FACING MT. ELGON

and other short stories

Compiled by

Brian Simiyu

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©Brian Simiyu, Isaac Ongere, Onyango Charles, Clare Asis, Scholastic Chao, Job Kabula

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This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, businesses, places, events, and incidents are either the products of the author's imagination or used in a fictitious manner. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental.

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Finally, to every reader who picks up this book, thank you. By engaging with these stories, you become a part of their journey

DEDICATION

This anthology is dedicated to;

- *The Storytellers and the Story-listeners.*
- *To the elders who keep the old tales alive, and to the youth who are bravely writing the new ones.*

May these stories serve as a bridge between generations, a mirror for our struggles, and a beacon for our hopes.

INTRODUCTION

This anthology, **Facing Mt. Elgon & other short stories**, is more than a collection of stories; it is a tapestry of voices emerging from the heart of Kenya, each thread coloured by the unique soil of its origin. The mountain itself, a silent, majestic sentinel watching over the lands of Kenya and Uganda, serves as a powerful metaphor for the themes explored within these pages—endurance, tradition, the weight of history, and the resilient spirit of the people who live in its shadow.

The stories you are about to read journey through the complex landscape of the human condition. They grapple with the painful grip of cultural rites and the defiant cry for change, as seen in "Facing Mt. Elgon" and "Barasa the Village Parrot." They delve into the spectral realm of justice and ancestral vengeance in "The Spirit of Vengeance," and navigate the treacherous paths of love, betrayal, and redemption in tales like "Home is Never Far" and "Grief of Happiness." From the poignant secrets kept "To My Grave" to the modern dilemmas of relationships in "A Bleeding Society" and "Marry Me Not," this collection showcases a remarkable range.

The authors, hailing from the very communities they often write about, do not merely tell stories—they breathe life into them. This anthology is a celebration of this new generation of storytellers, who are courageously facing their own mountains and, in doing so, are helping to shape the future of African literature. We invite you to listen closely, for in their voices, you will hear echoes of universal truths.

BARASA THE VILLAGE PARROT

WHO WANTED TO MARRY HIS STEPMOTHER?

Isaac Anyolo Ongere

#SON OF THE SOIL

Isaac Ongere is a graduate from Mount Kenya University. He has produced plays that have won national competitions, such as The Bill, Dark Shadows, Tempest at the Cathedral, and Kisima cha Machozi. He is also the author of Son of the Soil. He has received an award from Enhancing Border Africa for one of his Swahili plays

Chant!

"Oyaya Flora soumbakho vindu."

Whenever this arranged lyric, rhythmically chanted in its original tune as it is poured out of the village soloist's mouth while the instrumentalists spice it with their instruments, it sparks ears and penetrates deeper into the souls of the people of the Mlembe nation announcing to them with goose bumps that the season has come. A season to separate men from boys, and chaff from the grain. A season to slaughter bulls and celebrate without forgetting the condemnation of the evil caused by people.

In the Bukusu community specifically, the line is sung on a special occasion of circumcision in August according to the Bukusu traditional rite of passage calendar, one of the Luhya sub-tribes found in the western part of Kenya. For anyone who had committed an atrocity, a song would be composed and sung during this special

occasion for condemnation, (khuminya). Praise songs for warriors made up part of this celebration. This celebration was a community mirror that shaped responsible individuals to reflect accountable morals and discipline in the society. This was a ceremony of its own indigenous traditions which the whites brainwashed us to believe were demonic.

Atanasi, the famous Bukusu warrior, brought the initiation practice into existence during the early days of Bantu immigration to Kenya. He gained experience and skills when he single-handedly skinned alive a giant killer snake and thereafter chopped its head off at Mount Masaba with a well-sharpened machete. The snake had terrorized villagers for a long span of time. Praises were made of his bravery and his name was written on the hearts of many. To show bravery and maturity, it was a necessity for every Bukusu son of the origin of Mwambu and Sela to undergo this initiation by cutting the foreskin. Elders sat around a small, round, moulded clay pot (enyungu) full of traditionally brewed brew (kamalwa), sieving as they spat blessings to vasinde, the young boys awaiting to undergo the wrath of a knife. This was to initiate them from childhood into manhood.

