no one here,’ a subdued voice said.

‘There must be. We were informed yesterday that all the weeds had camped here,’ another, huskier than the first interrupted.

‘Then where are they? A group of four hundred weeds cannot just escape into thin air overnight,’ the first said.

‘Wait, I smell smoke.’ A prolonged silence followed. Then;

‘And these bicycles, what are they doing here? Anyone fleeing would be sure to take them.’
Silence.

Unable to contain herself, Amy edged herself to the window and peered through the crack. Two men were standing just outside the timber fence looking intently out of her field of vision. They were young clean-shaven and wore red bands tied to their heads. Above the low timber fence, she could only see the dressed animal skins which covered their shoulders. One of them motioned the other with an index finger for silence then pointed towards the back of the church. The other nodded his head slowly. He pointed at his own eye with the index finger of his right hand, then made a sign that indicated round the church. He closed his left hand into a fist then tapped the top of the fist three times with the open palm of his right hand. The other motioned for them to withdraw with the raised thumb of his right hand. They walked silently backwards for ten metres or so then turned and walked quickly but silently out of her view. Amy walked over to her mother.

‘They’ve left, but I think they know we are here. And they don’t portend good news.’ Her mother and those who heard her looked questioningly at her.

‘Ndona meka...*I’ve seen them do...*’ then she showed them the fist and palm sign she had witnessed outside. The tension began to grow. There was another ten minutes of silence and pronounced increase in the smell of unwashed sweating bodies. Then they heard some cries in the distance. It was the same cries that Amy and her mother had heard at dawn that morning. She

rose again and approached the window. She peered through the crack. Outside, their men had also realized what was going on. About fifteen of them had congregated outside the fence and were looking intently in the direction from which the cries came. In the distance between their heads, she could see tiny red dots. They increased in size and took shape as the cries increased. The movement within the church grew quickly into a commotion of fear and desperation as the noise increased outside. The men outside talked animatedly among themselves then appeared to come to an agreement. They moved off in one group in the direction of the coming attackers. It was then that she saw they were armed; they carried machetes and simis and other crude weapons. In the distance, the red dots had crystallized into running men dressed variously in red shukas and dressed hides. They carried all manner of weapons in their hands; simis, machetes, clubs. Bows were also clearly visible hung across their chests with the inevitable quiver of arrows peeping above their shoulders right or left.

Amy watched as the two groups of incensed men closed in on one another. Some distance away from the church, the men from the church seemed to acknowledge themselves outnumbered. While they were about a dozen, the advancing army had at least five hundred men who moved in military fashion – the short ahead of the tall with the tallest in the rear. They also advanced in one flank, their eyes intent on the enemy, their weapons raised, their maniacal cries growing in crescendo. Then she noticed something; those who fell behind their line were immediately cut down by those behind them and the advance continued as if nothing had happened. She felt her blood freeze. The men from the church had stopped, dropped their weapons and raised their hands up in surrender. She waited with bated breath as the distance between the two groups decreased rapidly. She did not have long to wait. She saw the front line of the advancing men raise their hands in unison to their shoulders, draw arrows and shoot. They then knelt on one knee, again in unison as the line behind them shot past them their machetes raised. The men from the church had no chance. The one who had come to inform them he had sent sentries was the first to fall. He was clear in her line of vision. He doubled over, then knelt on one knee as he clutched at the arrow which was lodged in his chest. As she looked, the machete wielder advanced quickly swung his weapon and the kneeling man was suddenly shorter. It was a moment before she realized that it was the head that had been severed and had fallen off. Something snapped inside her head and she sunk to the ground.

She must have been out for only several seconds. When she came to, her mother was bending over her. She could tell the raiders had not got to the church for although the cries sounded nearer, they were still some distance off. A number of women were fanning her with their *shukas* as the volume of distressful cries swelled around her. In a short while she heard the trampling feet outside the church. The raiders were dancing and shouting and singing victorious war songs as they ran round and round the church. The trampling feet scared the children intensely and they began to wail loudly. The women wailed too while others began to pray, first silently then with reckless abandon.

Suddenly, the trampling feet outside went silent. The church quieted too except for a few children who cried and whimpered. Amy rose slowly and peered out again. The attackers had gathered round the church. They looked on silently as if waiting for the next orders. She noticed too that they had dragged along the bodies of the slaughtered men. She watched as one of the attackers, a man of about forty, walked over to one of the bodies, cut its chest open and thrust his right hand inside. It came out pulling the heart which he proceeded to sever off the body. He then sliced it into two and handed over to two young men, nay, they were mere boys. They couldn't have been more than fifteen. One of them looked exactly like Jay except for his red eyes and shaven head. The middle aged man said something to them. The two boys thrust the flesh into their mouths. They munched with furrowed foreheads and bright eyes thrust out of their sockets as the other man stood guard. Amy turned aside and wretched. She sat down on the earth floor and leant on the wall of the church unable to contain herself. The singing of the women slowly increased in tempo until it was one general rhythm which drowned the cries and whimpers of the children.

After a short while, there followed the sound of hammering, first on the door and then on each of the windows. The volume of prayer increased. It appeared that the attackers had set themselves around the church so that they could break down the windows in unison. All the hammering came simultaneously. After a number of hammer blows on the windows, the hammering stopped. This was followed by a long moment of silence. It appeared like they had failed to break through the windows. Amy even entertained the thought that they had withdrawn but she dared not look outside after what she had seen. It was five minutes before somebody shouted.

‘Feturu! Petrol!’

‘Ooooo! They want to burn us in here!’ somebody cried.

It was then that it occurred to Amy that they had been reinforcing the windows shut; they had not been opening them. She remembered the pattern of the hammering. It went more with the sound of hammering nails in than the heavy intermittent blows of one who tries to break something down.

‘Everybody try to get out,’ someone shouted. A man’s voice. Amy hadn’t realized there were any men inside. Mayhem followed. People rushed to the nearest windows and threw themselves at them. They pushed and shoved as they either tried to get them open or competed to get at the window. Some clawed at them in desperation tearing their nails like bears caught in baited traps. Then suddenly, the flames engulfed the church. The mayhem turned into pandemonium. People clawed at the windows or fisted them, pushed and shoved the singing forgotten; the cries of the children rose to the highest pitch. It was the smoke that got them before the heat. As it were, the slight wind from the east fanned the flames driving the smoke deeper and deeper into the church. People choked on the smoke as they rubbed their watering eyes which blocked their view. They ran into each other in panic as the stampede increased. Children cried loudly then went suddenly quiet like matches snuffed off as heavy feet trampled them underfoot. The fanned eastern side of the church drew the flames deeper into the church and the crowd shoved to get out of the way as the flames licked hair and skin. The smell of dry wood smoke was over powered by that of burning hair and singed flesh. Somewhere somebody was moaning, ‘Lord, remember Daniel and the lions! Remember Daniel!’

Amy suddenly felt a hand grab her and then she was dragged to the opposite side of the church. As she reached out her hand to touch the wall, her eyes saw blue sky through the wall. Somebody had somehow managed to break down some part of the wall on the western side and people were scrambling out through the aperture. Amy felt eager hands push her out as the cries of fear and pain deafened her. She could now see the outside of the church, the expanse of the grassy compound and the fence beyond; the blue sky and the distant tufts of dissipating clouds. She turned to the hand that had pushed her out. It was her mother. She was trying to push her body out through the small opening but she was caught among crying and singed bodies whose

skin peeled off at the touch of a finger. Amy turned and held her mother's hands and pulled with all her might. The skin peeled off all the way down to the hands. She jumped at her again and held her by the armpits and heaved. She pulled and pulled. Somebody joined her to her right and both of them pulled and tugged with all the energy they could muster. The upper part of her mother's body was out but she was held back from her hips down by something they couldn't see.

It was then that the roof of the church caved in effectively burying her mother's feet within. Amy turned insistently to the middle-aged man who was helping her.

'Oh God do something quick! Do something!' she said as tears blurred her vision. The two of them tagged and pulled with all their might until her mother's legs were dislodged sending them reeling and falling on their backs. Her mother moaned loudly and Amy could see it would only be a moment's time before she became unconscious. Suddenly, the man beside her rose and juttet quickly to their right. A few metres away, another woman was trying to rescue a baby whose mother was trapped in the burning debris like her mother had been. She had just managed to rescue the baby from the mother as the man who had helped her leant forward to pull out the baby's crying mother out of the inferno. Suddenly, one of the raiders rounded the corner of the church and charged towards them. He pulled a burning plank of wood off the wall of the church and hit the other man behind the head. The man collapsed in a heap. His head was dangerous close to the fire. Amy was paralyzed by fear and desperation as she watched the man's long hair catch fire. The attacker hit the woman who had rescued the baby across the forehead with the plank of wood which he still held in his hands. She fell into the raging fire. He proceeded to pick the crying baby which had fallen off the rescuers hands upon the impact of the blow. He threw it into the inferno then gave a hooping war cry. That decided Amy. She rose quickly and picked the plank of wood. She raised it high over the attackers head and brought it down on his head with all her might. He fell into the fire without a sound. He was soon lost in the long tongues of flame which leapt out hungrily. Amy stood there shaking then sank to her knees. She had killed her first human being.

The woman had just packed the unconscious form which they had found outside the church on to a rickety wheel barrow and was about to leave. She turned to survey the scene one last time, then stopped. Just next to the glowing coals and disappearing flames, she noticed a hunched form. She walked over to it. It was the figure of a teenage girl. She was sitting on the blackened grass near the dying flames of the burnt out church. Her hands were held limply to her sides, her glazed eyes focused into the embers of the fire. She seemed dead to her surroundings and she was about to dismiss her for the corpse collectors when something made her pause. It was the angle at which she was sitting. No dead body could possibly be propped up like that. It would either be on its back or on its side. She moved closer and touched a vein in her neck. She was alive! She quickly pulled her away from the heat of the embers. Was it possible? Could somebody sit this close to a fire even for two minutes and live? She gathered her and lifted her by her armpits and dragged her away.

‘There’s another child here!’ she shouted as she put the girl on the grass at her feet. Her body collapsed and she lay listless on the ground. Her colleague hurried over to her and looked at the girl on the ground. Her brown faces had been blackened by smoke to leave grotesque patches of red-brown around her eyes but that had done little to diminish her beauty. She looked like an actor at a theatre playing ‘The Fireman.’ She winced at the irony of the allusion.

‘It’s a miracle,’ she was saying. ‘There is no way you can sit where I have found her even for one minute and live.’

‘You could,’ her colleague responded. ‘Go read the book of Daniel. You never know what God is saving her for,’ he said enigmatically as he helped her carry the girl where other injured people had been taken. They piled them up on top of the pick-up. The man then fetched a green paper bag, opened it up and pulled out a dead cat. He wedged it between the cabin and the pick-up’s carrier. Just in case. They had heard that vehicles were being inspected by raiders. If they found anyone trying to save the injured, they killed both the injured and the rescuers. If you were helping the enemy, you were definitely an enemy. The pick-up truck went down the road then turned right. The scene on both sides of the road was one from a dream. Homes had been torched in a panoramic pattern. One here skip two. The next three. Skip two. The next five. There was some red marking at the gate of every home torched. It was like the devil had passed by in the dead of the night summoning those he wanted. It was the reversed scene from Exodus all over

again with the houses of the Egyptians marked for death. They drove up the earth road up to another, wider road that led due north-west. It went past St. Gedion Academy, up another earth road and joined the Stendi-Kisa-Yala Road, turned right and accelerated. The truck drove up past a number of schools, past the show ground, past the old Nairobi highway to the junction of Nandi road. The driver slowed down, looked right and left and crossed the road. He drove on to Uganda Road, then turned right. The gates of Eldoret Hospital loomed large ahead. He slowed down and signaled, then turned in as the gate was opened.

The hospital grounds were a mess of sickly humanity. Injured people were all over the compound and the doctors and nurses were no longer making any pretense of getting people into the hospital. The rescuers unloaded their truck then somebody went for a doctor. Thankfully, a bed was found for Amy's mother – another patient who had one leg had to be moved out – and Amy was treated for serious smoke inhalation. Medical supplies were scanty and the doctors had to make do with make-shift bandages. Her mother's legs had to be amputated at the knees. The stumps were treated and dressed. She was glad her mother was alive. Then she settled to wait. It was two days before Christmas all over again but now, she and not her mother waited for her mother to come out of the coma. It would be six hours and thirty nine minutes before she did. She turned her attention to the hospital. The injured lay all over, four to a bed for those who couldn't sit or stand. The rest had to make do with the floor. It was dirty with blood, urine and human waste. Groans filled the ward and the doctors and nurses who looked immune to all the suffering moved in and out mostly to comfort those who couldn't be treated for medicine was in short supply. Amy looked outside. It was around two in the afternoon. The sun was hot but she too had become immune to the suffering. She looked on it all like some bad dream which she would surely wake from sometime soon. She walked lazily here and there then returned to her mother's bedside, held her hand and continued to wait.

Darkness had fallen when her mother opened her eyes. She opened her mouth to talk but no voice came out. She had lost her voice. But her eyes told Amy all she needed to know. They smiled at her in gratitude and she knew she was trying to thank her, not for saving her, but for showing so much courage amid all that mayhem. She reached out for her hand and squeezed it. She leant down on the bed and held her mother, her cheek against hers the way she always did when she welcomed her home from school. She knew she understood. She felt her mother's tears

hot against her cheek and rose. She smiled at her bitterly then leant down and wiped her tears with the corner of her jacket.

By the third day in the hospital, it was becoming clear that the patients had to be separated. There was outright animosity against the Kikuyu from nearly all other tribes. Nobody could tell where the feeling had come from but it was becoming clear that the doctors had to do something to avert a catastrophe. Amy had felt it from the very beginning. The patients looked at you with understanding when you arrived but there was a suspended eagerness to hear what language you talked. Immediately you talked in kikuyu, you felt the others withdraw away from you like you were some mangy dog. Luckily, more than three quarters of the patients were kikuyu. This general animosity tended to band them together. Eventually, it was people from the other tribes who were moved elsewhere and their ward immediately adopted a common language. People consoled one another by reliving their experiences. Amy felt that this was to mask the hopelessness in all their eyes.

‘Guku gutiri bururi! *There is no country here!*’ Somebody was saying.

‘Kibaki niekuigua tha. *Kibaki will feel mercy for us,*’ somebody else said.

‘Who is Kibaki? I have always told you he is the greatest coward that ever lived. How can he sit there in State House while we continue to suffer like this? What did we choose him for?’ another responded.

‘Ona tikaba muthungu! *The white man was even better!*’ an old man said. This led to some silence, then someone said;

‘I kinyatta angiukira? *Suppose Kenyatta rose from the dead?*’

‘Othe niateti. *All of them are politicians,*’ someone else said. ‘We elect them and then they abandon us to be killed like dogs. What sin have we committed?’ the man who had spoken first said.

The women and the children were uncannily silent. It felt like they were paying for the sins of the men folk. They looked at the floor as the conversation went this way and that. None of them

seemed to have anything to say or the will to do so. Amy wondered what sin she and her mother had committed. And the rest of the family too. None except her father had voted. And her father had always been decidedly anti-Kibaki. What sin did one commit by buying a patch of ground at market rate in Eldoret? Why didn't those people simply take the land and let them be? How was it possible that a human being could decide the length of another's life with a simple stroke of a machete? Were they God? And where was God himself if he existed at all? Then she remembered the two young men eating the heart of a human being. She gagged. They had to turn themselves into animals – the children, the boys had to be forced to turn themselves into unfeeling automatons in order to do what they were doing. So they were human at heart. But how would they live after this was all over? What kind of dreams would haunt them from day to day with people's blood on their hands? Or maybe those were only myths. Maybe, just maybe it was possible to kill a human being and live like nothing had happened. She shivered.

In another two days, the turn of events changed again. Her father's phone was still off. Her mother's feet were recovering quickly. She recovered her voice and by and by, she was able to talk a little. All the patients had gone through a hellish week. It was officially declared, not loudly of course, that there was no medicine to continue treating them. News continued to filter into the hospital about how the fight was raging outside. There were rumours of planned attacks on the hospital. And then it was claimed that kikuyu doctors and nurses had been sent away and the patients had to leave too. There was nobody to treat the kikuyu at this hospital. They were rich thieves and they could afford medication in Kiambu and Murang'a. They had to leave or they would be attacked. The old man who had first brought the patients together spoke again. He told the people not to fear. They only needed some resolve. If anyone attacked the hospital, then they must be ready to go down with everyone else. Life was not permanent but if you went down for a cause, your living would have been worthwhile. That is what they had done in Burma and during the Mau Mau. They could do it again. The patients were greatly heartened. But the doctors refused to treat them. And they said they were not billing anyone so everyone could wake up and leave. But where could homeless amputees and half-recovered patients go? Amy could not believe that this was the same hospital in which her mother had treated Kalenjins for free. She had volunteered her nursing services here for three months. And the beneficiaries were now sending her away.

Amy asked her mother what they should do. She told her to go into town and gather news of what was going on. If it was safe to travel, they could try to get to Nakuru. Her aunt was a business woman in Shaabab estate. They had to try and get to her. Amy went into town several times. There were rumours that some raiders had destroyed the road between Turbo and Deffo. That meant that there was no way of getting to Nakuru. The raiders didn't want any Kikuyu to get to Nakuru. They wanted them dead, killed in Eldoret or on the way. Scores of trucks had parked in Eldoret town waiting for the earliest indication that the road had been repaired so they could leave. Amy found a girl she knew. Her family had packed their belongings into one of the trucks and they would leave any minute. Amy begged her to take her to the owner of the truck. When she saw him, Amy asked him whether he could make room for a sick legless woman. Though the truck was full, the owner promised he would try. Amy told her friend to come fetch her at the Eldoret Hospital immediately she learnt they were about to leave. She went back to the hospital, fed her mother on bread and milk she had salvaged from town and set about preparing to leave without informing anyone what was afoot. She went round the hospital and was lucky enough to find an abandoned wheel chair. Its owner was basking in the sun a little further away. She took it to their ward, folded it and pushed it under her mother's bed.

At about three that afternoon, her friend came with the news of departure. Amy retrieved the wheel chair and packed her mother on it then with the help of her friend, wheeled it out of the hospital like one who was going for some air. They found the truck owner impatient while her friend's father implored on him to wait until her daughter returned. Room was found for them in the truck where several families were squeezed. Two boys offered to climb up and hang on to the angle line where the men were immediately they saw Amy's mother's condition. Soon, the truck was driving out of the cursed town, its load of human cargo apprehensive for there were many dangers on the way. From where they were sitting, Amy could only see the sky above them. She was glad she didn't have to see their home as they went past it. She was not sure she could have contained herself. But she didn't have a shade of regret to leave the town she had known all the sixteen years of her life. It was the devil's own play ground. She preferred to leave it to him.

The lorry labored on down the road. From down there inside the lorry, the women and children could tell the nature of the destruction on both sides of the road by the exclamations of the men parched up on the lorry. Their conversation and exclamations wrote the narrative of the

destruction and rampage of the raiders along the road. Many houses had been razed. Some were still smoldering. Some however were still intact. Their owners went about their daily business as if nothing much had happened. They were still tilling their farms and looked up in surprise on finding a group of escapees still foolish enough to use the deserted road. Others went about harvesting the maize of those they had killed as their corpses rotted in the very farms. By the time they got to Burnt Forest, it was already five o'clock. The lorry stopped as the men exclaimed at the utter destruction of the town. Though some buildings had clearly been burnt a long time before, it was apparent too that the town had been revisited that afternoon. It was deserted. That is, until they climbed down and looked around. The number of dead was countless. Many had been burnt inside their houses and their still smoldering bodies sat in various angles reminiscent of the agonies at the time of their death. Macheted bodies were strewn all over, some dead, many in the last throes of life. Many of the passengers had never known the agony of watching a human being die knowing there was nothing they could do about it. The shops however were intact. They still stood although many of their doors and windows had been ripped off and the stock looted. Blood was all over, some still wet, some dried on the door frames and the eaves of the shops, some caked into the earth. For Amy, it was all she could do to contain herself. But she was the bold one. Some women looked and immediately wretched. Others wept and wailed. The men looked on stoically with gritted teeth and dilated nostrils. They clicked their tongues in emasculated frustration that bespoke of their castration.

'What did we do to deserve this? What did we do?' some wailed.

Among a pile of bodies heaped together, Amy noticed one that looked familiar. It was something about the way it lay. The face was turned away from her, but the...the beard? A two-day stubble that reminded her of...there was no denying it. The grey trousers were clearly visible. Of course there was no way of telling from the shirt. It was all blood red from the owner's own blood and that of the corpses piled on top of him. It lay at an angle so that she couldn't tell whether it had a tie or not. She walked nearer. It had been slashed severally across the face to mutilate it, disfigure it? What anger could drive a human being to do this to another? Was it just an election victory? No, it couldn't be. She saw the end, the very tip of the tie. There was no mistaking it. It looked like the killer had something against her father wearing a tie. Where were her tears? They couldn't come although she knew very well she couldn't cry. She couldn't let her mother know.

Amy wondered what right she had in this country. She couldn't grow up, not like other children. She couldn't mourn her dead or even talk about them. Were there men in this country?

Somebody was tagging at her, pulling her away. The owner of the lorry warned that those raiders could not be very far off, he told her. Those people they had seen stealing maize from farms of the evicted were spies employed to warn the raiders who was about, he added. He didn't even ask why she lingered there. The men herded the women and children back into the lorry and the lorry left. Nobody spoke. The lorry labored on, its engine roaring like some determined animal intent on some maniacal end. At Sachangwan, many of the passengers fell silent as they remembered the tragedy that had occurred there. Amy was struck by the pretense. The hue and cry that had followed that tragedy! NGOs offering food and shelter, the government putting up monuments in the middle of nowhere! Just because of a lorry accident. And here was a man-made catastrophe which no one was talking about. This country had an army, didn't it? Oh, it was better engaged in Somalia. And the police? They were adopting a wait-and see attitude.