You were to show bravery even when going through the torment of this tradition. It showed that you had become a warrior and a young man ready to have a family and make your own decisions. Any young man ready to go through this initiation rite was to approach his father for preparedness and arrange the required items. This ceremony was incomplete without aunties and paternal uncles. It is believed to this day that ladies have a soft spot for any brave man; a privilege any Luhya man couldn’t afford to lose. That even explained why whenever

a lady fell into the enticing arms of a Luhya man, if she was your wife, that is when your marriage was stormed by thunder and lightning.

Don’t be surprised when I tell you Flora was the third wife of Kuchikhi. Kuchikhi was the richest man in our village back in those green days before the white man came to explore this virgin land and introduced us to the roots of modernization to our attraction. Wealth was measured- by the number of children, wives, and domestic animals someone had. Kuchikhi was a household name in Mumbo village. His name was uttered with respect of the highest order. Having begotten a lot of heroes and heroines, he was known in every corner of this land. This automatically gave him the privilege of being a key decision-maker in the inner kitchen cabinet of the council of elders.

He ran errands and pulled the strings of the shows in this council of elders’ kitchen. “Where elders are gathered nothing goes wrong”.

Having said so much, every market has its own mad person just like this Barasa, the village parrot who wanted to marry his stepmother, Flora. You don’t trespass where your father brought you through. Having been brought up in the right ways by his father Kuchikhi, Barasa grew up as a feared warrior having led many successive raids from a young age. His heroic acts made it easy for him to be loved by the hearts of many maidens. Maidens could easily get into fights as each one claimed she belonged to him. It was so serious that others could even go to the extent of seeking a witch doctor's charm to keep him for themselves. Despite the fact that Barasa knew their interest, he never gave them a listening ear.

The maidens finally fell out of the race when he finally met what softened his heart during one of the village night discos. This maiden's spectacular beauty and her soothing vocals struck and melted Barasa's heart. Indeed, this lady was an extremely pure beauty which was still blossoming. A maiden blessed to be the epitome of exotic beauty standards. Honestly, some ladies were far from beauty while others were beautiful from far, but this one was a gift from Wele khakaba. Her name was Nekesa, meaning that she had been born during the harvest season. She was a village star because of her soothing, talented, and melodious voice. As she sang on that chilling night at the village event, people were dancing with their partners; men holding women with both hands controlling the waist as the females' hands rested on the males' shoulders. Isukuti spiced the dance as others shook their Kamavega (shoulders) in- a vigorous- manner. Barasa's mind sank into this singing voice as he fell deeply in love. After many wars, this warrior had finally been conquered with no weapons, just a smooth voice that had shaken and stormed this standing tree. He wanted to inquire more about her since he had never encountered her in this village. Barasa moved to one of his childhood friends. The maidens who he was dancing with had simply taken advantage of him, knowing that they were using him to be close to Barasa.

"Hey Wafula," approaching him as they moved aside from the noise, Barasa enquired, "Who is she?"
Wafula asked, "You mean the singer?"
"Who else do you think I am asking about?" Barasa continued.
Wafula had every detail of all the ladies present and hence he had no problem informing Barasa.

“The singer is Nekesa,” he started, “she inherited this singing talent from her grandmother Nangekhe who came from the lineage of celebrated village singers of the early days. History narrates that Nangekhe’s beauty and singing talent during her early days melted our grandfathers’ hearts. Any man seeing such a lady of substance could not stop at anything to have her even if it meant bringing a breathing lion. Her father’s compound was always full of suitors daily staking their bets.

It is said that a brave, young warrior who had killed a lion and brought it to their compound finally became her chosen and they lived happily thereafter,” Wafula finished as he joined the maidens who were awaiting him.