Darkness fell just before they got to Eldama Ravine forty kilometers from Nakuru town. The driver said they would spend the night there to avoid travelling at night. Everyone agreed. But they soon changed their minds. And they had cause to. As they approached the town, they came to the section where the road had been destroyed. Somebody had used a bulldozer to dig a big trench across the tarmac. The monster still lay by the roadside, the teeth at the edges of its cropper pointed obscenely into the sky, the graveled earth it had eaten out of the road still in its cropper. And there was more. Apparently, several lorries had arrived ferrying human cargo to Nakuru and found the road destroyed. It looked like they had been engaged with the repair, which was almost done when they were attacked. About three dozen bodies lay scattered all over the vicinity. Many had been matcheted while others had arrows lodged in various parts of their bodies. The attackers had contented themselves with shooting arrows at the fleeing children many of who were at the edge of the forest. They had clearly been trying to escape. But all the men had their heads decapitated, even those who had died from other injuries. Most of the women had been disemboweled. It looked like the attackers were not only content to kill them; they wanted to ensure that they didn't somehow give birth to other Kikuyu beyond their death. One pregnant woman had an arrow through her right ear, two in each of her breasts and several sticking evilly out of her private parts. She had clearly been raped before the final ordeal. She

had similarly been disemboweled and the unborn infant chopped to pieces. What kind of people did this to women? Nobody could wail or moan them for the attackers were surely in the vicinity. There wasn't even time for it. The men quickly fell upon the road to finish what had been started taking care to make as little noise as possible. After twenty minutes of concentrated labour, they pushed the lorry as the driver balanced it past the roughly repaired road. Immediately it was through everybody clambered on to it and it went down the road as quickly as its age could allow.

When they got to Nakuru, they all realized it was a divided ghost town. No businesses were running and there was a dusk to dawn curfew. Amy couldn't take her mother to Shaabab, neither could she look up her friend. The only option was to join other refugees. They learnt quickly too that the Kikuyu here were similarly marked. Even their refugees could not mix with others. While other tribes were gathered at Afraha stadium, Kikuyu refugees were at the show ground. That was the official policy. Like the Jews and Hitler, the Kikuyu were marked. And the label was not coming off soon. Amy had an apprehension they were being hurdled together for the final onslaught. That is what she had read in Gourevitch's account of the Rwandan genocide. The Tutsi were forced by desperation into churches. Then the church ministers would call the genocidaires when they judged the churches to be full to their liking. A similar pattern was developing in Nakuru town. The Kikuyu were being herded on their own into the Afraha stadium. If other tribes attacked, they could rest assured the enemy was on his own. Amy couldn't wait to leave the town. And she couldn't share all the knowledge she had about the patterns she of genocide she could see with anyone. No one would understand her. No one even had the choice.

Even at the stadium, Amy realized they couldn't stay there very long even if they had wanted to. The conditions were desperate. Since it looked like there was no going back to their home in Eldoret, her mother suggested that they must try to get to Kahuhia in Murang'a. That is where she heard her people had originally come from. No, she had never been there, she told her daughter. She had to get there and ask around. People would surely know *Mbari ya Gathirimu* the Gathirimu clan, although their closest ancestors had left for the rift valley in 1911, wouldn't they? They had to belong somewhere. Her mother's eyes wet as she tried to make herself convincing. Like in Eldoret, Amy set about trying to find out which vehicles were leaving for

Nairobi. Her mother's feet had become re-infected and the edges of the stumps were full of gangrene. She had to make an effort to take her to Murang'a where hopefully she could find people who would take better care of her. There had to be.

Two days later, she was lucky again to find a good Samaritan. There was a farmer who was going back to his home in Murang'a. He had lived in Njoro for forty years but luckily, he had never sold the half-acre he had inherited from his father. There was little space in his pick-up truck but his wife offered to sit at the back with the children to give space for Amy and her mother in the cabin. As they left Nakuru, Amy was glad to put as much distance as possible between herself and what she had known as home. The ride was smooth until they came to Kikohey. A ramshackle town famous for its *Nyama Choma*, it had turned into a refugee camp. There were scores of trucks parked in every little space many of which appeared to have been heading for Nairobi. On enquiring, they were informed that there had been a blood bath at Naivasha and the road had been closed. There were two armies engaged with each other there; a group of Kikuyu youth who had barricaded the road and policemen. The youth had vowed to kill two non-kikuyus for every kikuyu who had fallen in Eldoret. They had blocked the road and were pulling non-kikuyus out of vehicles and serving their own kind of justice. Initially, it was said, they had only been interested in Luos and Kalenjin but it got to a point where the means to differentiate had become cumbersome. Now they were only interested in whether one could speak kikuyu or not. This, they said, was the only way to bring to the attention the government the fact that what was going on in the name of post-election violence was a Kikuyu genocide. And it appeared to be working. Violence had immediately lessened in the rift valley and in the slums in Nairobi.

That meant that Amy and her mother were stuck at Kikohey. Somebody advised her to try getting some space at the refugee camp that had cropped up on the upper side of the road a hundred metres away. She found three kind women who took her to the manager of the camp – a red-haired white woman who looked partly amused at what these Africans were doing to one another. Amy had heard people say there was money in the refugee crisis. She hadn't understood what was meant. But looking at this red-haired woman, the pieces of the jig-saw fell perfectly into place. She was able to secure a small tent, a small kerosene cooking stove that burned a single flame, a mat, two blankets and plastic utensils. To her dismay, the only space she could

secure to put up her tent was the very edge of the camp a hundred metres to the north of the road. There were tall bushes and scrub and she feared there could be snakes. Her fear of grubs and crawling insects had long been forgotten. Thus her life as a refugee began.

Her first night at the camp, she had to make do with posho which she had got from the manager of the camp. The following day, she learnt survival tricks from the three women who had helped her put up her tent the day before. She joined them as they scavenged for food in the vicinity or begged for scraps from those who had been there long enough to come up with techniques of survival. She learnt too of safe wild fruits and herbs. She boiled the herbs and used them for her posho soup. Fortunately, her mother had again lost her voice. She could not bear to think of what the two of them would have said to each other. She was only content to do the best she could for her mother as she waited for Jesus or somebody to come by. She found it a lot more difficult than other people because she had never been a beggar. Her parents, especially her father had taught them to work hard and rely on their own sweat. And particularly for her, she had always been a loner, an introvert. She found it difficult to engage other people and avoided it if she could. It was therefore quite difficult to learn to cultivate the wiles of the ever smiling, ever hopeful beggar which survival in the camp demanded. Her mother's condition grew worse as the days went by. There was no medicine for her and the gangrene got worse. Each day she hope the promised doctor for the refugee camp would come but nothing happened.

Eventually, Amy decided she had to get a doctor herself. Her mother's condition had deteriorated so much that she now fell in and out of a coma at almost regular intervals. She had to get her a doctor. The only place she could get one from here was Naivasha. She told her mother what she had decided and she nodded her agreement. She also called one of her women friends and told her to keep checking on her mother in her absence. Then she set off for Naivasha. Traffic had resumed on the highway and though she had no money, she found a woman kind enough to lift her to Naivasha. She also introduced her to a nurse to whom she explained her predicament. The nurse was also a kind woman. She told her that her home was in Ol Kalou. She would help her bring her mother to the hospital where, though medicine was still scarce, she could hope for better care. She had to wait for her and she was only able to accompany her at half-past two in the afternoon.

On the way, they saw people on foot walking towards Naivasha. It looked like some refugee camp had closed down and they were headed to town. When they got back to Kikopey, things had completely changed. She found the refugees congregated at the town. There had been rumours of a raid by some Kalenjin attackers at around ten that morning, they said. People had scattered in all directions. Most of them had ended up here and no one was willing to take her to the camp. They consulted policemen who were guarding the escaped refugees. They said they could not allow anyone back into the camp at the moment. The camp had been evacuated. Surely, her mother had come with somebody. The policemen had searched the camp to ensure it was empty before they themselves left. Nobody would be allowed back to the camp until it had been secured. Amy went about looking for her mother and the woman with whom she had left her in charge among the refugees who had congregated outside buildings. She couldn't find them. She mused they must have been among the group they had met on their way here. She told the nurse she would go back to Naivasha with her to continue her search. The nurse agreed. But she would give Amy some food first before they resumed their search. She took Amy to her own house at the hospital where she gave her some food. By the time she was through, it was already half-past six. The nurse told her to spend the night. She would enquire where the refugees had gone and they would go there the following morning. Amy was too tired even to think.

The following morning, the nurse told her that the refugees had camped at Naivasha police station. The sun was already shining in the cloudless sky as they hurried over but they couldn't find her mother.

'I think we should go back to the camp and start from there. Somebody, the manager possibly, must have seen the person with whom my mother left,' Amy argued. 'There must be a report of some sort.'

'That makes sense,' the nurse agreed. 'But it would be better you leave this task to me. You are in no condition to be walking about worrying yourself.'

'No. I won't rest until I know exactly where my mother is,' Amy said. 'We've been through a lot together. Nobody will understand her condition better than I do.'

They left for Kikopey again. The morning was beginning to get hot and no clouds had shown up yet. At Delamere's Farm, business was going on as usual. Above the neatly trimmed hedges, jets

of water sprinklers could be seen against the grey background. The acacia trees that line the road swayed in the slight breeze like they had always done. When they got back to Kikopey, some of the refugees were already returning to the camp. Dregs of ill clad humanity walked slowly up the small hill towards the camp dragging their misery along. They joined them but their walk was a little more purposeful, a little urgent. At the camp, a few of the refugees were waiting at the manager's office. The manager herself was nowhere in sight. Several policemen were standing near the manager's office. Amy led the nurse whose name she had learnt was Dorothy, to the manager's office. When their enquiries among the waiting people yielded no fruits, they decided to visit the tent. Its zipper door was still intact. Amy was apprehensive that her mother might have been left to spend the night there on her own. She unzipped the door and went in. Inside, the tent looked disturbed. There were signs of a hurried departure. The bed clothes which had been on the thin mattress on the floor had been dragged to one side. She went out to tell Dorothy but met her as she was getting in.

'There's no one here,' she said, then thought for a moment. 'Let me ask the neighbours here. I've heard some commotion in some tent over there.'

She left with a heavy heart. Meanwhile, Dorothy entered the tent. She pitied the young girl. Though she didn't say much, her suffering was only too clear on her face, even in her silence. She surveyed the tent. The meager cooking paraphernalia set on the makeshift table was hardly anything to get by. There was a single thin mattress set on a reed mat on the floor. There was a kerosene stove which had been overturned. She went to right it up. She noticed a long tear on the tent and marks on the floor under it. It looked like something had been dragged through the tear in the tent. She felt her heart begin to quicken. She went out behind the tent and noticed the same drag marks under the tear in the net. The pattern of dragging led to some nearby bushes. And there were prints of some carnivore's paws. She left quickly and returned to the manager's office. The manager had still not arrived. She approached the policemen.

'How are you,' she greeted. 'Listen, I think there has been a terrible accident. You see that girl over there?' she said indicating Amy who was walking towards them with a pout of her lips. The policemen nodded. 'Don't let her follow us under any circumstances whatsoever,' she told one of them. 'I think something happened to her mother and she shouldn't get alarmed until we find out exactly what. One of you needs to come with me.'

The two policemen looked at each other then one stepped forward.

‘Hey, listen,’ Dorothy said to Amy who had arrived. ‘I think there is somebody else we can enquire from. Wait here until I come back.’ Amy looked at the two policemen questioningly then nodded. ‘Trust me,’ Dorothy said to dispel the doubt which was so clear on her face.

She accompanied the policeman to the tent and showed her what she had discovered. Both of them followed the marks into the brushwood. After a few metres, a trail of blood became clearly visible. About sixty metres from the tent, they came upon a pack of hyenas and jackals. The policeman held Dorothy back as he approached the animals raising his gun. He shouted at them and they scattered. Dorothy approached warily. What she saw first was the blue hospital sheet which Amy had described the night before. The label ‘Property of Eldoret Hospital’ was unmistakable. Then the half-eaten body became visible. It had been badly torn apart on the legs, the torso and the face. It looked like the woman had desperately tried to hang on to the sheets as the hyenas dragged her away.

‘She’s dead,’ the policeman said unnecessarily. ‘Go take her away. She can’t see this.’

But Amy insisted on seeing her mother when it became apparent what had happened in spite of Dorothy’s attempt to say it as gently as she could. She’d told her that her mother had had an accident which the police were looking into but soon realized she couldn’t keep it away from her big forthright eyes for very long.

‘I want to see’ was all she said. The policeman led her to the body. He had covered it to await collection. He held her back as he revealed the part of her face that had not been eaten away. She didn’t cry. She didn’t utter a sound. She only stood still for so long he was afraid she had stopped breathing. Then Dorothy who was standing behind her reached out. She held her firmly and led her away.

Dorothy excused herself from work to stay with her. She was afraid of what the young girl might do to herself. She was only a child; a child she had known for barely a day. She took her to her house where she tried to talk to her but she did not utter a word. She sat there with glazed eyes looking at nothing in particular. Dorothy was glad her children were at school. She finally coaxed her to take some sedatives and she fell into a deep sleep. When her children came home,

she took them to a nurse colleague then she and her colleague returned to her house. They fed Amy like a baby when she finally woke up. She ate a little, took some milk and slept again. Though Dorothy did not dare leave her for a second, she had to Amy with a nurse colleague briefly so she could organize for her children's supper. When she returned, Amy was gone.

Daniel and his family soon came to accept the label – IDPs – it was what your country called you when it didn't know what to do with you.

Selina sympathized with her sister. She took care of her daughter as the parents went out to try their luck. She would stick it out for her sister until things changed.

'I think even this place is not safe,' Daniel said one evening. 'There are rumours that the Mungiki want to revenge in Nakuru for all the Kikuyu killed in the rift valley.'

'But where can we go?' Emily was desperate.

'We have to think. We just can't sit and wait for a disaster.'

'But why can't these people agree? What are we suffering like this for?' Emily wondered.

'It is called power. This is not the only place where it comes via bloodshed. There were the Jews and the Rwandans,' Daniel said. 'But history has little to teach Africans. They don't even believe in it.'

'So what can people do?' Emily asked.

'It is more of what they shouldn't do. To trust a politician,' Daniel said enigmatically.

'Meanwhile, we must move out of Nakuru. We cannot just sit here and wait for the Mungiki.'

'Maybe even that Mungiki is a myth,' Selina offered.

'That, my dear sister, is one thing I'm not willing to sit here and find out,' Daniel said. 'Tell you what, Naivasha is a relatively calm town because it has a lot of white people. The government will ensure the multi-billion flower industry there is protected.'

'What are you trying to say?' his wife asked him.

‘My brother lives there. You know him, the one who works at the flower farms. I think we should temporarily move there. We can come back to Nakuru when things cool down a little.’

The following day, the family moved out. Many other people had moved out of the stadium fearing for their lives. Others spent the nights in the streets with their children only returning in the morning. Selina and her in-laws joined other travelers on the highway. They landed a lift on a military lorry that was going to Gilgil then walked the rest of the distance to Naivasha. Just past Delamere farms, the real impact of the violence hit them. The night before, Naivasha town had been ruled by the worst violence that had been seen since the outbreak of the violence. People had been massacred by youths the night before. The evidence was all there for them. Bodies were scattered all over the road as if the youths had intended to use them to block the road. The road was still wet with the shining dark red of drying blood. They could still hear noise of the retreating youth ahead. Daniel led his family down the first road they came across. They hadn’t gone far when they heard the noise of advancing youth coming from the town. They turned into the first turn-off that led off the road. They walked quickly through the estates looking for the nearest friendly house they could find. They could no longer hope to get to the lakeside. They came across a Luo family hiding in a small room in one of the estates. It was here they learnt what was going on. The kikuyu had blocked the road further ahead and were pulling people out of vehicles and demanding to see their identity cards.

‘Whatever for?’ Emily asked.

‘They claim it is the only way to stop the violence.’ One of the strangers answered.

‘How can they reason like that? Violence can only beget more violence.’ Daniel said.

‘They claim that all the other tribes are killing kikuyu elsewhere. That the only way to stop it is to kill people from other tribes who are in central province especially in Nairobi.’

‘When did I ever hate or kill the kikuyu?’ somebody said. ‘Those politicians are only fighting their own battles.’

‘Listen people, this is not the time for...’ Whoever was speaking stopped short. Selina could hear voices clearly headed in their direction. Since her friend Amy had taught her a little kikuyu, she could tell exactly what was being said.

‘They’ve come this way,’ a voice said.

‘How many were there?’ another one demanded. A series of shouts followed. There was an argument. It appeared there was a dispute as to the direction to be followed and what should be done with whoever was captured.

‘It isn’t moral to kill them. Why don’t we simply maim them and kick them out of Naivasha?’ a voice said.

‘What are saying you dog?’ another voice demanded. ‘It is the likes of you who are betraying us. Aren’t you yourself married to a Luo?’

‘You mean he is married to a *kirigu* and is following us wherever we are going? He is the one who is betraying us!’

‘Yes, he is a Gacheru! He should be healed!’ shouts, louder this time followed. A man cried out followed by cries of ‘Kill him! Kill him!’ There was one anguished cry, then silence. Selina was extremely worried. She couldn’t tell the others what she had heard. This might cause chaos which would draw the attackers to them. But if they could kill fellow kikuyu, how much worse would it be for them if they were discovered? She might as well tell everybody so they could try to save themselves. Before she could decide what to do, she heard the noises coming back. They grew louder and louder as they came nearer. They drew near the door then one of the attackers said, ‘There are Luos who live here. Yes that must be the house’.

She spoke in the first language that came to mind – Kisii. She told them to run. But only her sister heard her. She ran to the timber window and thrust it open. She took her niece and threw her outside then felt her sister pushing her out. Emily had just fallen outside when a number of the attackers rounded the corner. Two of them came rushing at her and her sister with their machetes raised. Then one of the attackers said in kikuyu, ‘Don’t kill uncircumcised girls. God does not accept irigu.’

She didn’t know what irigu meant but she was glad they had been saved. In the house, something devilish was going on judging from the groans that came from there. Then Selina realized she had been mistaken when the youths pulled off her clothes. She trembled as she realized she was about to be raped. Then she felt the sharp pain between her legs. She couldn’t tell what angel

talked to her. She only heard herself yell in Kikuyu, 'Nikii muraturia? *What do you people want from us?*' then she fainted.

When she came to, she was in a hospital bed. Her sister was beside her. Her face was swollen and puffy while her eyes were blood red.

'Don't say anything,' she cautioned. 'We will talk when you are feeling better.'

'But I'm okay except for the pain,' Selina winced. 'Did they hurt you? Where is Daniel?'

Emily could not speak. Her eyes clouded again and she began sobbing.

'They killed my husband. They burnt him in front of my eyes!' Emily could say nothing more. The whole day she kept repeating those words, 'in front of my very eyes!'

Selina learnt that they had been saved by the few words she had spoken in kikuyu. The attackers had thought she was kikuyu. Though they couldn't account for her sister not talking at all, their resemblance saved her. They tore her clothes and ensured she was circumcised. She learnt too that the doctors had to do a better job on her than the machete had done. She had run away from a blade only to land on a machete! But it was the few words that her friend had taught her that had saved her and her sister. It was true. Tribes had more to gain by learning from each other than what they had to lose. She determined that she must look for her friend and find out how she had fared when she got out of hospital.

When she eventually came out of hospital, Selina joined a number of friends to form what came to be known as The Circle. It was a group of young people who had suffered from the violence in one way or another and were willing to sacrifice their time and resources to try and heal their country. Her first task – as a circumcised – she thought bitterly, was to look for her friend. Many girls, Amy among them had not returned to school by the time she was able to go back in May. None of the girls had heard about Amy. She decided she must begin looking for her even if it meant going to Eldoret. She began that August. She went to Eldoret and though it was enshrouded in secrecy, she was able to trace her friend's home. The man she found claimed he was the owner of the home. He had never known such people, not around here. Selina realized

then what kind of danger she was putting herself into. These people had taken over other people's homes and if you tried to make them anxious, they might even kill. She went back to her sister who now permanently lived in Naivasha. She would think of a cleverer way of tackling the issue. Her sister had found a job at a tourist hotel in the town. By December, she still had not heard anything about her. When the results of the exams came out, she had done well enough to join the public university. Meanwhile, she decided to train for a course as she waited to join the university. Since she would eventually join the business line, she enrolled for CPA at a private college in Naivasha town. She implored her sister to get a job for her so she could raise money for her courses. Luckily, her sister found a job as a waiter. It didn't pay very well but for her, it was fantastic to be employed!

Part II - The Prelude

May to December 2007

Second term was quick for me. We opened school on a Monday and I was particularly eager to see the new friends I had made the previous term. As it happened, no form three was eager to get back to school. I got to school at around eleven for all prefects were required to report to school before noon unless it was absolutely impossible. We went ahead to prepare the dorm with the dozen or so girls who had arrived by two-thirty but the majority would not arrive until five. Though we had talked on the phone several times during the holidays, I couldn't wait to see my best friend Selina. She arrived close to six and had the audacity to tell me she had been dilly-dallying in town trying to avoid the school supper as much as possible. We fell all over each other as we embraced. I took her to the prefect's room where Jecinta was overjoyed to see her. The three of us chatted into the evening and by the time anybody thought of the time, it was already past eight o'clock. Nobody usually has the heart for school supper on opening day and although we are forbidden to carry any food to school, a few of the students still sneaked in chapattis. Those that don't, like me, content themselves with a light supper of bread and juice or tea or hog on friends. We made tea and bread in the prefect's room and chatted on. By the time Jecinta and I went to put off the lights in the dorm, we were already feeling drowsy.

The following day, we went about the usual opening routine and the day dragged on. It wasn't until that Thursday that students really felt settled and the school went grudgingly into its normal routine. The revision of the previous term's exam whose reports had been mailed during the holiday was done in the first two days and by Thursday, teachers were eager to get on to new things. I was eager for the following week when I would get a chance to present my science project. I had come up with the idea of perpetual motion which would enhance perpetual energy. The idea was that since energy can be drawn from motion, an enhancement of perpetual motion could create a self renewing form of energy. The only catch during my first term presentation had been how create perpetual motion itself. The teacher had pointed me in several directions then left me to come up with my own solution. I had discounted the motor for the time being for it would itself require another non-renewable energy source. I was trying the idea of suspended weights and was sure I would succeed by the weekend. Selina was eager to see me succeed and was helping all she could.

The waiting over the weekend was made a little easier by the various CU rallies that had been organized for that weekend. The general hum of the preaching and singing was a welcome background to my mind as I worked on my project.

I was sitting in the prefect's room struggling with poetry. I was engaged with Thomas Hardy's, *The Man He Killed* – I admit it was for the assignment for I couldn't make head or tail of it. I could barely follow the narrative itself; a man who apparently went to war and had a rejuvenating feeling? But I couldn't figure out how, again, what he was doing in an inn at the same time. And the rhythm. Why did teachers always insist on questions about a poem's rhythm? Yes, I could figure out rhythm in the swaying from side to side in a choir's stage performance but how do you transfer that into a static poem on a page of a book? Bollocks! I turned to my cup of chocolate for consolation; not much help there. I tried the stick boy I had drawn, put a circle around him and written 'Jay! Jay! Jay!' in every available space within the circle. The boy had the wide mouth I remembered plastered on Jay the last time I had seen him at Langas. I thought the smile widened as I gazed at it. So much for consolation. It wasn't very poetic. Not in the way I wanted anyway. A knock came on the door. I took the drawing and thrust it quickly within the pages of the poetry collection before I shouted 'It's open!'

The door swung and in came Selina in her hockey practice gear. She shut the door leaning her hockey stick against it.

'Hi tiger!' I had become tiger to my clique since my physics project had gone through the provincials. I was eagerly waiting for the national competitions.

'Oh Selina, It's you! You startled me.'

'Startled you? What's up?' she said as she leant forward to pick the collection of poetry I had been using. She looked at the cover, then turned it to read the blurb.

'I guess I was engrossed in poetry,' I said lamely.

'Poetry? Since when did poetry become interesting, nay, engrossing to you?' she could tell I was cajoling with her. I guessed that was why she had 'nay'ed me. Selina knew me like my towel. I

could hardly keep anything from her and she saw through me like glass. I tended to lean heavily on her too. I find it difficult to get intimate with people. But when I do I'm a leech. I considered, already lost in my thoughts.

'Ooooooh I see,' Selina said. That brought me back quick. I reached out quickly and tried to grab the drawing she was holding aloft. She easily pulled it away giggling.

'So we are keeping secrets? You should have warned me to withdraw mine,' she laughed out loud.

I brushed my hands up my face and over my hair as I yawned.

'He's just a guy I met.'

'Just a guy?'

'Yeah, you know I'm straight – at least with you,' I added looking at her with mock malice.

'Mmmmh, I see. Where does that exactly leave us,' she said sitting on the desk on which I had been writing and crossing her hands over her breasts the way our class teacher did.

'Look Selina, you know you are my best friend. I wouldn't keep anything from you,' I said feeling a little hollow.

'This seems to say a lot different,' she screwed her face like a mother regarding a love letter she had found in the closet of her twelve year-old.

'Look, it's just a guy I met over the holiday. He promised to write and you can be sure I'll discuss every bit with you,' I said my eyes pleading.

'Don't worry girl. I'm only trying to help. This is new direction with you and I'm so happy for you,' she said.

'I know. I trust you that much,' I told her.

'So how's the poetry? I'm waiting for you to finish so you can guide me,' she knit her brows as she regarded the blurb of the poetry collection.

‘Bad idea. I’m in worse trouble than you are.’

‘I don’t think so. Of late you seem to be moving forward with it faster than I can catch up. Is there something I should know?’

‘I think that guy is partly responsible. He’s been showing me bits of this and bits of that in poetry over the holiday,’ I said as my mind flashed back to the sessions at the Catholic church at Langas.

‘The plot thickens,’ Selina said knitting her brows again, leaning forward and regarding her palm the way Sherlock Holmes would as he tried to explain the characteristics of an exhibit he had found to Watson.

‘Look Selina, I tell you that is just it. He’s just a guy I met. I admit I’m hopelessly attracted to him but he’s way out of my league. I can’t compete with any of the girls I’m sure a guy like him is sure to have met,’ I said very much aware that I sounded like a child explaining a wishful dream.

‘Okay, okay, I drop it. But promise to keep me posted. I’m here for you, you know.’

‘I know Selina. It’s just that...you seem to take everything in your stride so cool while I’m a hopeless stick in the mud,’ I said.

‘That science project was no stick in the mud girl. You are currently the talk of the school. You are a lot more than Queen Zinga you know,’ she said reaching out and patting my arm.

‘I don’t know Selina. I mean look at me. I’m just a plain girl. I have no butt like you, the breast fairy has given me a wide berth. I can never hope for anything close to your bazongas. Where does that leave me?’ I was worried I was beginning to sound like a confessing suicide victim but I couldn’t help it. sometimes I’m such a sissy!

‘Amy, you have a great body. You know how many girls would give their right arms to trade places with you?’ she comforted. I was beginning to feel guilty. As much as Selina was endowed with brains, figure and all, I had no right to heap all my troubles on her.

‘I’m sorry Selina. I know I had no right to take advantage of you like that. Please forget my little act.’

‘On the contrary, don’t mention it. I’m here for you if you want anything. You are the best thing that has happened to me in very very long time,’ she leant forward and embraced me. We hugged and kept it there for a long minute swaying from side to side, our eyes closed, our chins digging into each other’s shoulders. ‘Tell me his name, at least,’ Selina said into my shoulder.

‘C’mon, I thought you’d dropped it,’ I paused. ‘His name is Jay...I mean Jason,’ I sighed into her shoulder in turn.

‘Jay, Jay Jay...Jason. What a name! And you are supposed to be the silver fleece?’

‘Yeah?’ I asked her. I had no inkling of what she meant. This girl was heaven, I thought. She was intelligent, always ahead of the rest of us in a number of ways. And she was the fastest learner I had ever encountered. Except for B, of course. Selina felt like a part of B, a part of mum, a part of Auntie Margaret and a part of... Jay all combined. I thanked the heavens I was lucky to know her.

‘I came to ask you to help me with something,’ Selina was saying.

I released her and looked at her at arm’s length.

‘What? Spill it.’ I had never felt that guilty. The girl had come for my help and there I was pouring all my life troubles on her poor soul. ‘Is it something with you?’

‘No no.’ I felt relieved. ‘It’s Tabitha. I think there is something deeply troubling her.’

‘Her dietary habits again?’ I queried.

‘No. I think it is a lot deeper than that. I found her crying at the hockey pitch just now,’ she said.

‘You talked to her?’

‘I couldn’t bring myself to. You know we aren’t close.’

‘She isn’t close to anyone. If you can’t get it out of her, no one will.’

‘I just wish Jecinta was around. She has a way with such business.’

We immediately left for the hockey pitch. Selina led me to the hidden slope beyond the pitch where Polly Famous and her stoning gang had used to hang out last term until someone – we all thought it was Terry – informed on them. As much as we all knew it had been the right thing to do, it seemed wrong somehow. You just didn’t walk into Ms. Konga’s office and spill the beans on any student. But several guys thought Terry had been trying to get her own back on one of the girls in Polly’s gang after a word exchange that had occurred in 3S. That was why she had been suspected. I felt it was paradoxical for a prefect to think this way. Like dad always said, it seemed there wasn’t an absolutely right way to anything. You just had to use your head and hope for the best.

We found Tabitha sitting next to the path between the fence and the pitch. Her hands on which her head was propped up, were on her knees. She was looking away and did not hear us as we approached although our shoes were making enough noise to wake the dead on the gravel that dressed the pitch. She jumped when Selina said hi.

‘Oh, it’s you,’ she said simply. Her red eyes had a distant look and there were slight smudges on her cheeks. ‘Go away. I don’t want to talk to anyone,’ she looked away.

We stood behind her. Selina hesitated for a moment then motioned me with her head. We walked down the incline to where she was sitting and sat on either side of her, Selina on her left, me on her right. No one spoke. We must have spent up to three minutes in silence before she leaned her big form heavily on my left shoulder and broke down. I held her to me and rocked her gently. I was completely bowled over. I didn’t know what she had seen in me to give me such trust. I suspected she had broken one of the school rules. I was not sure how I would handle it. Selina seemed to sense my indecision. She moved closer to her and held her on the other side. She cried for a good five minutes as Selina and I rocked her slowly and waited. Finally, she sat up and wiped her eyes slowly with embarrassment. No one spoke. Then an idea occurred to me. She had chosen me and I could put myself together to do a good turn however much was required of me. It was a chance to wash off some of the guilt that had been eating me about Selina, B, Jay, everyone.

‘Let’s go try some cold power,’ I suggested when I judged her eyes were dry enough. There was no power in the dorm – unlike the other students, prefects were allowed to keep a water heater as long as they used the sockets in the prefect’s room and none other – and so we had no choice but to try cold. ‘Cold Power’ was a term used for cold cocoa or chocolate which the students who missed hot water at the DH after supper had to satisfy themselves with. We rose and walked casually to the dorm so it wouldn’t look to anyone like there was any problem with Tabitha. We were lucky to find there was power in the dorm. Selina busied herself with heating water and making hot chocolate. I opened my drawer and fetched the remnants of sliced bread from the night before. We were soon engaged. Afterwards, we talked of a number of things for quite some time avoiding the topic that had led us to the dorm. Eventually, Tabitha said she wanted to talk to me alone. Selina left. I trusted her not to feel betrayed by Tabitha’s choice. But Selina is the kind of girl to whom such strength comes naturally.

‘I don’t know how to say this,’ Tabitha started. I waited. ‘I’ve been so dreadfully lonely for several months that I was beginning to entertain some crazy thoughts. I don’t know what would have happened if you hadn’t come along,’ she said looking at the floor. She dipped her right hand into the pocket of her skirt and withdrew a small plastic container which she handed to me. It contained a dozen or so pink tablets. They were tiny, round and smooth and looked like something you’d take an hour before lunch to up your appetite.

‘Five of those are enough to turn you out cold,’ Tabitha said matter-of-factly. ‘I intended to have them for lunch. All of them.’ There was little emotion behind that voice. My stomach turned cold. Suicide? It had never occurred to me that Tabitha was capable of that. Though she had her own problems with weight and diet and all, I had always thought of her as one who could very well hold her own if it came to that. I was taken aback. Why would a girl like Tabitha want to commit suicide? She was resplendently blest with all what we girls craved for. Her father was extremely rich – we had since learnt that her father was a big man high up in government. Nobody knew exactly where or how high. Some suggested he was an MP, some a minister, others some big shot who headed some public corporation. Bits and bits of news about her dropped from the Rift Valley crowd once in a while but they were never conclusive. In school, she was the envy of all the girls especially those in our dorm. Everything about her from her shoes to the handkerchief was designer. Even her school uniform looked custom made. Nearly

all the other girls had to make do with Deluxe School Uniforms in town or the local market. This was no secret. She was therefore the object of envy from many girls. Her dietary manners were additional venom for her detractors and so was her closeness to the school principal. The only problem was her eating disorder – she ate like one possessed. This became the object of silent attack and behind-the-back derision from other girls. Many had openly verbalized it. Now they only contented themselves with talking behind her back. Among the girls her plump form was the standard allusion of what sugar could do to a stupid, greedy girl.

‘I’m sorry, everyone thinks you are a very lucky girl. They would give their right hands to trade places with you.’ I felt quite uncreative.

‘I have so many problems I don’t know what to do,’ she said.

‘C’mon Tabby, everyone has her load of problems. The best we can do is to share them,’ I saw her jump a little when I called her Tabby.

‘You’re wrong Armelia. I mean look at me. I am a big mess. I know I am a giant and it makes me look horrible but I still go on and on. I can stop myself.’

‘I can’t believe you are so irked by your body. You know what? We actually make a pair,’ I said looking out the window. ‘Only this holiday I had an argument with my sister about how I look,’ I said when she didn’t respond.

‘You are joking right?’ her eyes narrowed.

‘No I’m not. I mean, I would love to have hips and kissable lips and a big butt like all other beautiful girls. Don’t pretend you haven’t noticed that!’ I couldn’t face her.

‘But Amy you are a beautiful girl. Don’t just say that to placate me,’ she said looking suspicious.

‘You know it’s funny. I have the most beautiful sister and I admire her like a queen. Of course I often don’t tell her. She has a great body which I envy but what I like most about her is the fact that, unlike me, she doesn’t require anybody’s approval of what she does. That is exactly what I see in you.’

‘Who, me?’ she looked astounded.

‘Yeah. I mean, look at you. All the other girls envy you and talk behind your back and all. But you don’t give a damn. You live your life and I think they hate your guts. If I was in your place I’d probably slit my throat,’ I said. She didn’t talk. I waited.

‘Good Lord. I’ve never looked at it that way,’ she paused. ‘All this time I’ve been thinking you girls avoid me. And I’ve been asking myself what the hell did I do to deserve this?’

‘Now you know better,’ I said smiling at her.

‘I can’t believe I’ve been so stupid,’ she was smiling too. I saw there a glint I had never seen in her. I could see too that she had a lot more to say but I let her say all she felt free to say for now. It was as good a beginning as any.

‘And Selina. I think you should have let her in on this. She is the most stable girl I have ever met. She is one of the best gifts that God can ever give anyone.’

‘I like her too. I only thought she is too strong a girl to hear my stupid weaknesses,’ her face had changed a lot. And she didn’t look all that fat after all. It was probably her morose nature that made her appear so.

‘Let me do this. Let me get her. Try to relax in her presence. I’m sure you will soon get to like her,’ I said. I rose when she nodded and went out. Selina was reluctant at first. She thought she had been singled out but she relaxed, then laughed out loud when I told her what Tabitha’s fears had been. We went back to the prefect’s cube and Selina busied herself making more hot chocolate. Tabby, she became Tabby after that, talked a lot with our encouragement. We learnt that she was from the rift valley – Eldoret in fact – and that her father was a minister. We gaped at her.

‘Where in Eldoret do you live?’ I prompted her.

‘In the suburbs. I’ve lived there all my life,’ she said enthusiastically.

‘You can say that again,’ I countered. ‘I’ve lived in Langas all *my* life!’

‘Langas? You must be joking!’

‘No, I’m not. My father has been working at Eldoret Polytechnic since I can remember,’ I said.

‘Holy Mary! And all this time you didn’t tell me?’

‘You didn’t ask,’ Selina answered on my behalf.

‘God forgive human folly. I bet Cain killed his brother because he didn’t know him!’ We all laughed. It was unbelievable to see Tabby making jokes and laughing with us. Humpty Dumpty! Konga Junior! It was simply unbelievable. She told us about her family in Eldoret. It didn’t seem a happy one but she didn’t elaborate. She had a single brother and her mum was a lecturer. We got so engrossed that by the time Selina peeped out of the window, it was dusk. We had to run to the DH lest we missed supper.

It was a week of miracles. Three days later, Selina herself opened up. I had noticed that she wasn’t exactly herself since the beginning of the term but I had been too engrossed with the science project to probe it up. She seemed to know it would affect me if I knew for she continued to wear a straight face every time I looked at her. Her eyes somehow seemed far away. She wasn’t as eager with hockey as she had been in first term. Her chess which had improved remarkably by the end of the first term had suddenly slackened again when we opened. I had put it down to her respect for what I was engaged in so that when she came out with it, it was a real surprise. We had been trying to teach Tabby chess in the prefect’s cabin but Selina kept making mistakes. I kept glancing at her to see what the matter was. I knew that if something was troubling her, she would eventually come out with it. She was the strongest among the three of us. Nay, she was the iron lady of Nzoia, the next dorm to ours. I had used two en passant moves against her, a move she had mastered well and was thinking what I could do to bring her attention back to the game when she threw the rook she was about to play on the board rearranging the other pieces. Tabby and I looked up.

‘I don’t feel like this game,’ she said out of nowhere.

‘What’s up,’ I probed gently. She crossed her arms across her breasts and shut her eyes pursing her lips. ‘Do you guys believe in circumcision?’ she asked out of the blue.

‘Circumcision? Men or women?’ Tabby asked her jokingly.

‘You mean you are not circumcised?’ I asked her knitting my brows in mock seriousness.

‘I’m not joking Amy.’ Indeed she wasn’t. Her face was set and she avoided our eyes. I knew she was dead serious.

‘Please explain,’ I told her. She kept quiet. I looked straight at her. Tabby who had not realized the seriousness of the matter was still doodling with the pawns of the disarranged game but the ensuing silence made her look up as she dropped the piece she had.

‘I’m about to run away from home,’ Selina said with finality.

‘What?’ Tabby asked. I could only gaze at Selina in disbelief. She gave what she was about to say a moment’s thought.

‘You see, I’m a Kisii girl. Where I come from, it is compulsory to get circumcised. Of course they do not organize communal activities like some communities because many are afraid of the law. But circumcision goes on all the same,’ her thoughts were far away.

‘Oh my God!’ Tabby said. ‘In this age and time?’

‘You are serious Selina, aren’t you?’ I said more to myself than to her.

‘You see, over there it is about the community, not about me. The clansmen and the village will feel betrayed if I don’t go through with it. It is about upholding family honour,’ she said.

‘But they can’t compel you, can they? Nobody would dare do that. It would attract a jail sentence,’ Tabby said.

‘There are chiefs there, aren’t there.’ I said. It wasn’t a question.

‘It doesn’t work like that guys. This is about family honour. They trust you and honour you. It is your duty to reciprocate by doing what is required of you,’ she was forthright.

‘You are not saying you go along with it are you? The things I hear they do to people! They open you up like you are some sort of pumpkin!’ Tabby said with disgust.

‘I hate it too. That’s why I want to run,’ Selina said simply.

‘Is that what has been eating you up since the beginning of the term?’ I asked her guiltily.

‘I guess so. Don’t let it trouble you.’

‘If it troubles Selina, then it is enough to trouble the whole school,’ Tabby said.

‘You have a plan? We’ll back you all the way. Even if we have to make the whole school go to Kisii.’

‘You won’t have to. I intend to run to my sister’s beginning this August. She lives in Nakuru,’ she said with finality. I could see her mind was firmly made but it was apparent that this had been troubling her for some time. We were all silent thinking.

‘Is your family aware you are running?’ Tabby asked her.

‘No. Telling anyone at home would only make things worse. I telephoned my sister and told her I want to spend time with her in August. I will simply go there. She will have to do the rest.’ I could see that Selina was determined. When Selina made up her mind, nothing would change it. She had the resolve of the whole of 3S put together and we knew it. I decided I would support her in all the ways I could. I was sure Tabby would go along with me.

‘Is your sister married?’ Tabby asked thinking a whole second ahead of me.

‘That’s another catch. She is married to a Luo from Oyugis – that’s a small town near Kisii. His name is Daniel Owiti,’ she said as Tabby and I looked at her bewildered. ‘I’ve never been close to her husband. I’ve never even visited them though they have come home severally. My sister and I are very close but I have no idea where or how they live. I only know it is in the suburbs of Nakuru. Her husband works in the industrial area,’ Selina said evenly.

I pitied her. In the close to eight months I had known her, I would never have guessed she was in such trouble. She was one of the happiest girls I knew, the most hardworking both in class and in the fields. I mean, she had just led the hockey team to capture the provincial title. It felt immoral for anyone to try to undress her and do things. Yes. I would help her all the way. Selina and I agreed to go to Nakuru together at the end of the term.

They got to Nakuru at four. Her sister was waiting at the bus stop and was very happy to see them especially her new friend. She hugged them tightly as her bright white floral dress flew in the wind.

‘Oh, how I have missed you,’ Selina said as she took her turn to hug her sister.

‘I have missed you more I tell you,’ her sister said. Selina turned to Amy.

‘Amy, meet Emily. She is the eldest in our family.’ Amy shook her sister’s hand again. ‘Amy is my best friend in school and the best thing that has happened to me this year. It is a pity somebody had to force us to get to know one another,’ she said then continued to explain to her sister how their class teacher had come up with a scheme of mixing them like maize and beans without their will. ‘She seems to know that the best friends are those that meet by accident.’

‘And so I hear of marriage,’ Emily agreed. ‘The best are made by those who meet naturally. Not those that are designed by people.’

Amy envied Selina. She was so lucky to have an elder sister to look up to. She wondered whether her sister B thought that way about her. Emily then led them to a restaurant where she told them to order what they felt like. Amy was mesmerized at her friend’s aunt. She looked young enough to be under twenty. She was a big dark woman with the whitest eyes Amy had yet seen. And the best smile. Her cheeks dimpled like a child’s every time she broke into a smile, which was quite often. The two girls enjoyed fish and chips as they talked ceaselessly about school. When they were through, she bought them sodas in plastic bottles and hurried them on. She wanted to catch her daughter as she got home at five.

‘You have a daughter?’ Amy asked as she pointed at Selina. ‘She didn’t tell me.’

‘Oh sorry,’ Selina answered on her sister’s behalf. ‘I was so engrossed with other things it didn’t occur to me to mention it. I have a beautiful niece. Wait till you see her,’ she said laughing happily. Amy could tell Selina blended beautifully with her sister. While she must have been at least twenty five, they talked and laughed as if they were twins. It made her feel she was probably a bit uppity towards B. Emily led them to the bus stop. They boarded a matatu for Kwa-Rhoda, a suburb to the west of the town. Selina looked out at the broad avenue whose one way roads were the most beautiful she had yet to see in a Kenyan town. The clean, tidy tree-lined

street would put other Kenyan towns to shame – especially Kisii which she considered her home town. The matatu headed due west for about a kilometer where it slowed at around about.

‘I come this way every time I’m going home,’ Amy said noticing that Selina was mesmerized.

‘It is such a clean orderly town,’ Selina responded. ‘I’d love to live here.’

‘Many people feel that way,’ her sister said. ‘It is also the most cosmopolitan town in this country.’

‘And probably the oldest after Mombasa,’ Amy said. ‘Our history teacher says that this was the first town to be really settled by the colonialists. At the time, Nairobi was just a railway depot.’

‘They still own big tracks of land around here, so I’ve heard. I have seen large estates and grazing land around myself,’ Emily said. ‘Unless, of course, they are fronting for someone else.’ Selina nodded. She knew from her history that the former president Moi was the largest land owner in the rift valley by 1970. She remembered reading that in a book called *The Myth of the Mau Mau*. She had read there too how the colonialists had added a lot of unrealistic accounts about the Mau Mau to demonize it in the eyes of Europe. The image of the Mau Mau in Europe had become one big myth that worked for the colonialists interests. Their teacher had explained how some history scholars had taken advantage of the title of that book to create their own myth in the 80s; the myth that Mau Mau was itself a myth that never existed or one that was blown out of proportion. He had sent them to read a number of respected history professors but with an objective mind.