Barasa was determined to marry this maiden. Time was running as fast as the seasons which passed within no time. Each day as the sun set to the west, Barasa’s love for Nekesa deepened in tandem with the depth of his soul.

A clear message to all maidens that a suitor of their preference had chosen this particular blossoming flower. Nekesa was a flower with detailed beauty and no maiden could dare make the mistake of challenging her in the village contest. Competing with her was degrading yourself. It was so ironic that even beautiful maidens automatically appeared ugly whenever her presence was detected amongst them. Not that I am in her defence. I am a living testimony who, with my naked eyes, will proudly brag, “I the son of the soil,” witnessed this kind of raw cardinal beauty. Therefore, I will not be biased when giving credit where it is deserved. Prove me wrong if you

have the guts when I state that, “Kizuri chaliwa na wengi,” attractive is dished out amongst many.

Time waits for no man as Fate twisted its direction and Barasa became a laughing stock. It was so heart-breaking that his biological father Kuchikhi married Nekesa.
“How could my father marry the one I intended to make my one and only better half?”

It’s a paradox. To date I can’t create words to explain the magic in this twisted script. Those questions kept ringing in Barasa’s mind. The culture did not allow him to question his father with the many queries that ran in his brain. Barasa was heartbroken and frustrated so much. He could not stand this to the point of being caught in the webs of drinking kamalwa. He was no longer that respected and glorified warrior. His dedication developed into drinking from morning to evening. His father had taken away his happiness. It would have been easier to bear if it had been another thing, but not this beautiful flower Nekesa. He drank and slept in trenches and bushes. Now a hopeless man, he was celebrated only by flies wherever he passed. Any secret in the village could be found at his exposition, and that is how he became the village parrot. This man was so depressed that he became a petty village thief.

The funny thing is how he went on to propose to marry his stepmother Flora to his father. Thus, the origin of the song; “Oyaya Flora soumbakho vindu.”

FACING MT. ELGON
Brian Dredan Simiyu

Dredan is a teacher of English and Literature. He holds a BED Arts from Kibabii University. Dre, as known by his audience, is an experienced writer having been published twice. His first book, a novel, was published online by Smashwords. His secondo book is an anthology of poems, African Extreme Poetry published by Elong'o Publishers in 2020. He is a known social media poet holding a brand called DRE Arts.

Sindebe village was the eye of the Elgon. The villagers were termed as the servants of the mountain. Every second moon they travelled to the Elgon to say their prayers to Were khakabha, the almighty being. They walked with their animal sacrifices side by side headed for the sacred slopes that led into the dark cave under the mighty Mountain Elgon. They whispered softly as they walked. Some talked about the experiences they would have later in the night, the dances of the night.

Adeyo, Alumahale's daughter, was coming of age. Her father, a village council member, was known for his boldness in issues concerning life. He made bold statements in every sitting the council had, and they were echoed and taken into account. One time, when Sagle, the village wrestler, thought he had grown strong enough to engage other people's wives, he found himself in cold fire after Alumahale walked into the council and asserted that he be thrown into exile. Sagle was ordered to leave Sindebe village for 10 years for his dirty behaviours.

Adeyo was a known dancer, for her waist swung like trees swaying in a windy afternoon. The flexibility that played under her agile body was one of a kind, admirable and tempting. On the dance floor, her face played- smiles of the ocean sending breezes to those watching admirably. Her feet, full of bangles, said songs that ran adjacently with the beats of the wide weird drums that were hit so hard on the night. Adeyo oh Adeyo khwa Alumahale, she rung lust and admiration among men watching her moves. All the other dancers were forgotten. Abole, her envious stepsister, would stop and walk off the floor in disgust. Cheers and jeers would pour out from the crowd.

"Aaadeyo! Aaadeyo! Aaadeyo! Aaadeyo..."

And the drums would play scents of her agile waist. Her feet creating a rhythm of life and laughter. Adeyo oh.