‘Selina, the road to the right goes to the showground. Straight on leads home and Uganda beyond,’ Amy said.

The matatu turned right, dropped some passengers opposite Manyatta Hotel - funny name, Selina thought - then continued to the General Kariba street and turned right again. After that the dropping and picking of passengers became more frequent. When it got near Baringo street, her aunt told the conductor they would alight at the next stage. The matatu stopped at Yala road and they got out.

‘Over there is Ndarugo River,’ her sister said pointing at the small valley ahead. ‘Past the river the road rises to Kaptembwa then goes on to Njoro. If you follow it further to your left, it can take you to Narok and further on to Kisii.’

They went down Yala road for about a hundred metres then came to a wrought iron gate. It was made big enough for a lorry to go through but there was another smaller gate within it where one had to stoop to get through. Her sister leaned forward, thrust her hand through a hole in the gate and shot back a bolt, opened the small gate and led the way. When she got in, Selina saw a large compound on which stood a one story building with about a dozen doors, that is, the ones she could see. Her sister led the way to the third.

‘Thank God Atieno isn’t here yet,’ her sister was saying as she fumbled in her bag for the key. ‘I would have found her crying if she got here and found the house locked’.

‘Don’t tell me she goes to school on her own,’ Selina said her eyes widening.

‘Of course not. Her father wouldn’t let her. The school bus brings her right here to the gate,’ her sister replied.

‘She’s only three,’ Selina turned to inform Amy as her sister fumbled with the large Viro padlock then opened the door. It opened onto a small modest sitting room. The larger of its space was taken up by a three-piece velvet-red leather sofa set. In the centre was a glass top coffee table with a heap of Standard newspapers underneath. Against the wall left was a sideboard on which was perched a large flat-screen Sony TV and a corresponding hi-fi. Through the clear glass in front of the sideboard Selina could make out clean utensils in various colours and sizes. Next to it was a blue door that led, Selina guessed, to the family bedroom.

‘Welcome to our humble cave,’ her sister said. The girls laughed at the allusion. The room wasn’t clammy like a cave but the furniture left little room. The seats had taken a lot of space and Selina vaguely wondered how they had been moved in, especially the large three sitter which was propped against the far wall. When they sat down and faced the way they had come, Selina noticed a smaller sideboard behind the door on which was perched a kerosene stove. Apparently, this space served as the family kitchen. Above it was a small window that looked out to the front compound. The place did feel a lot more comfortable than the mud and wattle house she had

known all her life. Her sister busied herself making tea as the two girls leafed through the family album. There were many pictures of her sister and her husband, a tall dark guy with very white teeth, Amy noticed. Apparently, they liked scenic pictures with water backgrounds which dominated the album; many at Lake Victoria with bluish water, boats and the inevitable hyacinth in the background, several at Uhuru Park, Nairobi and even one at the coast. Her sister opened the door and went to the inner room. Just then, a car hooted outside the gate. Selina went out to see only to be met by her niece who rushed at her happily. Emily went to the door and said, 'Hey, it's okay, she's her auntie.' The driver of the school van who had stopped at the gate to watch said something, waved and left. The three returned to the house.

Amy liked the small girl immediately. She had a plump innocent face with even more innocent white eyes. She had the face of her mother but the eyes of her father – and his temperament, she'd later see. Soon they were busy with tea and boiled sweet potatoes. Selina's niece who had been quiet at first as she threw furtive glances at the stranger soon got used to Amy and Amy began telling her stories about Eldoret. Emily's husband came home soon after dark. He was happy to see his sister-in-law but seemed a little uncomfortable with her friend. Not that he treated her ill but he did not respond to her as openly as he did to his in-law. He looked a little conscious when he talked to her. In any case, he spent quite some time with the Standard newspaper he'd brought along and with the KTN Prime when the news came on. There wasn't much time to talk for everyone was tired. After a tasty supper of Ugali, mrenda and fish, the girls prepared a make-shift bed behind the three-sitter which they pulled towards the middle of the sitting room as the hosts went to bed. They continued to whisper even after the light went out and it was slightly after midnight when they finally slept.

The following day, they woke up early. Though they might have wanted to sleep a little longer, the sleeping arrangements did not allow. In any case, Selina's sister's husband had woken early to go to work while her niece had to be prepared for school. Their school would close that Friday. The girls had to wait for Emily to collect her daughter from school at eleven so the three could escort Amy to the bus station. Both Selina and her niece who was beginning to get to like her second auntie were sad to see Amy leave. On the other hand, Amy felt Selina was in good hands. They promised to call each other and soon, Amy was on Eldoret Express on her way home.

Selina slowly became acquainted with Nakuru town. The first thing her sister showed her was the public library in which she would spend many hours of her short holiday. Her sister called Kisii and informed her mother that Selina would spend the holiday with her. Her mother agreed it was for the best. She had been opposed to the rite from the very beginning but their father had insisted on respect and family honour, she said. Emily shivered as she remembered the sharp razor. Her mother said she would relay the news. There wasn't much her father could do in the circumstances. And besides, her mother said, she had felt that he himself had not been very keen on the idea. It was the pressure from age-mates and the older generation in the village. Selina breathed a sigh of relief.

She also got to slowly understand her brother-in-law. He was the political kind, agitated by what he said was government nepotism. He looked down on everything the government did and always found a way to argue it in the negative. He loved KTN and The Standard whose views he agreed with and scorned other papers and news channels. Selina agreed with none. But then, she thought, her political ideas needed a lot of honing! She had to remember, she mused, her history teacher's advice. Read all the papers you can find. Between them you will be able to sift the truth from the lies, the sense from the nonsense. She also discovered the wealth that was the local libraries which she visited with the avidness of a tourist, reading like a young philosopher who had just discovered Nietzsche. She found her new environment invigorating and took the time to learn about it as quickly as she could – before it turned ordinary and uninteresting.

The first Thursday of the holiday, she had an encounter with her sister's landlady. They were busy having their supper when a knock sounded on the door. Her sister opened it. Somebody greeted her and without wasting time said she wanted to see her husband. Her brother-in-law had grown jittery on hearing the voice outside. He rose all the same and went outside.

'I've come for my money!' the lady didn't waste time. It was apparently the land lady.

'Mama Wanjiku, you know I haven't received my money yet. I told you there was a technical problem at my place of work and I'm waiting to have it sorted out.'

‘I don’t want to know about your work problems. It is two years since you paid your rent. Where do you imagine I get money to pay for your water? And all the other charges at the municipal council?’

‘Please be patient. I will pay all your money.’

‘And what are those rumours I hear you are spreading here? I hear you are telling people this building will be yours after the election, is it true?’

‘Mama Wanjiku, those are people’s lies. You know how these Luhya and Kamba like spreading malicious gossip.’

‘Don’t make a fool of me. I allowed you to bring those three other tenants. Now they too claim they have problems with salaries at their place of work. They won’t pay. And I have reliable information that you’ve told them that from January you will reduce the rent for them, and that they should pay the rent to you? You think I’m a fool? You are telling them even in Mathare and Kariobangi people have taken over other people’s houses and nothing has been done?’

‘It is just a small misunderstanding.’

‘What do you know about sand and ballast to stand there and talk of misunderstanding? You think I eat and pay my children’s fees with misunderstandings? I give you up to the end of this month. After that I will have the chief throw you out!’

‘I’ll pay, I’ll Pay.’

‘And from January I don’t want to see you in my house, you hear? This is neither Mathare nor Kariobangi. This is Shaabab. Naguku ni kwa Wangari! *And this property is Wangari’s!*’

She did not wait for a reply. When he came back to the house, he didn’t look an inch intimidated. Selina was shaken. She was not even through with her celebration. Where would she turn if they were evicted? Her sister looked flustered but not unduly worried. It looked as if she was used to these threats. Was this how she’d been living all along? And she told no one about it?

The following day, she learnt that the problem was wide spread. That was why her brother-in-law hadn’t looked worried. It seemed there were many other people who hadn’t paid rent and

were not planning to. Indeed, the rumours that the Kikuyu property had been divided among tenants from the other tribes became more pronounced as the days went by. It looked like the law had completely broken down. These things were however only talked about in whispers. Selina fervently hoped that God would come to her rescue. She turned her attention to her studies. She took long walks to the library and got to learn about the town; the open air market, the shopping districts, the schools and the various colleges. She got to know her sister even better.

By three that afternoon, I was home. Grandpa saw me before I saw him.

‘Oooh my little wife, how have you been?’ grandpa said happily as he pumped my hand. I am named after my paternal grandmother, that is his wife, and grandpa liked to tease me. I noticed that his face was more leathery than I remembered, his head greyer. I could only giggle excitedly as I shook his hand then that of Martha. I knew Martha could not wait to tease me.

‘Look how you’ve grown. You are already a young woman,’ grandpa said.

‘You’re only teasing me grandfather. When did you arrive?’

‘Only today. And yet they haven’t fed me. They say I have to wait for my wife,’ he chuckled.

‘Now you have no choice because she is here,’ Martha said enjoying herself. ‘It is true that he hasn’t eaten much. He said he will only have his appetite back when he sees you. Part of his lunch is still in the house. Now he will have to eat.’

‘Oh, but I have eaten,’ grandfather said jumping on the defensive. ‘She’s been feeding me like she was fattening a *Ngoima* for December. But tell me about school,’ he said changing the topic for he knew what was coming.

‘School is quite okay,’ I said. ‘How is grandmother back at home?’

‘She is coping. Just getting old,’ he said. Often, his answers needed encrypting. They were usually coded.

‘Good to hear that. It is long since I saw her.’

‘Yeah. She says you and Mary have forgotten her. And she’s fattening a cockerel. She told me to tell you it is all there waiting.’

‘Is it? Martha, can we go on ahead with grandfather so that I can make him some tea?’

‘Actually, we can all leave together. I’m through with the calf. It will have to wait for its milk now,’ Martha said as she tied the tether to a pole in the fence and joined us. We talked on as we went to the house where we found mum and B had already arrived. B was busy inspecting my school bag so I had no chance to give her a surprise. She brought out her hand clutching the small packet Selina and I had bought her in Nakuru, then returned it on seeing grandpa. She came forward and greeted him shyly. Grandpa was full of praises for her as usual including how tall she was. That, I thought, was no exaggeration. Even to me it looked like she was on high heels. The greetings went round. Mum’s look tended to linger on grandpa long after the preliminaries. She herded us into the house and she and B lounged with grandpa in the sitting room as Martha and I went ahead to make tea. Martha stood on her toes to reach into the cupboard above the window, withdrew a hundred shilling note and sent me for bread as she finished with the tea. I found the family waiting with the tea when I returned from Langat’s kiosk down the road. Dusk found us still chatting and it was the groaning of Black Bess that eventually warned mum and Martha that it was getting late. I switched on the telly as they withdrew into the kitchen. Dad soon came in already folding up the sleeves of his shirt. Today he was in a white shirt and a pink tie. He seemed pleasantly surprised to find two guests and soon, he and grandpa withdrew into politics as they commented on one thing after another as the news were read. B and I went to our room.

B had tidied the room including my usually chaotic corner. The room had been washed spotless earlier in the day and there was a faint Warwick smell in the air. I thanked her copiously. B was really growing up, it occurred to me. Normally, her cleanliness went as far as her clothes. She did not usually do much about the room itself. We talked about this and that till around eight-thirty when we were called in for supper; rice, mince mutton and vegetables. I noticed that mum kept looking at grandpa while he himself kept throwing furtive glances at dad who was dividing his attention between his supper and nine o’clock news. Mum suddenly turned to grandpa.

‘Baba, *Dad*, you have something on your mind?’

'No, why?' he paused with his spoon held mid air and looked at her.

'There's something on your mind. C'mon, come out with it,' mum did not mince her words. She was a favourite of grandpa and usually saw through him better than anyone else.

'I guess I might as well do. I didn't want to talk with the children here. I don't want to alarm anybody,' he put his fork on his plate spooned some rice and ate slowly before turning to dad.

'Njenga, did you think about that issue I called you about?'

Dad did not pause in his eating.

'Yes. I don't think anything is going to happen here. Besides, we can't leave our homes. I've been saving all my life for this and I simply can't walk away from it,' he did not elaborate. I felt everybody relax somewhat. Grandpa was usually apprehensive about our living in Eldoret and had voiced his concerns severally. He probably had cause to. We had watched people move away from the town since '92, including my two best friends at Mulla's Bakery who had moved to Naivasha while we stayed put. Grandpa often made it look like we were sitting ducks. Dad tended to think he was over-anxious. And so did we. Probably not as much as dad did, but no one was unduly disturbed.

'You need to seriously think about it. Look how people have been killed or evicted in Kuresoi and Molo already. Nakuru is already full of people who have run away from those areas. And rumours are rife that there is a major training going on in the forests, in Ndoinet and Mau. I'm beginning to think that this is a lot more than just the election.' 'Look dad,' my father was saying, 'What you are saying is absurd. This is a Kikuyu government. We – you – are waiting for it to give you justice for '92. Karinjini citingitwenyenya! *The Kalenjin cannot move us!*'

'I like your confidence my son but I do not share it. This is not a Kikuyu war. It has never been. It is one between the rich and the poor. We went to the forest and the sons of the rich went behind us and took the spoils of Uhuru. They sacrificed us to the Kalenjin in the rift valley. At independence they took everything. And their sons have inherited that booty in successive years. It is not a curse but if you people don't think and take action now, these your children and their children will follow the same path.'

In the ensuing silence, I could sense dad's dilemma. Did one stay and teach his family the value of courage and the need to defend one's property or did one risk it and put the family in danger? For how long would they run? He himself had lost a complete school from standard one to form four which he and three of his brothers had built in Burnt Forest. The school was still running with new owners who did not know the cost of a nine-foot building stone. He still saw it and was forced to swallow his pride every time he passed by on his way to Nairobi. No, he could not let that happen again.

'Dad, I think this time round we are going to stick it out.'

'Do not forget, son, that this time round it is even worse. All those people who have stolen public money during Moi's regime are desperate. They will stop at nothing to ensure those who will protect them get power. I fear what such desperation might drive them to,' his eyes brooded.

'And something else, these people you call neighbours are quite pretentious. At Deffo, when we ask them why they killed the Kikuyu in '92 and '97, they always blame the devil. Ni shetani alituingililia! It is the devil who got into us! For how long is the devil going to partner with them to create Kikuyu orphans? Answer me that.'

As dad kept quiet, lost for words, I looked at B. She too had that faraway look that said she was worried. I winked at her and motioned her out. We rose and went to the kitchen, took some juice, then went to our room.

'I don't like such talk at all,' B said. 'As much as it might be the truth, it is making me very nervous.'

In a number of ways, she was still a child. She was still my little sister.

'I know B, that's why I drew you away. I could see the signs begin to register on your face.'

'I'm sorry but I can't help it. I feel what grandpa is saying is very true. And very serious. But again I feel dad has little choice.' She put on some music, New Edition's *With You All The Way*. The soothing tone of the young soloist persuaded us to think of other things and soon the incident was forgotten. We turned to girl talk and B filled me in on the latest trends in Eldoret. She had taken to her piano lessons with vigour – and that guy still asked about me. No, I hadn't met him since we saw him together. Sure we would find out the next time we went to Langas etc

etc. By the time Mum came to our room, the rest of the family was in bed. We assured her we were okay and she reluctantly left. We both went to bed late – it must have been at least midnight. B's breathing soon fell regular and I reached out for an old novel, Gaskell I think, to try to invite sleep. I leafed through the pages then put it aside and picked Philip Gourevitch's account of the Rwanda genocide fearing it might grip me so much I wouldn't sleep.

I was woken up in the dead of the night by B's groaning. I switched on the reading lamp and looked at her silhouetted form across the room. Gourevitch had fallen to the floor next to my bed. Across the room, the bear and the elephant had fallen off B's bed to the floor too and her bed sheets were hanging on the edge of the bed. She moved from side to side in her sleep as she groaned deep in her throat. She seemed to sense something and the movements and groans stopped. I guessed it was her psychic nature at work again.

I got off my bed and walked over to her, picked her dolls and set them on a stool next to the bed. I spread the sheets over her carefully and just as I tucked them around her shoulders, a stray hand moved quickly and caught my wrist and held it tightly. I hesitated as I waited for her to say something then realized she was still deeply asleep. After a minute or so, her hand relaxed. I tucked her in and went over to my bed and got between the sheets. My bedside clock glowed 3:28. I spent some time brooding before I realized I couldn't go back to sleep. I picked Gourevitch, which I had been reading the night before and turned the pages. I was soon engrossed.

'Hey, don't you ever get bored with so much reading?' I jumped out of my reverie to find B looking at me from under the covers. Her puffy face still looked sleepy but it appeared she had been regarding me for some time. I turned to the window partly to relieve my stiff left leg and partly because dawn was already creeping through the window lighting the upper walls of the room which had been in the shadow of the reading lamp shade.

'Oh hi B, you caught me off guard.'

'What is that so interesting that it is keeping you awake at this hour? It doesn't look exactly like Physics to me,' B said as she moved the covers to reveal her head. Her right hand moved involuntarily to reach for one of her dolls but failing to find them where she expected, she raised her head and looked around.

‘Sorry about your wildlife,’ I said. ‘They strayed off the park as you slept and landed on the floor.’

‘Oh I had a bad dream,’ she said.

‘It’s unlike you to dream. What was it about?’

‘That’s the problem. I can only remember scraps of it. We, you and I, were in Subukia and there were these formless people chasing us with blunt wooden machetes or something like that. At first it was a game the two of us were playing. Then I looked and saw they had joined you to chase after me. And then suddenly you were ahead of me and they were chasing both of us. One of them caught me and I tried to call you but my voice wouldn’t come out,’ she yawned.

‘I can imagine. You woke me up at three-something with your groans. Your army was on the floor and your neck was tightly entangled in one of the sheets. Did you see the devil in your dream?’ I pouted and raised my eyebrows as I lowered my head and looked directly at her; a mother concerned about her three-year-old. B picked one of her dolls and threw it at me as she burst out laughing. But the laughter did not reach her eyes. I realized she was more serious than I had thought.

‘Could it be something at school do you think?’ I leaned closer to her.

‘Probably a flu on its way,’ the sadness left her eyes as she dismissed the issue with a wave of her hand. ‘But I remember the ending. You turned into a dove and flew beyond the clouds and I stretched my right hand to reach you. The more I tried, the shorter my arm grew. Then I tried pulling it to make it longer and I guess the pain woke me up.’ She smiled. Suddenly she was the same old B again; the laughter in the eyes, the puffed face of a plump five-year-old, the concern for her dolls. She now got out of bed and began to gather them. I felt relieved.

‘Amy, could you please do something for me?’ B said suddenly.

‘You only have to ask,’ I said without looking at her.

‘Could you please replace a button for me?’

‘C’mon B, you seriously can’t bother me with buttons.’

'I know I shouldn't. Look I pricked my finger here and even that piano is giving me a trying time.' I turned to see. She was brooding as she massaged the edge of her right index finger with the ball of her left thumb. She wasn't pulling my leg, I decided.

'Okay, which one.'

'It's my pink jacket. It caught on something and the button came off.'

B had a pink jacket that was at least three years old. Aunt Margaret had bought it for her for her ninth birthday. She rarely put it off, nay, not exactly. She would wear it at every opportunity. During that birthday, it had been two or three sizes bigger. Now it was just the right size. It had shiny buttons – the type that has a glassy face within a pink hold and a single eye that forms a loop underneath for the thread. She brought it forth and put it among my other clothes. I picked the pink button from her outstretched hand and put it in my pocket so I wouldn't lose it.

'Leave it on the bed,' I said as I turned back to Gourevitch and dismissed my former fears about B's psychic nature.

Throughout the day however, I couldn't help feeling there was a change in B. She was quieter, more composed and less restless. Her eyes brooded and once in a while I caught a far-away look in them. It was quite a start to a school holiday. I felt guilty as I wished that flu would quickly come and pass and leave me the usual B. Of course I didn't tell her that – and the flu never came.

We settled to the usuals with Martha and I doing the washing that Saturday while B lazed around. She had developed an interest in the new calf, which I thought she regarded as a pet. She fed it its milk and helped Martha chop the Napier into smaller sizes for it. In the afternoon, we went to Langas to wash the church. We were eager, each of us in her own way, although we didn't talk about it. B was eager for her piano lesson which had stopped a month before because of her exams while I secretly entertained the thought of seeing Jay again. He had written twice but I hadn't seen there any hint of what I imagined love to be. It felt like I was just another friend to him. I was determined that I would keep it that way; if that was the way he wanted it. We didn't find him. I felt a little disappointed. I felt like pinching myself at the thought. There was no way of telling whether he would be coming or not, I realized. We set about washing the

church as I tried to forget him. He came at three. He seemed delighted to see me or so I thought. He was soon busy with B and Sue – she was the other girl he was teaching now – and the piano notes resounded in the church as I watched fascinated. After about a half hour, he left them to practice and we had time to talk.

‘So how have things been with you?’ he asked looking me up and down.

‘Cool’ I kept it short.

‘So I can see. You’ve grown big.’

‘C’mon, I’m not a five-year old,’ I felt he was looking for an opening.

‘Really. I’m sure you weren’t this size the last time we met.’

‘That tells me you can’t remember when. Unless you are mistaking me for someone else.’ I didn’t smile although deep in my heart I was teasing him. He took it serious.

‘How can I forget such a face?’ I noted it was the face.

‘You still teaching those kids here?’ I said to change the topic. He took it on cue.

‘Yeah. They assemble here on Monday at nine. How’s your poetry coming on?’

‘It is beginning to look brighter, thanks.’ That was true. I had got the first half mark in poetry since joining secondary school – a twelve. My English teacher had been delighted and my English grade had moved slightly up. I guess poetry affects the rest of the language.

‘What’s giving you trouble this time?’ Thomas Hardy came clearly to mind.

‘Rhythm,’ I did not hesitate.

‘Wait here,’ he said without warning, went over to the piano where he had kept a small satchel, picked it up, said something to the two girls and came over. He took my elbow and led me to the cement seats outside the church. I felt a hundred bolts of lightning at my elbow as he touched it. He chose one bench under a leafy tree and sat down putting the satchel on his lap. I sat too remembering to keep the distance.

‘Rhythm is really easy to determine in poetry,’ he said opening the satchel and removing a legal pad and a pen. He opened to a fresh page. I saw a church choir in my mind’s eye with beautiful girls in some uniform swaying rhythmically.

‘The most basic way to interpret rhythm is to think of stress – no, not nervous tension,’ he said as he looked me in the eye, ‘But the force we put on a word. Like the one you put on some part of the word ‘perfect’ to differentiate between the verb and the noun.’ He said as he drew, not wrote, the two words on the page and put a mark above each. ‘This word divides here,’ he said.

I looked and noticed he had divided the two words with a dot between the letters ‘r’ and ‘f’. He had put the mark above the first part of the first word and another above the second part in the second word.

‘If you stress this part,’ he pointed at the first word, ‘This word is a noun. But if you stress the other, the word is a verb, got it?’ he looked up from the page. I nodded although I wasn’t very sure.

‘Now each part of this word is called a syllable. In poetry, we talk of a stressed syllable for the one on which stress falls and an unstressed one where there is no stress. Whether a word has one syllable or more, you should be able to place the stress on some part of it, any question?’ He sounded like Mr. Maranga talking about Shaka Zulu back at St. Mary’s.

‘How would you stress ‘perfection’?’ I said an idea coming to my mind.

He *drew* the word three times on the page and placed the mark above various syllables and told me to read the word with a deliberate emphasis on the syllable above which the mark was for the three words. The meaning of stress was immediately apparent because the word only sounded English with the stress above the first part of the word. He then went ahead to explain which words in English normally carry stress – what he called basic stress - and which one don’t; verbs, nouns, articles etc. By the time B and Sue emerged from the church, a whole new perception of stress and poetry had formed itself in my foggy brain. We agreed I’d practice at home with poems before we met next, the following Saturday. I felt it was too far away but said nothing. Soon, B and I were on our way home. It was late evening and I was sure Mum was beginning to get worried. I didn’t know where the afternoon had flown to. B skipped happily on behind me

singing snatches of Mariah Carey while I let thoughts of stress in poetry occupy me. B looked at me once in a while like she knew a secret which she was waiting for me to prompt her so she could share. Soon we were home. There was no one at home. I went to the kitchen to begin preparing supper. I busied myself with vegetables as I hummed to myself. B made tea then washed and cut up the chicken. She was quickly learning how to cook. A little later, Mum and Martha came in their hands full of shopping. Mum announced we would have chapatti for supper. I offered to make supper to relieve Martha who was taking exams the following week. Mum offered to make chapattis while I made the rest including soup. She knows my chapattis are lousy. They always turn hard a few minutes after they leave the pan. I've never been able to master the art. Mum said that grandpa had left. I knew B felt bad because she had not been able to bid him goodbye. Making supper kept me away from obvious occupations but I withdrew immediately after supper prompting Dad to ask what was up. I said I had a little job to do.

B didn't waste time. She followed me to our room several minutes later. She found me engrossed in a poetry collection. I had a foolscap beside me on which I had written English words in two columns. Those without stress on the left and those with natural stress to the right with a mark to indicate stress for the more than one-syllable words. I didn't look up as I heard her enter. I avoided her eyes as I felt them search the nape of my neck. She ruffled things about before sitting on her bed and keeping quiet. After a long contained silence, she decided that I wasn't coming out with it. She started humming 'Georgie Podgie' to herself. I kept mum. She started singing out loud.

Georgie Podgie pudding and pie

Kissed the girls and made them cry

When the boys came out to play

Georgie Podgie ran away

I looked stolidly into my poetry collection tracing Jay's handwriting on the page with the edge of the nail of my small finger. B started again.

Georgie podgie pu...

‘Stop it B,’ I whirled around. That caught her by surprise and for a moment she couldn’t think quickly enough of what to do. Then she slithered silently across the room and stood beside me. I didn’t look up for I knew I couldn’t trust myself with what I was sure to see; a pout, hands across her breast, head cocked doctor style. After a moment she said;

‘Mmmmmh! I know just what you need. A spoonful of honey and you’ll be alright.’ She recrossed the room went through the motions of opening a doctor’s cupboard, removing something, shaking it and regarding it against the light, opening the cap and squirting a little into the imagined spoon. She crossed over to me again.

‘Open your mouth quick!’ That got me. I jumped up and hugged her tightly as we burst into laughter.

‘Ooh B, I’m so unsure of myself.’

‘It’s ok honey. He must be big news to make you forget my favourite jacket and its button for a whole holiday,’ She parted my back lovingly like some protective mum. I felt the guilt rising up again.

‘I’m sorry B. I know that was unfair to you.’

‘It is okay. Tell me what I can do.’

‘Nothing. At least for now.’

‘You are in love right?’

‘Stop it B. You are a child.’

‘No I’m not. I’m thirteen going on fourteen. And I’m the closest friend you have here.’

I kept quiet. We did not release each other.

‘You love him?’ she said out of the blue.

‘I don’t know B. and I’m hesitant to involve you. You are my kid sister you know.’

‘I don’t mind. And I won’t tell,’ she smiled mischievously. ‘Only promise you will share it if it gets too heavy. And that you won’t forget my jacket.’

‘I promise,’ I said, then paused. ‘He gave me some poetry to work before next Saturday.’

‘Good Lord. And there I was thinking you are penning him!’

‘You have a dangerously fertile imagination B,’ I laughed. I did see her concern though. I pulled her to my reading desk and showed her what I had learnt from Jay that day. In a way, it felt like I was confirming to myself that I had understood what he had said. I don’t think I did so badly. I think even B’s naturally inquisitive nature helped me a lot. She asked a number of questions and my attempt, nay struggle, to answer them led me to better understanding. She went and put on some music then came back. She hummed but loudly enough to make the notes of music draw a parallel with the stress in poetry. I was mesmerized. She had looked at what I was doing and made a quick connection in a way I was sure I never would. I was happy and thanked her profusely. I couldn’t imagine she was only thirteen. She wished me the best then went and put on her earphones. I continued with my poetry. At eleven, she announced she was dropping off. I spent another hour with a novel before I finally slept.

The rest of the holiday quickly fizzled away. I met Jay severally and my poetry took a very good turn. I called Selina and gave her the news. She said she couldn’t wait to meet me back in school. I could also hardly wait.

Third term itself was a torrid of activity. The fourth form prefects had relinquished their positions though, as a rule, they were allowed to occupy their offices until they left the school. If a new school captain was elected and not the deputy promoted, the three students would continue to use the prefects’ room until the form four prefect left. If the deputy was promoted, through the ballot of course, and a new deputy chosen, the deputy would continue to use the dorm with the other girls until the retired prefect left. Elections would be held at the end of September and therefore I was the acting dorm captain. I did not want to ascend to the captainship. I hoped a new captain would be chosen and I would defend my deputy captainship. I would also contest the leadership of the science club. As it turned out, things worked my way. Nobody contested the

deputyship when it was apparent I would defend it. Four students offered themselves for captain and to my great happiness, Salma Mohammed got it. Though we were not very close, I respected her for her maturity. I had dreaded that the students might choose somebody we couldn't get along with and Jecinta's good work of the last two years would be put in jeopardy. Salma was the best thing that could happen. She was forthright and I was sure she could do a lot better than I ever possibly could. I was glad to introduce her to Selina.

'You know Selina, I believe,' I told Salma when Selina looked in.

'Sure we've met around,' she said easily. 'It's a pleasure to finally know you formally.'

'The pleasure is mine. I happen to be in *your* room.'

'Oh don't mention it. All Amy's friends are my friends. You are welcome here all the time. I'm sure you are better acquainted with this room than I am. I'm positive I can rely on you to show me around,' we laughed. I hadn't looked at it from that angle; neither had Selina. She laughed the loudest.

'In here we have a habit of taking a lot of hot chocolate. Selina is the official chef and that is her specialty,' I said.

'No.' Selina said. 'It's actually the specialty of the former head of this office,' she laughed. Everybody knew that Jecinta and Selina were close friends. Just then, Jecinta entered. She had a number of volumes in her hands and it was clear she had been in the library. Her eyes were visibly harassed.

'Hi all,' she said setting her load on the tiny table. 'Hey Salma, how are you coping?'

'I'm learning. We've agreed with Amy here that I'll play second fiddle until I fully fit in your shoes. It's tough though.'

'You are in good hands believe me,' she patted me on the back. 'She's the best deputy anybody could ask for.' I felt honoured, nay, even pampered. At the same time, I felt that anything I said would put either Jecinta or Salma in a difficult position. I kept quiet.

‘And the best friend too,’ Selina came to my rescue. ‘I believe we should vote her for student counselor.’

‘C’mon Selina, stop putting on airs. You know very well I’m the tendril and you are my support,’ I said.

‘And for me, she’s the birch and I’m the mistletoe,’ Jecinta said sitting on the lower bed of the double-decker. There were only three chairs and they were occupied.

‘Please explain that professor,’ Selina joked as she took the heater and the jug of water and proceeded to the wall socket. I knew the mistletoe was some kind of plant but like Selina, I couldn’t figure the metaphor.

‘I simply mean that I am the roof and you are the truss.’ We let that ride.

‘Jecinta, you are becoming cryptic with so much reading,’ Selina said. ‘We can’t cope.’

‘Hey Selina, why don’t you get busy with that chocolate?’ I said to break the ice. ‘At least to formally welcome Salma.’

‘Don’t let them fool you. In here we contribute evenly to buy that chocolate. Now they are very happy because that contribution will be quartered. Unless you take coffee of course,’ Jecinta laughed.

‘And the contents will be similarly quartered,’ Salma laughed. ‘The tin will run down faster.’ She was getting into the mood. Soon we were sitting back with mugs of hot chocolate. So much like her, Jecinta had produced the inevitable slices of bread. Salma was very grateful.

‘This is how you guys live here? I should have known. I would have contested the deputyship last year,’ Salma said.

‘I have a proposition to make. Selina and Amy, bring a hundred each,’ Jecinta said.

‘Whatever for?’ Selina asked. I simply gazed at her.

‘Trust me,’ Jecinta said simply.

‘A minute then,’ Selina rose and left. I knew she had gone for the money. I rose and opened my suitcase and fumbled inside. I pulled out my jacket in which I knew there was a two hundred shilling note. I fumbled in the pocket and pulled out the note. Something else fell out of the pocket to the floor. I knelt to retrieve it. It was the pink button I had promised to replace for B. Good Lord! I had forgotten all about it. It was still in the pocket of the jacket I had worn that morning all this time. I put it on the table in front of me as I threw the jacket on the bed. Selina came back and we handed our money. Jecinta rose and fetched hers too then pronounced, ‘We are buying the first tin. When it is over, we will include Salma in the next budget,’ she said triumphantly. We all laughed as we concurred with her. Selina picked the small button from the table.

‘Where does this belong?’ she asked no one in particular.

‘It’s beautiful!’ Salma said as she took it from Selina to admire it against the light.

‘It looks like Amy,’ Jecinta joked.

‘It’s actually my sister’s,’ I pronounced. ‘I was supposed to replace it on her jacket but I misplaced it. I’ve been looking for it throughout the holiday; and all along it was in the pocket of this jacket.’

‘God wanted you to bring it here so we could see it,’ Salma said. She had a way of seeing something good in everything. She claimed it was part of the teaching of the Koran.

Soon, we were all walking towards the dining hall for supper. It occurred to me that I hadn’t seen Tabby for some time.

By the time December holidays came around, all of us were looking forward to a restful holiday. It had been a busy term. Besides, third term is usually so short that its events often feel crammed up. By the end of the term, all the students are looking forward to a rest. With December at the back of every one’s mind, students are often eager for the term to come to an end.

Selina and I left school at around eleven. She had to wait for me for prefects are usually the last lot to leave. We have to ensure that the various keys are handed in after the dorms are locked.

This normally keeps the prefects back until the last student has left – including the lazy ones. Selina was patient enough to wait. I couldn't thank her enough. As usual, we took a matatu straight to Nairobi. We agreed we could ride the same bus and she would alight at Nakuru while I went on home. At other times, I usually took an express bus. They are quicker. The bus we took at the Nairobi Railway go downs only stopped briefly at the highway outside Naivasha then went on straight on to Nakuru. We got to Nakuru at three where the bus spent ten minutes as the passengers to refresh themselves. Many people bought snacks including mishikaki, buns, smokies and a variety of juice from the hawkers who swarmed around the bus. I waved at Selina as the bus left. I wished I could just spend the night to see how she was coping with her sister and the niece I remembered. But I had promised mum I would go straight home. I got home at half past five. Eldoret town was awash with the campaigns. The colours of the walls of buildings could hardly be determined due to the campaign posters that were all over. Vehicles of all shapes and sizes moved about the town with mounted speakers giving conflicting messages about the candidates. While one said Lang'at would bring the people's share from the government in Nairobi, another said KipKurui was the only trustworthy person to develop the county to produce self-sustaining wealth. But the public believed both. It was very enthusiastic especially with those speakers who said they'd bring the government to the people.

I bought doughnuts with the little change I had left and took a matatu to the eastern part of the town. It dropped me at the highway just off the red earth road that led home. Luckily, a woman neighbor, Mama Cherotich, had alighted at the same place. She had been sitting in the back and I had not noticed her. She was exhilarated as she constantly asked me about life at school. She was surprised to hear I was going to form four the following year.

'Where have the years gone?' she asked. 'Just the other day you were a toddler when your father first came to farm here! You must remind me to send you a success card.'

'The exam is a whole year away,' I observed.

'Even though,' Mama Cherotich was not flustered. 'If you don't I'll forget.'

I assured her I would. We parted ways at the gate to our home. The woman would walk three farms away. I heard noises as I approached the house. One was mum's, the other a woman's voice I did not recognize. It had a heavy Kalenjin accent. When I got into the house, I found I

didn't know her. The flurry of excitement was too much as I was welcomed home especially by Martha and B. I hugged my mum gratefully as she fussed about a cup of tea. A full flask was already on the table from which my mum and the strange woman were helping themselves. B had been in our room while Martha was in the kitchen, busy with supper of course. The strange woman had come to buy cabbage seedlings. My mum often planted cabbage seeds and sold them in bunches when they were ready for transplanting. Meanwhile, the stranger helped to keep attention away from me.

That evening, I could not wait to show my awards to the family. I had a small silver globe which I had received for my second position in the National Science Congress. B could not wait to frame the certificate and hang it up the wall in our bedroom. I had also done the best in academics since joining secondary school. I was the best in my class, the third in the four stream third form. I had also made a straight A. My parents were exhilarated. I could see that it was the first time that my dad had really come to believe in me. To him, a university entry was guaranteed. I was even happier for my kid sister. B had made top position at Ravine. Let me put it this way. Topping at Ravine is no child's play. It is not like St. Mary's. St. Mary is a *kawa* school. An ordinary school. It draws many of its students from the rural areas. It emphasizes Christian values, probably more than academics. Ravine Academy is a completely different matter altogether. You find there some of the best brains in this country. That's why parents pay through the nose. Dad had said he was ready for the sacrifice. So for B to make tops, you know what it means. And what was more, she had come down from number six. How she managed to balance this with her dolls, her chic world and her world of soul from *Az Yet* to *Aaliyah*, I couldn't figure out. I was sure if I tried B's complicated life for a week my marks would dive like shooting stars. Because of our achievement in academics, dad finally relented. He was ready to take us to Mombasa for a week – *one full week* – if we gave up some of the other Christmas accompaniments like trips to the relatives. B and I were on cloud nine. The date was fixed for Monday 24th. The eve of Christmas. We immediately started counting the days. B carried the living room calendar to our room and began ticking down the days every time she woke up.

B and I withdrew immediately after supper. Martha came later. She wanted me to help her with essay organization. Her teacher had warned it would let her down. But we had to postpone it. B had put on Silk and was dancing again. We felt that her achievement allowed it. Besides, Martha

was only nervous. She had no exam until the 27th. For the first time, I felt completely free as I caught B's hands and danced her around the room the way she used to do to me. She was as gay as a lark. I could see too that Martha was happy, both for us and for herself. If it wasn't for the fact that she is an absolutely self-conscious girl, she would have joined us in our antics.

December came on with all its surprises and joviality. On the 12th, dad had a get together. It usually went round among the uncles so that every year it was celebrated at a different home. It helped the family to keep together, and I believe, to keep track of how people were doing. Though it wasn't dad's turn to hold it, he informed other people he would host it because his daughters had done him proud. By the 1st, word had gone round and the uncles and aunts in Nakuru and Njoro had confirmed they would come.

The day was one of the most jovial I had witnessed. It was the first time a goat had been slaughtered at our new home. Grandpa went around the homestead splashing contents from the slaughtered goats innards around the home. He said it served to bless the home and to ensure that anyone who wished it ill-luck would be killed by his ill-luck first. B and I thought it was first class. My cousins from Njoro and Nakuru joined us in games. We learnt about each other's progress and aspirations. Mum had invited neighbours to come and 'welcome' her guests. She didn't want them to think that she lived alone. Mama Cherotich was happy to join us, even Kimutai came with his wife. He joked he had helped make half of what dad was for he had worked for him for the better part of his life. Everyone agreed. When it was all over, we were reluctant to let our friends go. The visitors left at five to travel the a hundred and fifty kilometers to their homes. Grandpa and grandma would spend the night and travel to Subukia the following day. That evening, grandpa told us stories. We were lazing on the sofas for nobody wanted food. After 12th, things fell silent as if compensating the hurried activity of that day. Life seemed to drag for B and me but I guess it was because of the way we were looking forward to the Mombasa trip.

Part III – The Aftermath

The two girls alighted from the matatu just before it got to Thika Road off Outer Ring Road. They crossed the road, then retraced their steps a little. The first girl led the way to the large wrought-iron gate above which the roofs of go-downs were visible. They were made of corrugated iron bent to a dome shape so that they gave the high roofs a mysterious umbrella appearance. The leading girl knocked twice. She turned to the other girl and said;

‘Guku gwitagwo Laiti. *This place is called Light (Industries).*’ The other girl nodded briefly.

A square inch metal plate within the gate shot back and a red eye peered out. It took in the knocker and the girl beside her.

‘Who’s the other one,’ a voice demanded from within.

‘She’s reporting for work today,’ the leading girl said.

The red eye looked on as its owner was considering the extent of the truth of what he’d heard. After a moment, the metal plate slid back into place. There was a sliding noise within. Then a bolt shot back noisily. A small gate just enough for the average single person opened within the massive gates. The leading girl motioned her colleague to follow. They went in and the gate shut after them. Inside, the guard considered them.

‘You will have to leave your ID here until you are officially cleared,’ the guard said. He was in a blue uniform and a beret. The name tag on his shirt front announced he was Mutuku.

‘We Mutuku wacha kuwa hivyo! Mutuku don’t be like that,’ the first girl said. ‘She is coming for an interview. The manager told me yesterday to bring her over.’ Mutuku considered that. He pursed his lips.

‘If the boss is angry you are responsible,’ he said then motioned the two girls to go on.

‘Don’t worry about him,’ the first girl said to the other when they were out of earshot. ‘He’s only trying to see whether he can get lunch out of you.’

They walked away. Inside the gate was a small open compound. To the right next to the gate was the guard box, a structure just big enough for a single man standing up straight. To the left was a

ten square feet office set within the larger building which was the factory. The factory itself was a seven to eight metre high building extending the length of the right wall. In front of it was a parking space with two vehicles at the far end. Beyond the vehicles was what looked like a extension, a newer wing of the factory. The space left by the parked vehicles was just big enough to park a loading lorry. It was paved and brushed clean. The front wall of the office was made almost entirely of glass through which one could see two rooms. Inside one was a young woman perched in front of a stand computer. In the other room could be seen a man on a high chair behind a mahogany desk.

The first girl led the way to the office right, knocked and entered without waiting to be welcomed in. The woman at the desk smiled at her.

‘Habari ya leo? How are you today,’ she asked in a coastal accent.

‘Fine. I’ve brought a visitor to see the manager,’ the girl said. She was obviously a friend of the other who looked like the manager’s secretary. The secretary walked over to the manager’s door, opened it, said something then came back leaving the door open.

‘Go right in,’ she said motioning with a slim long nailed hand.

The girls walked into the manager’s office. He was reclining back in a high backed leather chair obviously waiting for them. The visitor guessed he had seen them through the window and the announcement was just formalities.

‘Sit down,’ he motioned to the seats across from him, then paused. ‘Yes Njoki, can I help you?’

‘Yes. This is the girl I was telling you about,’ Njoki announced looking straight at him as the two girls sat.

The manager turned to face the new girl.

‘Oh, how are you? My name is Adan. What’s yours?’

‘Wanjiru,’ the second girl said simply.

‘Yes Wanjiru, I’m told you want a job, right.’

‘Yes.’

‘Do you have any experience working in a factory?’

‘No.’

The manager looked at Njoki.

‘Please give her a job. She has come from very difficult circumstances and she needs a beginning,’ Njoki said.

Wanjiru did not intervene on her own behalf. She looked at the floor.

‘I thought you told me she could work,’ the manager said. ‘She can’t work without experience.’

‘Please give her the simplest job there is. I’ll teach her myself. I know her. I’m quite sure she will learn quickly,’ Njoki pleaded. The manager considered that as he twirled a pen with his fingers.

‘I respect your work very much Njoki. I recognize the fact that you are a hard worker. And that you are self-taught. So I’ll take her on because of you. But you must promise to ensure she learns quickly so she can fit in a number of departments as soon as possible,’ he said.

‘I promise I’ll do my best to see she fits in,’ Njoki said.

Amy began at the labeling department. She joined three other girls whose job was to fix labels of ‘Millennium Distillers’ to quarter, half and one litre bottles. They began at eight thirty, had a brief break at ten thirty, an hour between one and two for lunch and stopped at half past four. Six days a week, though on Saturday they worked between nine and noon. Not bad for six thousand shillings a month, Amy thought. Njoki had told her she would put her up until she was able to stand on her own feet. She had been surprised to learn the circumstances of her old friend. Her aunt had called her from Kayole to ask her whether she could get a job for a girl who was desperate. Amy had been living with her aunt’s neighbor, a market woman at Gikomba who had been friends with Amy’s mother. Amy’s mother’s friend couldn’t explain the exact circumstances that had turned the plump brown girl she remembered into the haggard girl who had been brought to her stall one evening. She only understood that the family had run away

from Eldoret, both parents were dead and Amy could not tell whether her sister was dead or alive. She had promised to get her something to do first so that they would later look into how best to help her. She lived with her three children in a two-roomed house and so when Njoki had offered to put her up, Amy was relieved. She had always been apprehensive of being a burden to other people.