The night ran with excitement. After the dances, the wrestlers walked into the stage to entertain the way. The elders would nod when a wrestler jumped into the floor. Alumahale faced the ring with smiles. Wrestling was his favourite sport that ran the night. He, as whispered around the villages and the neighbourhood, was one of the greatest wrestlers to ever grace the ring.

He threw every wrestler to the ground and walked with confidence around the villages. That's the reason he easily found another wife. His younger wife, Yandya, walked herself into his life because of much admiration and love for his strength.

When wrestling started, Samboja, the young man from Afuela village, stole the show. He proved the night that there can be a wrestler away

from Sindebe. Moons after moons, every wrestler that won the match was from Sindebe.

The night fell off the hills. When the sun rose, Adeyo was already walking home from the river. A sizeable pot stood on her head as she swung around her waist up the road. The agility that faced her proved her readiness for the knife, which her father really wanted to see of her. Adeyo, however, despised the act and never embraced any conversation leading to the idea of circumcision. She walked away from her father on several occasions that he threatened to beat her up but she could not just listen. A father cannot walk with pride around the village if his daughter is uncircumcised. Since the season was approaching, Alumahale sensed the need to prepare his daughter. He tried to pull her into the idea but Adeyo played hard and showed 'fear'. Alumahale grew worried of the situation.

"My wife, our daughter seems reluctant of the knife. Liondo has reached the stage of harvest, but cannot be harvested. What do we do, mama Adeyo?" Alumahale said to Yandya, his circumcised wife.

"This is hard for me my husband. Our daughter seems reluctant to adhere to our norms. How can we talk her into it?" Lamented Yandya. Her face sank into worry while her voice broke down to nothing. She sat with her legs spread on the bare floor, stretching her head on the left side while her weak eyes stared at her husband.

"Adeyo must accept what I say to her. Were Khakabha won't spare her stubborn head." He said, getting on his feet as he peeps outside. "Adeyooooo! Adeyoooo!" He called.

"Papa, you're calling me." Adeyo came running.

"Yes, my daughter. Relax your body on the floor. We must speak of your thoughts." Alumahale said, pushing himself around his stool. He stretched his hand to put his walking stick on the floor. "My daughter.

The season is here and you're ready. You're nubile, with beauty and character. One thing is missing to complete the woman you are, circumcision. Have you decided yet?"

"Yes papa. I don't want to face the knife. Not now, not ever. Why is it a must for me to get circumcised? The other day you said you don't want me to be like the uncircumcised neighbours. Are they dead? They are living happily." Adeyo responded with vigour.

"My daughter, I don't want to be termed disrespectful. Our cultural values demand that every member of our community be circumcised. So, you have to be circumcised. Nekhali sina tawe, I would have slapped you." Alumahale said in anger and walked out of his younger wife's hut. Adeyo looked at her father as he walked out with pity. She loved her father but then some strings of modernity were pulling her away from impressing him. She held her breath for a few seconds then stood up to walk out before her mother stopped her.

"My pumpkin, you know I love you. This whole thing is upon you to decide. I was circumcised but that is not an issue. Take your space and also consider your father. You're his most loved daughter. All your other sisters faced the knife, it's only you who's left yaya." Yandya was known to be a woman of a few words. Her advice to her only child could be termed as the longest she has ever spoken to someone. Adeyo

said nothing. She burst out and ran into the forest where she found consolation every time she felt below the sky.

The dark bushy forest covered her with privacy which gave her all the space to cry her pain out. She sobbed and sung around the bush. Her sorrowful voice still felt enticing, pouring fragrance onto the bush with the songs. After a hard-fought hour of cries and songs, she fell asleep under a mulembe tree.

"Hey lucky girl. What are you doing here, at this time of the night?" She was woken up by a deep voice from a strange woman. She looked up and saw a face pouring smiles across her sight. She sat up so fast and pulled herself away from her.

"Move away from me! Who are you?" She screamed at her.