Njoki herself lived in a single room in Huruma-kwa-chief. She had known Amy for some time when Amy and her sister had visited their grandmother in Subukia. She remembered that the sister's name was Mary. Njoki remembered her as a chatty girl, that Mary, who never got angry. She envied that. She recalled that Amy had been the quiet type. She had lived and played with them for a fortnight. Her mother's home was a stone's throw away from Amy's grandmother's. Njoki had since left Subukia and settled in Nairobi after her form four exam two years ago. She had been working for Millennium Distillers for a year after a brief stint at the open air market near the Aga Khan Hospital. Now she was struck by the new Amy she found. The girl had clearly suffered. She could not sleep with the light off. Njoki had to often wake up quickly and comfort her when she woke up screaming in the dead of the night. She had persistent dreams in which she appeared to see the devil strangling her sister. Njoki could hardly associate the quiet girl she knew during the day with the red-eyed, screaming, biting and fisting one she had to contend with at night. But she too had suffered in her own way. She was determined to help her.

Njoki was three years older than Amy. She found Amy a quiet but easy girl to live with. She had no demands and neither did she talk much about herself. She was however one of the most strong willed girls Njoki had come across. Once she got the feel of the city, Amy amazed her with her will to live. She always woke before her and prepared breakfast so that she soon found herself competing with her lest she looked like a leech. But unlike her, Amy never seemed to make the effort to wake up, prepare or even get to work on time. While Njoki would either get to work too early or a little after time, Amy somehow taught her how to manage time. She would get to work five to ten minutes before time. Not before, not later regardless of whether the matatus were late or on strike. And she had a beautiful way of sharing costs in the house without offending her. She would buy a packet of rice or unga on her way from somewhere so that Njoki found it in the house. This happened in spite of her meager salary. Njoki earned more than twice her salary. And she taught her to go to church. She would be punctual at Huruma Catholic church at ten

every Sunday. Njoki had never been much of a church goer. She always found that Sunday morning had run too quickly so that by ten she was still not ready. With Amy's influence, she first became regular then started joining in the church activities like her. Amy started teaching the Sunday school while Njoki joined the Catholic Action. Njoki was always mesmerized by this quiet infallible girl.

One day, Njoki determined herself to find out more about Amy. It was a Sunday and a bright idea occurred to her. She could take her out for lunch. After church, she suggested that they go into town. She would buy her lunch there. They took a number twenty five and were soon carousing past Drive-In towards the city. The matatu boomed with music from the large speakers set directly in front of them. While Njoki openly enjoyed it and sang along when she heard a familiar song, Amy was nonchalant. The music seemed to neither affect her nor annoy her like it did many other passengers. When they got into town, a better idea hit her. She could take her friend to City Park. She had worked at the open market there and thought the environment was just the right one for a girl like Amy who didn't know the town much. At the Odeon Cinema, she bought girl food; three packs of chips and sausages. They took a number eleven Matatu and headed for Parklands. They alighted at the Aga Khan hospital and retraced their steps into the park. Although she didn't laugh out loud, Njoki could tell that her friend was happy. She smiled as she watched the antics of the monkeys. She enjoyed the food too. When Njoki judged the time right, she turned to her friend.

'You never say much about your family.'

Amy was quiet a long time. The smile on her face seemed permanently plastered on her. Finally, Njoki was sure she wouldn't talk. She volunteered.

'Sorry if I sound too nosy. It's just that you've grown into such a good friend I thought I was being extremely self-centred not to try to understand you.'

'It is okay,' Amy said. The smile had dropped off. It didn't return. Njoki tried another line.

'What do you intend to do in future? I'm sure a girl like you doesn't plan to spend her lifetime at Millennium.'

‘What do *you* Plan to do yourself?’ she countered. It was probably the most number of words she’d put together in a month. Njoki felt encouraged.

‘Every Kikuyu girl dreams of starting her own business. I plan to stash off enough money to do just that.’

‘About how much?’

‘Thirty to fifty thousand.’

‘Oh. I see’. She relapsed into the enigmatic silence. After three minutes, Njoki probed.

‘You?’

‘Me?’

‘Yes. What do you plan to do?’

‘I...I don’t know. I’m not sure.’

‘We could start our own business together, you know. So many women do that. My sister joined hands with another woman and with only a hundred thousand, they began a business in South Sudan. Now she is a big landlady in Nyahururu town.’

Amy was silent. Njoki could almost hear her mind ticking. This girl could really brood. If you didn’t know her properly you would think her impudent. She had the patience of a saint.

‘I intend to go back to school one day,’ Amy said. ‘That is, after I have found out exactly what happened to my sister.’

‘You had a sister? You’ve never mentioned her.’

‘It’s...it’s not easy.’ Njoki quickly glanced at her. She was crying silently. Two silent drops ran down her face. But her eyes didn’t look sad. It was a paradox. It looked like the tears had forced themselves from a deep well that had been forced back for a long time. It sounded crazy to put it that way but it looked like Amy had mourned one time without tears. The saved tears were now coming out with nothing to mourn.

Njoki moved closer to her and held her. Amy didn't lean in. She neither showed any gladness nor did she pull away. She just sat as if Njoki was doing the expected thing and she had no compulsion to either acknowledge it or ignore it. It was just a fact of life.

'It helps to talk. You've got to get it out.'

'There's been no one to tell,' she said simply. 'And I'm not much given to friends.'

'I'm here. You trust me don't you?'

'Don't get me wrong. It's not about you. I'm just not ready to talk,' she paused. 'Or maybe I just like myself. Maybe I'm just saving it to punish myself. To give me a worthwhile reason to mourn.'

'The much you've said tells me you do trust me. Don't push it. Just know I am here. Whenever you feel free to say anything, I'll listen,' Njoki said.

The following day, the manager called them both into his office. Njoki was apprehensive. She hadn't been very keen in the last few days. She wondered what the manager had in mind. When they sat, he went straight to the point.

'Sorry to call you girls in like this. I thought it is time I showed some appreciation for Amy. I think she has done a tremendous job in the last two months. She has learned fast. What do you think Njoki?'

'I'm also very impressed with her brilliance. I think she is gifted,' Njoki said.

'Amy, you have anything to say?' it looked like he was testing her. Amy had no idea what she was supposed to say.

'I'm happy to hear my work appreciated,' she said. It was the first thing that came to mind.

'In that case, I would like to inform you that I'm moving you to the Bottling Department beginning this morning. You will work directly under Njoki's supervision. And your salary rises to thirteen.'

‘Thank you,’ Amy said. She could not believe that her salary had just doubled. Njoki was even more surprised. She was happy for her. She felt that the two of them were going places if this lasted. As they left the office, Amy whispered, ‘Lunch is on me.’

‘You can say that again,’ Njoki was all smiles. She led her to the bottling department where she had been working herself and began by introducing Amy to the rest of the staff. She then explained to her the various activities and set her at a position among the filling machines, within reach so that she could directly supervise her. This was a little more technical than what Amy was used to. She knew however that Amy could do well. It took what she was made of to do it. Not necessarily many hours of learning. Not many years of experience.

The new job involved making sure the bottle fillers did not stick, that the racks on which the bottle railings ran were smooth at all times and that all the fillers filled the bottles to the correct amount. She and the other girls in this section had to be keen to remove any bottles filled ill, clear the racks of anything that might cause the bottles to get stuck within the rails and to ensure that all the machines measured the contents properly. The only problem was that there was a putrid smell of whisky heavy in the air and it made one dizzy if you removed the mufflers for long. Distilled alcohol also flowed freely here and there wasn’t much restriction. Many girls indulged themselves and easily got hooked. The management even appeared to encourage it; Njoki told her it was because the management often took advantage of the girls and it was easier to do so when the initial strong will had already been loosened by alcohol. It was difficult to resist it especially for one who found herself in the circumstances that Amy did. Njoki herself did a little once in a while but was careful not to get hooked. Amy felt that if it went too far, she would ask for a transfer even if it meant a salary cut. She must remember she was here for a reason, she thought to her herself.

As it happened, she wouldn’t have much choice. One Tuesday morning, the lights went out while Amy and the other workers were hard at work. Normally, the generator would be started immediately so that man – Amy thought woman – hours were not lost. But that day there was something wrong with the generator, the fuel or some malfunction of some sort. As they waited, Amy went to the second wing of the factory. She was surprised to see that it looked quite unkempt. The machines were old and all the staff looked permanently drunk. They didn’t look like they could be trusted to keep a company going. They looked surprised to see her there. Then

she noticed that even the work going on there was different. The packing done on the bottles was unprofessional, the labels on the bottles looked faded and the caps looked like they had been done by an old malfunctioning machine. She was sure that these products could not be sold to the same customers who bought the ones they made in the other wing. It was while she was this engaged that the manager came and pulled her out of the wing and led her to his office. He demanded to know why she had gone wondering. Didn't she know her place of work? Or was she tired of working with them?

It was Njoki who intervened on her behalf. She told the manager that Amy was innocent. She didn't know anything and she was unlikely to go telling anyone. That was what made her very suspicious. What was it she wasn't supposed to know? Who was she likely to go and tell and what was it they were afraid she would say? She somehow had to find out. She realized that Njoki might not have been telling her the whole truth. And if that was the case, there was only one person she hoped would tell her what she didn't know. She continued to play dumb throughout that week. That Saturday, she approached Nduku when Njoki went to Kariobangi for a hair-do.

'There's something I want you to tell me,' she began. Nduku was surprised to see her talk. She had come to accept she was a loner. During the few times she had talked to Amy, it had always been one-sided. It left her feeling she was talking to herself; like she was thinking aloud.

'It must be tough for you to come to me,' Nduku said.

'I guess it is. Tell me, do you know Njoki well?'

'What a question? Are you testing me or something.' It was a statement.

'No. Why would I want to?'

Nduku was quiet as she surveyed her. Then she appeared to come to a decision.

'You are her cousin, right?'

'Did she tell you that?'

‘That’s what she has told everybody around here. You are her cousin from Nyeri and she is helping to look after you.’

‘Well, I’m not,’ Amy said simply. ‘Why would she want to lie?’

Nduku kept quiet for a while.

‘I can guess why,’ she paused. ‘You work with her, right?’

‘Yes.’

‘Do you know what they do there? At that factory of yours?’

Amy thought it rude to put it that way. It was not their factory. She was only an employee and she did what she was told.

‘Make beer, what else?’

‘Have you examined those things carefully yourself?’

Amy thought back. What she had been suspecting was true.

‘That’s why I came to you,’ she said. She went on to relate her little encounter and how the manager had reacted. Then she felt apprehensive. She didn’t know this woman at all. How could she inform on her friend to a stranger. For all she knew, Nduku could be with the police. What would that mean for Njoki who had literally pulled her out of a hole?

‘Forget your doubts about me. I’m not likely to tell anyone,’ she said. ‘But I have been concerned for you. You seem like a good enough girl. That place where you work is very dangerous. You should know what they do to girls over there. I’ve been looking for a chance to warn you but I don’t trust your friend.’

She went on to tell her the stories she had heard, how the management at the factory deliberately got the girls hooked on alcohol so they could retain them. It was like killing several birds with a single stone. Didn’t she see the state of the other girls in there? They were just vegetables. Once the girls were hooked, they couldn’t move elsewhere. So the management had easily accessible cheap labour and a permanent reliable cover for their business. What was their real business,

Amy wondered. They were bootleggers. They bottled illicit brews and sold them to Kiambu and Thika. That was three quarters of their business. What Amy saw in the first wing was only a cover. If they happened to be raided, and it would happen because that was how all such businesses ended, Amy could find herself in jail for a long long time. And the management knew exactly that. If they were raided, they would sacrifice the workers, give a hefty bribe and relocate. And business would go on as usual. Amy's body froze to the bone. She didn't know whether to confront her friend Njoki or not. But she decided she must.

When she came home, Njoki found Amy chatting with Nduku. She didn't look amused.

'Si nilikwambia huyo Malaya hakuna vile mnaweza saidiana? *Didn't I tell you there is nowhere that prostitute can take you?*' she asked her openly.

'Yeye ni Malaya? Is she a prostitute?'

Njoki was taken back. It was unlike the docile Amy to come up with something like that. She looked at her closely.

'You've been talking to her, haven't you?'

'Yes I have. And nothing has changed. I'm still very grateful for what you have done for me. But I just wish you would have warned me. You should have told me the truth so I could be ready for any eventuality.'

'Look Amy. I'll tell you the truth. When I got you that job, I didn't care very much about you. I thought you were just another Nairobi girl who could take care of herself. Lakini nilikuja kujua wewe mshamba. *But I later realized you are a country girl.* I realized I had to protect you.'

'What do you mean you had protect me? Suppose the police raided that factory today, what would you expect me to do?'

'Believe me you were never in any danger. I would have warned you well in advance.'

'How would *you* have known? You are just an employee like me. You aren't part of the police.'

'There are ways Amy, that is all I can tell you now. You've got to believe me. That's how business in Nairobi works.' Amy realized she was slightly drunk. A little more than the usual.

‘That’s very comforting,’ Amy said. Njoki was surprised she wasn’t angry. All the other girls had been.

‘Look here girl, you are one of the strongest women I have ever encountered. You have a spirit in you which shouldn’t go to waste. But one thing you’ve got to do is to grow up. You must realize that this world is a hard place and you must fight tooth and nail to get what is your own. That is how Nairobi is. That is how the whole damn country, the whole –ing world is.’

‘I’m sorry to disappoint you but I’m not like that,’ Amy told her with conviction.

‘Then you don’t belong to this world. There are people out there Amy who will kill you without thinking twice. There are people who see you as a hammer they can only use to beat a shilling out some metal. Your only job is to realize that and fight it. You can only fight them by being better than them.’

‘There are other ways Njoki. I believe in God and I believe He will give me better ways.’

‘You are only cheating yourself Amy,’ she paused and gave her a long slow look before she continued. ‘Those people who killed your family Amy, they are in this country, even in this government. Now they are singing peace, peace peace, how can you ever have peace when to get that peace requires the slaughter of the innocent? Did I ever tell you I lost my father that way too? The man who killed him raped my mother, then took over my father’s farm including the chicken and even the cat. I went there incognito myself and saw how his family is enjoying the spoils. And tell you what, I would rest till he is punished.’

‘I’m not saying that I am not ready for revenge but I don’t think violence will take this country anywhere.’

‘There’s a difference between violence and justice. People pay tax in this country to pay the police so the police can use their guns to make sure that we have peace. That is why we both wake up at five Amy,’ Njoki said almost fiercely. This was a new Njoki that Amy was talking to.

‘When that same police joins teenagers to sing peace, peace, peace in broken sheng, I know somebody is taking me for a ride. You yourself saw the government reward a policeman who had broken the law. You give him a gun to protect the public but he keeps his gun aside and

pleads with killers. That is breaking the law. And whoever thought that such a person should be rewarded either doesn't know the law or is misusing the same law to his own end. That is the kind of country we have here Amy. You need to wake up to that.' She pulled out a small bottle from her bag and took a long swig. It was nearly dark. She vaguely thought it was time they got busy to see to supper. But she was in no mood for food. She looked at the girl across from her. So beautiful. So innocent. She wished she could realize how many hyenas were out there ready to rape her and boast on TV about it. They knew there was no law. They had killed her grandfather and taken his property in '97. They had seen that the law had its hands tied behind its back. So they had come back to do the same to her father in '07. They had condemned her to the life of an animal. And she was sure they would be coming in 2012 or 2017. But she'd be ready. She would no longer sit like a duck. She realized Amy had been crying. Not like that time at City Park. Not just weeping but sobbing from the depths of her soul. She did not wake up to go and comfort her. The girl had to be taught to stand up for herself. This was the time to learn. If she ever would.

Making supper that night was mechanical. The girls did not talk to one another. Amy was surprised. Njoki had sounded the way her history teacher used to. And because she had fervently believed in him, she was forced to believe her. She didn't intend to do anything drastic. But Njoki had shown her a part of life that she never probably would have known. She would look into it and take in her own way. She wouldn't quit her job. No. But she would always be ready. She made rice and vegetable stew on the kerosene stove which wasn't smoking today. Njoki had given up trying to help her. She had slumped back on the single sofa with the bottle in her hand on her lap. She vacantly followed what Amy was doing from there. She had tried offering Amy the bottle but she had refused. Amy had argued she didn't need it. When the food was done, Amy pulled a stool in front of her and placed her food there. Then she told her to eat. She sat next to Njoki and pulled another stool. She put her plate on it and proceeded to eat in silence. Eventually, Njoki was forced to follow suit. They ate in silence. When supper was over, Amy sat for a while then announced she was going to bed.

The following day, Njoki thought the two had been healed. Nobody attempted to review the night before or even the activities of the past three months. Amy had woken early as usual and thanked her for the night before. Njoki was not very sure what she was being thanked for. But

she didn't press. Amy made breakfast and told Njoki to hurry. They would be late for church. After church, Amy offered to buy Njoki lunch. That is, if she could promise to take her to the famous Uhuru Park. Njoki did. The two girls lazed about the park with their fish and chips until five. They took pictures and rode a boat, like children, Amy thought.

Amy was having lunch at a kiosk near the factory when her phone rang. It was Njoki. She'd hoped to eat first and call later when the phone rang for the second time. She licked her right fingers clean, punched the receive button with the tip of the nail of her small finger then balanced the phone at the tips of her Ugali tainted index finger and thumb.

'Uga Njoki. *Yes Njoki.*' She said.

'Hallo, have you gone back to the factory yet?'

'No, why?'

'Don't. Have you checked your messages?'

'No. what is this about?'

'I'll explain later. Meet me in the house. Don't go back to the factory, you hear? Don't. Just meet me in the house. I'm coming from town. And don't let anyone see you leave.'

Njoki had gone to town that morning as Amy headed for work. She had been excused the day before. She'd told the manager she was meeting a relative in town. Amy didn't know what to think. She felt fear creeping into her breast as she washed her hands at the makeshift hot water sink outside the hotel. She looked in the direction of the factory fifty metres away. The workers who were through with lunch were lounging outside the gate waiting for two o'clock. She couldn't go that way. Whatever Njoki intended, she couldn't take anything for granted. She gave a hundred shillings to the lady who owned the kiosk. She always stood by the door supposedly welcoming customers and watching that everything in and outside the hotel was okay. Amy suspected that she was really ensuring everyone paid. She dipped her hand into the pocket in front of the grissy blue apron she always wore and gave her thirty shillings. Amy went in the opposite direction of the factory when she made sure no one was watching, turned behind the

kiosk and followed an alley that ran parallel to the road behind the buildings. She emerged on to Outer Ring Road a hundred metres away from the factory and flagged down a matatu. She got in and the vehicle headed for Huruma Round-about. From there she walked home. She got there in under ten minutes. If Njoki was fooling, she would still be in time for the afternoon shift.

Njoki was already waiting for her.

‘Have you checked your messages?’ she asked immediately.

‘I haven’t had time to,’ she replied.

‘C’mon, let’s see,’ she said reaching for Amy’s phone.

‘Why don’t you tell me what this is all about?’

She was quiet as she scanned the messages in the phone.

‘When did you last check messages in this phone?’

‘I can’t remember. I don’t even know how to use it properly,’ Amy said now with technophobia all over her face. Njoki scrolled down the messages and came to the in-box. She opened it and looked at the latest messages.

‘I can’t believe it. come see this.’

Amy walked over and sat next to her.

‘You know this number?’

‘No. why?’

‘See here? Somebody has been conversing to this number using your phone.’

‘So?’

‘Jesus you still don’t get it. see this?’

Amy leaned forward. The message said: Thirty thousand shillings outside the petrol station at Kayole junction. 3 pm. No police.

‘What does it mean?’

‘Amy you’ve been played. Somebody has been demanding ransom using your phone.’

‘What do you mean? How does this affect me? I’m innocent.’

‘You still don’t get it do you? Adan called me and told me the police are looking for you. He said that the police came to the factory hoping to arrest you as people were going for lunch.’

‘Like I said, I’m innocent. I have nothing to worry about,’ her voice was shaking.

‘I have several theories about what might have happened but they are unimportant. There are girls in that factory who know this place. They will lead the police here before long.’

‘Tell me please, what do I do?’

‘Put on something decent. We are going out.’

Amy did not think. She went on and dressed in whatever she could find. Although the enormity of what had happened had really sunk in, she dreaded the law. She couldn’t imagine herself in situations such as she had heard girls at the factory relate. All she could think about now was to get as far as possible. Njoki led her out. They did not use the regular route. Njoki led her through the back streets to an inn at the round-about. They climbed upstairs and found a corner table. Njoki ordered a quarter Gilbeys and krest and a fanta for her friend. Then they began dissecting the issue.

‘Two things,’ Njoki started. ‘Either the manager did you in, or one of the girls did hoping to get something out of it.’

‘I haven’t wronged anyone.’

‘In Nairobi, most of your sins result from what you haven’t done,’ Njoki was candid. ‘That’s why you’ve got to know how to handle people. And also situations that maybe thrust upon you.’

‘What do I do now?’

‘You’ve got to leave,’ Njoki said. ‘You can’t even go back to my house. Somebody may bring the police at night. And then I won’t be able to help you.’

‘I can’t go back to the countryside. The only place I know is Eldoret. There are people trying to kill me there.’ She tried to relate the story she had held in her breast for this long as briefly as she could.

‘My God. That must be it. It isn’t even Adan or the factory girls. Remember the first time we went to City Park?’ Amy nodded. Njoki continued. ‘There was a guy there. I thought he was ogling you. But then he has been turning up in so many places of late. I think he must have been shadowing you.’

‘You mean following me?’ Amy asked wide-eyed. Then the picture of the guy came to her. Tall, ever present blue jeans, dark coats and the face she had severally thought she had seen somewhere. Now it was clear. The face had began becoming familiar at the Eldoret Hospital. The same face she had recognized through window at the nurses house in Naivasha. It was probably true what she had thought in Naivasha before she ran off. May be it really had to do with that incident with B. Father Piaggio had said that there were men looking for her for what she was believed to know. Would this ever stop? If they had followed her to Nairobi, they could follow her elsewhere, to Subukia, to Nyeri, even to Nanyuki. She had to get as far as possible. They discussed the problem with Njoki. Every argument led to one thing. She had to get out of the country. And she had to ensure nobody saw the direction in which she went. Njoki had a bright idea. She could talk with her aunt in Juba. That was the furthest many Kenyans went. But what was she running away from? She couldn’t afford to think, Njoki argued. She had to get as far as possible and begin to gather her thoughts from there. As soon as she could.

That evening, Njoki called her sister in Juba. Though it was already eight thirty in Nairobi, her sister had said dusk usually settled in Juba at about that time. She had to load the phone properly first for as she put it, the phone ate credit like water every time she called Juba. The network was not very good but they were able to communicate. She had only managed to explain Amy’s problem to her when her credit was exhausted. Her sister called her back. Njoki told the rest of the story as Amy hang on to every word. Her sister told Njoki that she had to take Amy to Nyayo House first – Yes, that place both had visited when her sister was looking for a passport. Since Amy was in a hurry, she could get a temporary passport within a day. Then they had to go to Ndumberi Road – the junction of River Road and Latema Road.

‘No, Latema is the one that goes down Odeon and Embassy Cinemas. At the number twenty two bus stop. Those that ply Kabete route. If you go down that road, it will take you directly to River Road. At the junction, look across the road. You will see Kampala Coach. They are red buses and the office is painted red all over. They are the only direct buses to Juba,’ she said. The following day, the two girls went to both places and came out with a ninety-day passport and a ticket worth six thousand shillings! Amy had never thought that there were bus fares beyond a thousand, and even when she paid that much, she felt stolen from. The only problem was that she had to wear a bui bui the whole day. Njoki said it would make her incognito. Whatever that meant.

It occurred to Amy that as things stood, there was no possibility her sister could be alive. If those people were hunting her, how much worse could they do with one at hand. She couldn’t bear to think of how they had been parted. Involuntarily. She put her hand into her pocket and felt the little pink button. It was her legacy from her sister. If she was dead, she would communicate to her from heaven through it. She trusted B that much. In spite of her sadness, no tears came to her eyes. And she bitterly thought that she could not even cry for her little sister, she had no tears for her.

Eventually, they arrived at Juba. The journey had been the longest forty hours Amy had ever sat down in a bus. She was not aware that they had arrived. She had expected tall skyscrapers that announced an oil rich nation. She was surprised to find makeshift houses made out of reeds and iron sheets at the outskirts. It occurred to her it was probably because of the heat. The temperatures had risen significantly since leaving the border. They crossed the Nile again and she saw boats either carousing on the water or moored to the banks. It was a wide river that stretched for a hundred metres across. They entered the town through a market. Her friend told her it was called Konyo Konyo. The town had dirt roads! She couldn’t believe it. all the buildings looked makeshift. When they got to the bus stop, Njoki’s sister had called it custom, she bought a Vivacell line and called the number she had saved in her phone.

‘Ni muiritu uria ureragwo ni Njoki I, kuhana atia? *I’m that girl Njoki was telling you about, how are you?*’

She said into the phone when it was received on the other end.

‘Oh, niwe? *Oh it’s you?* Where are you?’ the receiver said.

‘I’m at custom,’ she replied.

‘Just stand near the bus and wait for me. How are you dressed?’ Amy told her. ‘Give me five minutes.’

Amy stood by the bus watching as the conductors directed the unloading of the vast quantities of goods from the boot. She must obviously looked a stranger for several people gaped at her. One loader who spoke in a Luhya accent asked her whether she was lost. She told her she was waiting for somebody. Njoki’s sister came in less than five minutes. She resembled her in many ways although she was mid-brown. She greeted her then picked her bag and led her away as if they had known each other for a long time.

‘My name is Wangeci,’ she told her as she led her away. Amy told her that Njoki had told her. she repeated her name to her although she’d said it on the phone.

They went out of the bus stop, through rows and rows of makeshift stalls built out of reeds – including the roofs. Presently, they emerged onto a wider earth road. Wangeci led her to a makeshift bar. Inside, there were a lot of people, men and women drinking noisily and making merry. Wangeci noted that Amy was apprehensive.

‘You’ve never entered a bar?’

‘Aca. No,’ Amy replied.

‘Hi! Niukumenyera. Guku nikuo ndutaga wira. *Hi! You’ll have to get used.* This is where I work.’ Wangeci said as she bid her sit. She didn’t look unduly concerned. The bar had a small counter with wooden racks set to the wall. Various types of beer, whisky and gin were neatly arranged on the racks. A television was perched above the rack. The patrons were watching Jose Chameleon dancing some Swahili song on the TV. Next to the counter was a butchery, if you could call it that. Chunks of goat meat hung on hooks. There was no glass ventilation like she had seen in Kenya. Here, you only looked for an ‘S’ shaped hook, and hang the chunks in the

open and you were in business. Wangeci asked her whether she would eat. Amy threw a glance at the butchery.

‘Yes but not meat.’

Wangeci looked at her and laughed a full bosomed laugh.

‘You’ll get used!’ she said.

She said something in Kikuyu to the short man in the butchery, then turned back to her.

‘What soda will you take?’ she asked.

‘You have bottled water?’

‘Yes. That is what we use here. Never take any other kind of water.’ She was thankful for this first piece of advice in her new home. Wangeci brought a cold half-litre bottle of water and set it on the table in front of her. Amy opened it up and gladly took a long sip. She sighed as the water washed down her throat. Presently, the short man brought her rice and soup in which there were bits of mutton. She greeted her in Kikuyu then went away when he thanked her. Amy picked the spoon and tasted gingerly. It was good. She started eating slowly trying not to think where it had been made. Whenever the thought persisted, she took a swig of the cold water and paused before continuing. Wangeci came over and engaged her in talk as she ate. Amy noticed there were two other young girls who were waiters. She wondered what circumstances had led them here. After about an hour, Wangeci judged she was well rested. It was past seven but it was still daylight. Amy thought the clock needed winding. Wangeci took her where she lived. It was a large room with a small sideboard and a single bed. She told her this was where she called her Juba home. Amy could not believe that a woman who owned several blocks of flats could live like that.

‘Guku twokire gweetha tikuria. *Here we came to look (for money) not to eat,*’ she answered her bewildered look. There was a pile of mattresses at the corner. It was clear no cooking was done here. People simply came here to sleep. Wangeci put some water into a plastic bowl and gave her a towel. She showed her where to bathe. It was a reed bathroom made by joining reeds together. It left gaps especially at the door which didn’t close properly. It had no roof. Amy washed quickly. She had to face the door wary of who might pass by and see her. When she was through,

Wangechi bid her dress. She couldn't leave a visitor here on her own. They went back to the bar where she was left under the care of the other two girls. Wangechi went to see a friend. The bar was full. People ate and drank like they'd heard the end of the world was around the corner. She could easily see where Wangechi's money came from. There were about fifty patrons. Each had several bottles of beer on the table and they kept piling on more. Every new customer ordered food which was shared all round before he sat down to drink. Amy was mesmerized. The combination noise from Jose Chameleon on the telly and the exhilarated patrons made the bar one hubbub of activity.

Darkness fell at around eight-thirty. Wangechi herself came back at nine.

'Are you tired? It's still early.' Amy noted she meant it. she did not want to inconvenience her, after all, she was only a helpless guest. But Wangechi bid one of the other girls to take her to bed. When they got there, Amy realized what the other mattresses were for. A number of women to whom she was readily introduced had dropped the mattresses on the floor to make temporary beds. She noted the mattresses were few. They were spread on the floor from wall to wall to make one continuous bed. Being new, she was given the privilege of sharing the bed with Wangechi, the owner of the house. There must have been a dozen women there. She herself slept immediately. The lethargy from the close to forty hour journey was too much for her. and it helped. For the first time in a long time her dreams didn't wake her up sweating. She barely heard Wangechi as she came in at two and got into bed beside her. She only vaguely heard her say from afar, 'This one is really tired! She is sleeping like a young jumbo!'

Amy woke up late on her second day in Juba. It was about nine o'clock but the sun felt like it was already two. Wangechi had just woken. She was a late sleeper and late riser, she said. She showed her how to go about her activities here; the nearest shop, the toilet – where she rushed immediately – and the nearest house of Kenyans just in case the need arose. They took a breakfast of black tea and thin long bread. Wangechi didn't trust the milk here and she advised her not to. One could never tell where it was from or what you could contract from it. She told her that she would offer her a job at her bar for twenty pounds a day. Amy couldn't believe it. That was six hundred and sixty a day by the exchange rate she had at the border. It was possible to

make a little money here quickly and decide what next. She told her she could start immediately. They went to the bar at ten together. Here, she said, bars operated throughout. She was properly introduced to the other girls. One, Lucy was Kikuyu like her while Betty was Ugandan. They were jovial especially Betty and welcomed her open handedly. Her job would be to wash glasses and set the bottles of beer properly on the shelves until she became familiar with both the prices and the customers.

‘Don’t trust these people,’ Lucy told her. ‘They are not as good as they look.’

‘Usione wakicheka. *Don’t trust the way they laugh,*’ Betty who spoke Swahili in her funny accent added. ‘*Lakini ukiwazoea, utatengeza chuma.* But if you get used to them, you can make money.’

The two girls also offered to put up with Amy if the need arose. They didn’t like the idea that she spent the night with her boss. And the way they heard her house was crowded, Lucy said. She’d heard that she charged two pounds a mattress and her house was always full.

‘You mean all those people I saw had paid?’ Amy wondered aloud.

‘You thought it was free? In Juba there are no free things,’ Lucy said.

Over lunch, she learnt too that there was an allowance for lunch for the workers of the bar. Both girls would order food from the butchery there because one couldn’t trust food in Juba. There was a big water problem and diarrhoea, typhoid and malaria were common. Amy thanked the girls for their advice and offered to go along with them. Soon, they became well acquainted. By the end of the week, she had moved in with them. They lived a little further from Custom where their place of work was, at a place called Guava on your way to Gudelle. That was the same road that went to Khartoum and beyond to Cairo, they told her. they hoped to work hard, earn enough money and head that way. There was better money for their kind of work in that direction. Amy wondered how much more anyone could ask for. What she was earning was already more than enough. She noted too that here no one asked you where you had come from or what you were doing. Many Kenyans drank beer like hell. It looked like many were as troubled as she was. But here one could almost forget. She tried to imagine how far away Kenya was, how that country thought little about her and decided that she could forget it too.

This is not to say that she was comfortable. Or that she could entirely forget. She would never ever bring herself to forgive those who had taken away the people she loved most. She had not erred against anyone. If she could, she would make them pay. If she could, she would punish the government itself. I mean, why couldn't the government warn people early enough that it was not responsible for their security? In that case people could take measures. Instead, the government gave you the illusion it was protecting you. Then at the most critical moment, it left you alone. It watched those close to you butchered then sat back like nothing had happened. The only good thing was that she had left nothing behind. She could do without Kenya. After all, it had only given her pain. She would work hard and head north like her two new friends suggested. She reached for the ever present bottle of water as she thought. She had no use for Kenya. But those who had killed her family, could she let them go scot free? Wasn't it her duty, nay, weren't her parents and sister watching her from heaven waiting for her to avenge them? But she couldn't face those people. They were too strong for her. what could one do?

Amy soon realized that Juba was not as rosy as it appeared. It took her a death to realize that, though as she came to know, many other people had died and would continue to die. Wangeci had warned her against sitting with her customers. According to her, they were dangerous people. Many of them suffered post traumatic stress disorder from the recently concluded war. Others were just jealous that the Kikuyu had left their country and come to take what they thought was their money. It occurred to Amy that the Kalenjin Raiders were everywhere. Indeed, Adolf Hitler had been one. They were just jealous of anyone who was thrifty. By her second week at work, she had seen how they would take beer and run if she wasn't looking. Sometimes they would create a situation which they would take advantage of. They would say, for example, that a beer they had taken had expired. If she argued, they would demand that the issue be settled at the police lines. They knew she wouldn't go for trumped up charges would found one way or the other. Fortunately, Wangeci who always stuck around came to her rescue in such circumstances.

'Nii ndimahuhaga! *I don't pamper them!*' *She would tell her.* There was this one man who bothered her. He would keep at her even though she ignored him and did her best to avoid him. Lucy's case was different. It also came so suddenly that nobody within the bar could tell what to think.

Amy was sitting near the counter watching a music video on the telly when three Kikuyu young men came in. She knew one was Lucy's brother and she was eager to serve them. Lucy's brother ordered Tusker Malt saying he didn't want to get drunk that night. The other two ordered Bell Lager, a Ugandan beer. Lucy had been sent by Wangeci to take *Pesa ya chama*, money for the daily self-help contributions, to the proprietor of another bar up the road. When she came in, she was happy to see her brother – his name was Maina – and she immediately joined them. Amy went over and joking that Lucy was also a customer now asked her to order. She ordered Tusker Malt too. Amy continued serving them as they talked. She had got used to sitting alone at the counter for unlike the other two girls, she didn't take beer. After serving them for the third time, she noticed a tall Sudanese enter and sit near the door. He was a regular customer. Betty served him his regular, a can of Heineken. He had been drinking with both Betty and Lucy the night before. Betty had said it was the time to milk him for he had just been paid. Now, he kept throwing furtive glances at Lucy, her brother and the other two young men. Without saying a word. He took three cans of Heineken in quick succession. In under twenty minutes. Amy was beginning to think how tense he looked when he rose, went over to Lucy's brother and said something in Arabic. Lucy and her brother, both of whom knew Arabic, argued briefly with him. It didn't seem like a big deal. Amy saw him pause and look at them. He then held up three fingers; the ball of the thumb pressed against those of the index and second finger, then went out angrily.

The party of four dismissed him the way you would dismiss a particularly troublesome beggar in Kiambu and the drinking continued. The noise in the bar continued. Amy had just served them the fourth beer when the man returned. He entered the bar holding something behind his back. When he revealed it, Amy saw it was an AK 47 assault rifle. She cringed. She had only seen such guns in movies. The man did not talk to anyone. He raised the rifle, put three bullets in each of the young men, then turned to look for Lucy who had slipped by immediately she saw the gun. She had vanished. The man immediately left the bar. There was a split second of immobilized silence before anyone could act. Amy fainted forthwith. She would only learn what had followed from Wangeci and Betty. Some of the patrons had jumped under the tables while the other Sudanese had brought out their weapons. But the assailant had vanished. The three young men died inside the bar. It was then that Amy really got a grasp of exactly what she had stepped into.

The problem was that for her, there was no alternative. When Wangeci saw the effect the incident had on her, she tried to console her.

‘Amy you can’t chicken out like that. Here you will see a lot more. The only thing you have to do is to make sure it doesn’t happen to you.’

‘I’m scared Wangeci. I haven’t lived a life close to this before.’

‘Look, this is business. We were chased out of our country. We must therefore learn to live through thick and thin. Twi ciana cia Israili Misiri! *We are the Israelites in Egypt.*’

‘What do you mean you were chased?’

‘Njoki never told you? I lost a twelve acre piece of land in Molo. My house was burnt and so was my business. And I think they did right because I have increased it tenfold.’

‘I didn’t know that,’ Amy said.

‘You see, I tell these girls not to joke with these people. They hate us more than they hate the devil because we remind them how lazy they are. You must be very careful how you relate with them.’

‘Doesn’t the embassy do anything here?’

‘You are talking about the Embassy? It is the government that commands the Embassy. The government doesn’t know you Amy. Just the other day Kibaki said that the Kenyans in Sudan are either thieves or prostitutes.’

Amy didn’t like the sound of that. She knew very well she hadn’t pretended to be under the protection of the government when she came. But she hadn’t bargained she would land in a battlefield. She had heard of more than a dozen other Kenyans who had been killed. She hadn’t thought that their death had come in this manner. In Kenya, she had also thought of people who risked their lives in Sudan as criminals when she heard Njoki and others talk about it. Njoki had warned her not to judge human beings she knew nothing about. Nobody would be so foolish as to risk life without cause. Now she knew.

‘Tell me. What does a people do when pushed to the wall like this?’ she asked Wangeci.

‘They fight back. Somebody said *amani* doesn’t come unless at the edge of a sword.’

Amy determined that she would leave the bar. She winced at the thought of the gladness with which she had thought of the salary she’d get from Wangeci. Now she had to leave it. how many other jobs would she have to hop in and out of before she could settle? Why had God forsaken her? she directed the question at Wangeci and almost fainted at the answer.

‘Ngai ni mundu, Caitani ni mundu! *God is human, the devil is human!*’ she didn’t know what to think. The following day, she requested Betty to take her to see the town early before they reported for work. They went through the scantily tarmacked town to the market at Konyo Konyo. She saw the wholesale shops with their rows of goods stacked outside to warn customers what goods the shops dealt in. She looked at the clothes and perfume stalls trying to decide what she could start with once she had enough money to go into business. They left the market at nine thirty. They walked past the vegetable market where Betty pointed out the car bazaar beyond. They took Cemetery Road because Betty wanted to see a friend who worked at the Queen of Sheba. Amy admired the tall hotel building that was coming up nearby as Betty finished her business. They took a matatu for Custom at Atlabara. When they got to Custom, they found that Wangeci had engaged another girl to replace Lucy. Somebody had told her that she had met with Lucy in Kampala. She had had enough of Juba. Was that what it took for one to give Juba up? A tragedy? Amy wondered.

The new girl’s name was Sadia. She had been laid off at Jebel Lodge, Betty told her. That’s where she had been working although she wouldn’t admit it because she had *shuka bei*, come down the social ladder. Sadia had been a muslim. She had come from Khartoum. Of course she had dropped Islam. She drank like a fish without giving a damn what beer she reached for. As long as it was canned. She took canned sodas in the same fashion. But she was a quick one to make friends. Amy liked her. Despite all her other failings, she was not pretentious. She did what she thought and openly said what she thought. Whether people like it or not. Amy opened up to her easily and she genuinely pitied her for all she had gone through. She agreed that Kenya was definitely cursed. If men could do that to children, they must be doing a lot better than the devil. Were there men in Nairobi now? Sadia wondered. And they went home everyday and slept with their wives? It was unbelievable.

A week later, Amy was having lunch at the butchery when Sadia came to her quickly.

‘There is something you must see,’ she said tugging at her Sleeve. She led her to the bar and pointed at the TV. The television was on a Kenyan channel via satellite. On the TV was an exact image of Amy. The girl who was in a wheel chair was being interviewed by a middle aged woman.

‘My doctor says I rose from the dead. I believe him. I believe too that God does such things for a purpose.’

‘Why would you yourself say you rose from the dead?’ the interviewer asked.

‘I learnt later that I had been taken to the mortuary. I had been put on the slab for some time until a lay doctor thought the colour of my skin belied death. There was no discernible pulse but she sent for a doctor who saved my life.’

‘You are one lucky girl,’ the interviewer said. ‘Do you think it is magic?’

‘I believe in magic. But I think this was the work of God. If you believe that the work of God is magical, then I concur.’

‘How so?’

‘Because God cleansed my mind too. I do not know who did that to me because I lost my memory. The only thing I know is that I was pregnant when I was rescued. Whether I was married or not, whether I am Kenyan or Russian, whether I had a family here or not, those are questions which I am hoping somebody will bring to light.’

‘God must really love you.’

‘Of course. How else do you explain being beaten to death and refusing to die? Being discovered by a mad woman who led a police woman who rescued me? Being saved by a woman doctor after a mortician had formally declared me dead?’

‘I must say it is quite a miracle.’

‘You can say that again.’

Amy could not believe it. It was B. It was her little sister. But she couldn't remember what happened to her. she couldn't even remember she had had a family. That was healthy for her mind. She could live without the knowledge that she had had parents who had loved her. And her sister who had admired her to boot. That way she wouldn't feel the need to revenge. But there were two things she needed. The interviewer had said she was still detained in the hospital because of a hospital bill. And there would always be the danger that those who had wanted to kill her might think themselves in danger. Hell! They had come after her. they would always live with the fear tha B might one day recover her memory. And therefore they might want to ensure she was really dead. Kind of re-kill her. The only real debt she could repay her sister was to ensure she lived happily. In a way she could not have to fear for her life. She floated the idea to Sadia.

'How much do you want to sacrifice for your sister?' Sadia countered as if she didn't believe her.

'I would give her my life. I couldn't protect her that time we were attacked after church. if only I had taken her home earlier like I was supposed to, she wouldn't have been attacked. She would still have her memory. Her life.'

'You are willing to exchange her life for yours?' Sadia was serious.

'Yes,' Amy said quietly. 'Look, I don't have a life. I'm a marked woman. I can't go back to that country. I do not want to die for nothing. I want to ensure that my life is what ensures that my sister lives.'

Sadia said there was a way. There were people up north who would pay B's bills and give her a life insurance incognito. But Amy had to do some assignment for them. If she was really willing, she could give her some contacts in Khartoum. She would show Amy how to get there and the rest could quietly be arranged. Amy was more than willing.

Amy's movement to Khartoum was however fast-tracked. The customer at the bar who used to bother her kept on without relenting until Amy became wary of the likely consequences. Though she had learnt to sit at the counter on her own, he would come over and insist on sitting next to her even though it was clear she did not talk to him. He, like many of his countrymen, appeared to think it their right to be talked to by a barmaid, most of whom they openly called

prostitutes. Amy did her best to ignore him. He kept at her like a *mucege* to a cotton dress. She had had it up to here with him and she did not know how to shake him off. When she continued ignoring him, he began to abuse her. He was the first person in Juba to call her a prostitute. It hurt her but there was nothing much she could do. She knew she was stateless. Amy felt she had to leave lest she would do something she would later regret. If she remained here, she was not sure what she would do to this man. She told Sadia she was ready and Sadia took her to Khartoum.

‘Good afternoon again. This is your captain speaking. Please ensure you’ve fastened your seat belt. We are just over Lake Naivasha now and we will be landing shortly. Thanks for flying with us. We look forward to seeing you again. Goodbye and welcome to Kenya.’

Amy looked out of the window. She could just make out trucks that looked like small insects on the long black strip which was the Nakuru highway. Soon, saw Mombasa Road to her left as the plane lost height. Its tail wing banked a little as the nose pointed slightly up as it came down to the runway. The passengers braced themselves for the bump. It was brief and then the plane taxied, turned in a tight circle and came back. Soon it stopped and the passengers began disembarking. Amy went through immigrations. She had lost her vaccination card and had to be vaccinated again to be allowed through. This was one of the most bureaucratic airports she had seen. No one was waiting for her at the waiting area but there was a yellow taxi in the parking lot. The driver recognized her by her dress. He opened the door for her and closed it after she was seated. He drove out of the airport up Airport Road on to Mombasa Road. At Ole Sereni, he signaled left and joined the bypass. When he came to Langata Road, he turned right drove down past Wilson to Mbagathi Way, followed it up past High Rise Estate, up the road past the City Mortuary round-about and turned into *The Princess Paradise*. He parked at the front parking lot, opened the door for his passenger and took her small bag. He turned to her and gave her a key then watched as she walked to the hotel before he left. They hadn’t talked.

Amy went over to the front desk of the hotel and gave her identification. She was given a key. The porter took her bag and led her up a flight of stairs, then right to a door on the first floor. He turned a key and motioned her in. Amy closed the door and looked around. The room was in

order. Its far window looked out on to the swimming pool. There was a telephone and a low table on which there were two envelopes. She picked the bigger of the two and ripped it open. Inside were maps and directions to various locations. Everything was in order. She got out her clothes and went into the bathroom. Then she took the small envelope and opened it carefully. Inside were photographs of various people at hotel meetings. He recognized a number of the hotels. Then there were pictures of raiders at forest training camps. The face of the big man in government was familiar. She could swear she had seen it – or its likeness – before. But it was probably in the papers. Such faces became familiar after seeing them severally in the papers. There was no mistaking it. This man had something to do with the calamity that had befallen her sister. It was him who wanted her dead. She would beat him at his own game. The good thing with her was that she had nothing to lose. Only her sister to save. She would only take some time to visit her home, see the priest. And then she'd would be ready for the final contract.

The bui bui clad woman walks down the path that leads to the Chagaa Catholic church. She knows that at this time, young girls will be washing the church under the supervision of one of the church orderlies. That means too that the priest is sure to be around. Outside the church, she meets two girls with empty buckets of water. She knows they are on their way to the line of taps further away from the church where water for various church activities is drawn. They look surprised to see her and she understands.

'I'm looking for Father Piaggio,' she preempts their questioning glances. 'He's still around, I trust?'

The taller of the girls nods.

'I have to get him from his quarters,' she says. The visitor nods as the girl leaves, walking along the length of the church to disappear behind it. The other girl walks over to the taps further on and proceeds to fill the empty buckets. Then she carries one into the church. The woman waits. She draws back her sleeve and looks at the watch. It is a minute after five. Presently, Father Piaggio emerges from behind the church. He is in a black cassock whose hood has a cord running its length round his neck, the two ends looped together on his chest rather like a noose. The edges of white trousers above saddled feet peep under the cassock. He looks older than she

remembers and slightly bent like he is bending under the weight of...some cross. When he comes closer she notes his face is more lined than the image in her mind's eye. The pink skin looks stretched and leathery. The hair at the temples is visibly grey. He too, like the girls appears surprised to see the visitor.

'You...you... wanted to see me?' he stammers. She is momentarily lost for words as the memories flood back. She sees herself as a small girl her long hair framing her lowered brown face, her small palms held together and extended slightly forward in supplication with Father Piaggio, his much younger face under bristling dark brown hair leaning forward towards her, his finger making the sign of the cross on her forehead.

'Hallo...you wanted to see Father Piaggio?'

The woman snaps out of her reverie.

'Yes, sorry Father, my mind wondered a little.' She extends her hand. 'How is the church?'

'We are carrying on. The work of God has got to continue,' Father Piaggio says kindly feeling the awkwardness of his words.

'Father, I...I need some absolution,' she says watching the priest's face fall in incomprehension.

'What...do you mean. You are Muslim. Do I know you?' Father Piaggio says testing a hunch.

'I'm sorry to come to you this way Father,' the woman says as she lowers her veil. Father Piaggio gasps and rushes forward to hug her in spite of himself. They cling together for a moment before Father Piaggio disengages himself wary of his congregants and feeling eyes on his back. He steps back and regards her.

'Jesus, Mary and Joseph! I thought you are dead!'

'It is good that perceptions remain that way,' she says. 'I need absolution and I don't know where else to go.'

Father piaggio takes her arm and leads her away towards the kindergarten near the church then sits her under a mango tree just inside the gate. He prods her to say what happened to her but she insists on remaining anonymous. Eventually, he agrees to absolve her and walks towards the

church. She goes to change out of her black Muslim bui bui and then approaches the absolution booths.

‘Bless me father for I have sinned,’ she says once inside.

‘How long is it since your last confession?’

‘It must be two years.’

‘What sins do you wish to confess?’

‘I have three sins I wish to confess. For one, I have forsaken my duty to my parents and family.’

‘My daughter, we should leave all our cares to God. It is He who knows how the sun rises and how it sets.’ Father Piaggio squeezes his eyes to keep back the memories.

‘Second, I wish to confess that I killed a person,’ she is crying silently.

‘Go on,’ Father Piaggio feels two lines of hot tears cut down his own face.

‘And third, I wish to confess for something I wish to do against the commandments of the good book.’

‘My daughter, you know I cannot hear confessions of temptations. Instead you must resist the temptation of the devil,’ Father Piaggio says bewildered.

‘Still I wish to confess. The devil has built his castle in the hearts of those entrusted with justice and like Jesus in the temple, other means must be employed. I do not wish to carry my sins into heaven neither do I wish to rest blame on those for whom this action is intended.’

‘If I may ask, what is it that you intend to do?’ Father Piaggio says, his voice an empty reverberation in the booth.

‘That, Father, I do not wish to say. I would like you and me to leave the judgment of that to the almighty God for I do not wish to leave you feeling like you broke the code of the Priesthood.’

Father Piaggio thinks quickly. He can absolve her but retain her long enough to talk to her outside the booth to find out what it is she intends and possibly talk her out of it.

‘That is okay my daughter. You must commune with God so He can show you the right path. Go to the bench and recite ‘Holy Mary’ seven times. When you get home, read Psalms 32 verses 3-5, and 1 Corinthians 10.’

‘Thank you father.’

‘Go in peace my daughter. Your sins are forgiven.’

Father Piaggio sits in the booth for several minutes. He considers several lines of approach but no clear one comes to mind. He decides to go face her and let the theme direct itself as they talk. When he goes into the church, she is not there. He hurries outside, then quickly to the gate to the church compound but she is nowhere to be seen. He goes back to the booths and that is where he finds the long closely written letter in a beautiful cursive hand.

The nondescript white Town Ace van signaled left as it approached the sign that said ‘Two River Dam’ on the left, slowed then turned in. its tinted windows gave it an air of mystery and so did the single person in front, a woman, clad in a bui bui and a veil which only revealed her large white eyes even more accentuated by the light black eye shade. As the van caroused up the badly kept feeder road, the woman looked outside the window at the farms on either side and at the undulating green hills that surrounded her. The van slowed down near a wooden gate made of long planks of timber nailed to four upright ones the ends jutting out into the fence so that to open it, you only needed to push it heavily to your right or left. She parked by the roadside, got out of the van and walked to the gate. Her slim white trouser legs touched her saddled feet which jutted out of her black gown. The grey planks of timber that made the gate were rotten from continuous rain and she had to be careful opening it to keep it from disintegrating. She left it slightly open and walked down a path that had signs of once having been graveled but which was now in disrepair, dotted by small pools of muddy brown water. She felt a little like a reversed Rip Van Winkle as she walked down to the stone house with its browning corrugated iron roof. The compound was overgrown with tall kikuyu grass which only left a path wide enough for her. There was a burnt out shell of an old VW variant next to a bushy mango tree. The mounds of black sacking that half covered spoke of its last experience. The grass had similarly overgrown to hug the walls of the house rising to the level of the windows in places and completely enveloping

the bushes of rosemary that surrounded the house. The purple heads of the flowers struggled among various other weeds. The compound appeared deserted. The walls of the house were covered with green moss. Two rotting drums on either side of the main door opened their mouths on to the gutters above them. Her mind was dancing with an idea. Suppose she tipped a little of the powder into the two drums...just supposing? But she couldn't bear to think of the death of the cows, and their pets if they were still around. Besides, she had confessed and been absolved of her sins and she intended to go to heaven clean.

'Hallo, anyone home?' she called out loudly. There was silence, then she thought she heard a slight cough. She walked through the grass that came to her knees, very much aware of her tingling skin as she thought of creeping things and especially snakes. At the edge of the flat ground that formed the compacted base that was once flattened out of the hill to allow for the building of the house, she stopped, wrinkled her nose as she looked around. Then she bent and parted the grass near her feet. She jumped as the parting grass revealed a dead cat. It was Kitty. Her neck had been wrung and the sisal string that had been used to kill her was still round her neck. The rotted mouth was grotesque revealing the rows of teeth on one side of the head. Grubs were busy doing what they knew best. She gagged as she walked away.

She looked down the incline towards a forest of wattle. Barely seen, a few metres down the incline was a cowshed. She could see the backs and parts of the upper torsos of three cows, one white and brown, the others black with large patches of white. Their skin was stretched out on their hindquarters and the vertebral columns jutted out in an immoral way. Their ribs thrust out of their bodies as if competing to be counted. Two of the cows were facing the milking shed and greedily munching out of the feeding trough. The third was in the shed itself its head similarly lowered into the trough. The sound of jets of milk against a milking can told her that someone hidden by the long grass was busy milking. She called out again and the animals paused, looked in her direction and lowed. They then lowered their heads into the trough again. The jets of milk paused. A man rose from among the bushes next to the third cow and looked up at her. He said something she could not comprehend and so she raised her hand in some kind of wave.

Presently, a skinny brown mongrel came yelping through the grass. She was just in time to jump before the dog was on her. It jumped at her bringing her to the ground as she cried out. But she realized the dog was only trying to snuggle at her wagging its tail and snuggling next to her.

The farmer was just in time to pull the dog back as he arrived carrying a can of milk.

‘Hey woman, you should be careful running into people’s homes like that,’ he pulled the dog away trying to calm its excitement.

‘Sorry, I didn’t realize there was a dog,’ the woman said picking herself up.

‘You should thank God it didn’t do worse. It’s a very fierce dog,’ the farmer was saying. He had a rough black face and shaggy kinky hair. But it was still the same Kimutai of old. The sleeves of his dirty shirt that had once been white were rolled back to his elbows to reveal two long rough muscular arms. She didn’t remember him as ever having fancied white shirts.

‘Who are you and how can I help you,’ he demanded as he bent to roll back the left leg of his trousers which had unrolled itself as he ran to rescue the visitor from the dog. The dog itself was no longer straining at the piece of wattle hide that worked for a leash but made throaty noises that made the farmer glance now at it, now at the visitor to whom the dog’s attention was directed.

‘Ooh I’m so sorry. My name is....Fatima. I’m trying to trace a girl who used to live here. She was my classmate but I’ve never been able to trace her since the clashes that rocked this place in zero seven.’

‘Here you said? You must be mistaken. What was her name?’

‘They were two girls, actually. One, the younger I believe, was Mary Nduta and the other was Armelia Wanjiru, but we used to call her Amy.’

‘They lived here you said or in the neighbourhood?’

The woman considered that.

‘I’m sure it is this compound. I can still remember this house and that Mango tree where they used to hang clothes to dry. Do you have any daughters?’ she asked cautiously.

‘I’m sorry woman but I have been living here since I bought this farm from a white man.’

‘After independence?’ the woman asked casually.

‘Ye...’ the farmer started to answer, then paused and looked at the woman again. ‘Why do you ask? Who are you?’

‘Forget I asked. I only thought that the colonialists had thousands of acres of land, not pieces as small as this one here.’

The farmer was silent. A cloud of fear enveloped his face. He then narrowed his eyes and peered at the visitor’s eyes seeming to read there something that he had not seen before. He appeared to dismiss his misgivings although he shifted his feet uncomfortably. The woman thought it was time to go. She thanked him and told him she would try the next homestead – she could have been mistaken. She felt his eyes burrowing into her back as she went up the narrow path with the bushes brushing at her from both sides and stinging nettles sticking at her bui bui as she went. She felt the eyes escort her up the path to the gate, brood over her as she reversed and turned the van the way she had come. She threw one last glance. The man was still standing there, the old blue plastic milking bucket in his right hand, his left hanging limply down his side as his eyes followed her out of his view.

PRIZE GIVING DAY AT NAIVASHA PREMIER ACADEMY. Tabby WAs happy she had been able to bring her brother home again. Though he was uncomfortable with sitting together with his father, he had come all the same. And that was something. He had excused himself a while ago and missed the beginning of the ceremony. It was a big celebration for the family. Her mum and dad were talking again and her mum was graduating the following week. She was looking forward to the graduation to wipe away the stigma of having re-done a year so as to make it to the university. Her parents were happy about it and it looked like all would be well. She watched as a bui bui clad woman came and sat next to her father, then turned her mind to other things.

Jason had rushed to Naivasha town to grab a snack. He hoped to be back at her sister’s school in time to catch the action. She watched as the black girl served him his coffee.

‘You’ve forgotten the samosa,’ he told her.

‘I haven’t, it’s in the oven. Just give it a minute,’ she said.

The girl went back to the hotel kitchen. After a moment, she brought the samosa and waited to confirm whether it was warm to his liking. Just then, the face of the TV announcer came on interrupting the debate which he had been watching.

‘We interrupt this program to bring you breaking news. It has now been confirmed that a suicide bomber is currently holding the minister for agriculture and his family hostage at a secondary school in Naivasha. The details of the incident are not yet quite clear but the police say the only clue they have about the bomber is a red button and a letter they got from the young female. Apparently, the letter is addressed to her sister.’ The camera angled to take in the pink button, a shiny red button that had a glassy face within a pink hold and a single eye that formed a loop underneath for the thread. There was a handwritten letter beside it. It was in a beautiful cursive hand that slanted slightly to the right. Selina was struck dumb. She knew that button. And the handwriting. She couldn’t see the face of the girl because she had drawn a veil.

‘Good Lord, it’s her!’

‘Who?’ Jason who had also been watching the television said. Apparently, the waiter was thinking aloud.

‘I know that girl. She used to be a great friend of mine back in high school,’ the waiter said to no one in particular. She came over and sat beside him. Her mind was still far away. The customers in the hotel had all frozen in their various activities and had their eyes glued to the TV. Jason had also thought the handwriting was familiar. Very familiar.

‘You mean this bombing can happen right here in Naivasha?’ somebody was saying.

‘Yeah. Naivasha is very newsworthy. We are still on the net for having burnt those people in a house.’ Few people heard him. Few would have cared anyway.

‘Where did you school with her?’ Jason heard himself ask. His heart was tight.

‘St. Mary’s. She’s been missing for three years.’ The word Mary’s almost made Jason’s heart stop.

‘Was her name Amy?’ he asked eagerly, his blood still cold.

‘You knew her too?’

‘She was my girlfriend. All along I thought she was dead.’ Selina could only gaze open mouthed.

‘Listen, she is at a school here in town where my sister schools. I have to get there immediately,’ Jason said as he rose. Selina held his hand.

‘You must be Jason then. I’ll come with you.’ She explained to her employer that she was probably the only one who knew the clue to the letter and the red button. They hurried out of the hotel. When they got to the school, there were policemen all over. They had managed to evacuate most of the students but a group of about thirty people who had been sitting with the minister were still sitting there. The woman in the bui bui was standing among them. the upper part of her garment was opened around the torso revealing a l string of grenades tied to her waist. The police were milling around in their usual confused fashion as they waited for an idea to drop itself from somewhere. Luckily, it did. Jason explained that the minister was his father and that the girl with him was the best friend of the woman bomber. She could talk her out of it. they policemen led them to the scene. Selina noticed Tabby sitting next to the minister. Jason called his father and explained that the woman was his girlfriend. He requested his father to plead with her to take the phone. Luckily, Amy consented. Jason watched from far as she cautiously took the phone.

‘Amy, it’s me...it’s Jason. Please turn and look to your right. I’m in a red shirt.’

Amy turned slowly and saw them. Jason and Selina, her best friend, were standing among the group of policemen. What could they be doing here?

‘Amy, can we come and talk to you?’ Jason asked her.

Meanwhile, more policemen had joined them. They were standing in various strategic positions, their guns at the ready. A police inspector who had been briefed about the young man and woman who were friends to the bomber was consulting with Jason on how best to diffuse the situation. He finally agreed to let them try to talk the woman bomber. Jason and Selina warily approached Amy. They could not tell her expression because of the veil. But Selina saw the white eyes and the cloudy expression they wore and immediately knew it was her friend. They talked asked her to let the policemen take care of the situation. If Amy was afraid of what would

happen to her, Jason said, he would talk to his father. They would get her a lawyer. Anything, they beseeched her. Meanwhile, the police inspector talked to his men on his walkie-talkie. Some were perched at vantage points in the surrounding buildings. Nothing like this had been witnessed in Naivasha before. They had to take out the bomber at the earliest opportunity.

Eventually, Amy agreed to let a policeman come and untie the grenades off her waist. She had removed the veil and Jason beheld the face that had tormented him for three years. It had come to life again out of his dreams. He saw a policeman three stories on a building across the road from the school. They had finally breathed a sigh of relief. Suddenly, he saw the glint of a rifle as the barrel shone in the sun. he looked. The policeman was aiming his gun. He realized what was about to happen. If he covered Amy, the police would be forced to hold until they could renegotiate. He jumped in front of Amy as he pulled her towards Selina. The two bullets caught him in the chest. One went through his left shoulder blade straight into his heart. The other went through the two shoulder blades. They spun him so that he was lifted into the air to fall into Amy's arms. Amy held him as she cried out. The two fell to the ground in each other's arms.

POSTSCRIPT

The papers reported it all. Jason was buried two weeks later. His father had quit politics because it had blinded him and led to the death of his son. But his actions during the so-called post election violence had become public knowledge. He was forced to resign. People eagerly awaited his trial. I'm not saying it will happen. My work is to relay to you events as they happened. The tragedy of the young man had brought even more attention to Amy and the circumstances that had led to her attempted suicide bombing. A battery of lawyers had come up in her defense. Everybody wondered who was paying them. Meanwhile she stayed out of prison. The young man who had led the gang that had raped her sister eventually came out of the closet. He confessed his sins. His tribesmen had called him a fool and dared him to reveal what else he knew. He was reminded they were crimes. He went to prison for life. But there was nobody to ensure he remained there.

Works Cited

- Abcarian, Richard and Marvin Klotz, (editors) *Literature: The Human Experience*. St.Martin's Press. New York 1992.
- Akpan, Uwem. 'My Mother's Bedroom.' *Say You're One of Them*. Clays Ltd, St. Ives plc. London 2008.
- Amnesty International Kenya – *Amnesty International Report 2010*
<http://www.amnesty.org/en/region/Kenya/report-2010> downloaded 13/01/2013
- Barnet, Sylvan, Morton Berman and William Burton. *An Introduction to Literature*. Harper Collins Publishers. New York, 1993.
- Beah, Ishmael. *A Long Way Gone*. Sarah Crifon Books. New York 2008.
- Chukwuma, Helen. *Women's Quest for Rights: African Feminist Theory in Fiction*. Forum on Public Policy Paper.
- Clements, Robert J. *Anatomy of the Novella*. JSTOR Comparative Literature Studies vol. 9 No. 1, Mar. 1972. Penn State University Press 1972.
- Dallaire, Lt. Gen. Romeo. *Shake Hands with the Devil*. Arrow Books. Croydon, 2003.
- Elusive Justice* – A Status Report on Victims of 2007-2008 post-election violence in Kenya – The Kenya Section of The International Commission of Jurists and Kenya Human Rights Commission www.khrc.or.ke/resources/publications/doc.../45-elusive-justice.html downloaded 13/01/2013
- Engdahl, Horace. *Philomena's Tongue: Introductory Remarks to Witness Literature*. Google Books, 2008.
- Gachukia, Eddah, S. Kichamu Akivaga, (editors) *Teaching of African Literature in Schools*. Kenya Literature Bureau. Nairobi, 1978.
- Forche, Carolyn. Poetry of Witness. You Tube. www.google.m.youtube.com/watch?
Downloaded 2nd April 2013.

Forster, E. M. *A Passage to India*. @internet archive. archive.org/details/APassageToIndia_109 . downloaded 13/01/2013.

Gourevitch, Philip. *We Wish to Inform You that we will be Killed with our Families Tomorrow*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux . New York, 1998.

Kenya – Amnesty International Report 2010 <http://www.amnesty.org/en/region/Kenya/report-2010> downloaded 13/01/2013

Kenya National Commission on Human Rights (KNHCR) *Annual Report for the 2008/2009 Financial Year*

<http://www.knhcr.org/portals/0/Reports/2008-2009>

Kombani, Kinyanjui. *The Last Villains of Molo*. Acacia Publishers. Nairobi, 2004.

Kourouma, Ahmadou. *Allah is not Obligated*. Knopf Doubleday Publishers. New York 2011.

Matz, Jesse. *The Modern Novel, A Short Introduction*. Blackwell Publishing Limited. Victoria, 2004.

Nwanji, Ojukwu John. *Gender Feminism and the Girl Child*. Journal of Education and Social Research. Vol. 1 (4) November 2011.

Orwell, George. “Inside the Whale.” *A Collection of Essays by George Orwell*. Doubleday Publishers. New York, 1954.

Report on Post-Election Violence in Kenya – UN Human Rights Team

<http://blog.ushahidi.com/index.php/2008/03/20/report-on-post-election-violence-kenya-un-human-rights-team/> downloaded 13/01/2013

Schiffrin, Deborah. *Narrative as Self-Portrait: Socio-Linguistic Construction of Identity*.

Singh, Kushwant. *Train to Pakistan*. Pearson Education India, 2008.

The Kenya Section of the International Commission of Jurists. *Ethnicity, Human Rights and Constitutionalism in Africa*. Seragraphics Co. Ltd. Nairobi, 2008.

Wa-Mungai, Mbugua and George Gona. *Remembering Kenya: Identity, Culture and Freedom*. Amazon Books. 2008.

Wanyonyi Anthony Wasena, 'Witness Literature'. MA 2010: *Poetic Truth vs. Historical Truth*.

Wellek, Rene and Austin Warren. *Theory Literature*. Penguin Books Limited. Victoria, 1956.