"I am Setupelu. I come from the village neighbouring this forest. What are you doing here, at this time? It is late little lady." She sheepishly smiled at her while maintaining the distance.

"I am Adeyo. The daughter of the greatest wrestler, Alumahale. I came here to relax my brain but fell asleep." She responded with little fright.

"Oh, Adeyo the famous dancer. You're known across the mountains, and the valleys, and the rivers, and the villages. I heard that you are to be circumcised this coming season. Are you ready?

"Who told you I want to be circumcised? The creepy culture of my people cannot move me. I will find a way out." Adeyo cried out.

"Let me help you little lady. Let me help you my little lady. I am circumcised but I don't want any more of this to happen to other girls.

Let me help you little lady." Setupelu went down to herself, sympathizing with the little frightened Adeyo.

Everyone around the village was talking. Group after group, people gathered to wonder together about the disappearance of Adeyo. They never had a clue of where she could have disappeared to. Young men after young men were sent into the forest to look for the pretty dancer but no one could find her. Her father, Alumahale, took long walks around the village in wonder and awe, not understanding what his most- faithful and loved daughter had in mind to walk away from him. Or was he wrong to push her into circumcision? Was he the problem, to threaten her on the face?

Yandya, the ever-silent woman in the village, a woman who had no teeth to chew so many words with fellow women, sat in her hut confused and infused with fear. Friends of the family walked into her hut and out consoling her. Making her feel their company which never was any close to what she wanted, Adeyo, her only daughter. She was worried because the mountains could have eaten her. Or the waters of the river could have swallowed her, and spit her body down the valley. Or the lions of the night could have torn her apart, to pieces of fresh meat for his lioness and cubs. She settled at nothing but fear. Every touch of their voices fell on a deaf ear. No one has ever disappeared for a night and showed after the next day. Not the day after the next day. Not even days of forever. Just like many other young ladies, she could have been lost in the woods, never to be seen again by them.

Adeyo woke up early enough as usual. Setupelu and she walked to the river in the company of other young girls. Girls of age. Girls in the stage of circumcision but never wanted to face the painful sharp knife.

"My father must be so angry, and worried now. How does he feel about this day? Many are going to be circumcised, but I am not. I'm a happy worried girl now." Adeyo fished out her feelings to the group.

"You must not worry. We are together in this." Sepetule said tapping her back.

Sindebe village was full of dances on the eve of the circumcision rituals. The floor was maaaad! The dancers shook around their waists in a rhythmic sense.

Their faces swung with smiles that took after the drum beats. A dance without Adeyo, however mad it'd look, can never be of brilliance and admiration. Abole took her place and rhymed so well, even though she never stole the sights Adeyo did. Alumahale was seated among the elders, and his face showed disguise. He looked sad and uncomfortable. He was not a part of the ritual dances done by girls of age that night. Asego felt the difference in his friend's face and sitting posture.

"Alumahale, my friend. I know you're not well but this is important for all of us. Speak blessings to your daughters, who are dancing away shame and fear. Give them what they deserve for the gods are waiting."

Alumahale turned his ugly face into a box office of smiles just to impress everyone. The night went down to earth and the morning came. When the birds started yapping out songs of the morning, the girls were up, well prepared by their respective parents. They were set in brilliant attires, animal hides covering their nakedness.

Their faces were shining with decorations that gave them a beautiful outlay. Abole the dancer, Adeyo's cousin, led the way. The girls were

walked through the forest to the Elgon. Every one of them escorted by their mother and aunt. They were going for the knife. To face the mountains and receive Were Khakabha's blessings before facing the knife. Yandya, Adeyo's mother, escorted her step daughter. The daughter to her husband's second wife who had died a few moons away. Her name was Abole, the dancer. When Abole saw the clean knife reflecting the rays of the brilliant yellow sun, she ran mad. Her madness woke her feet up and took after the path running across the forest, an escape route. Since young men were not allowed into the scene of circumcision, no one could easily catch her. The older women took after her across the thick bush.

The group of women running after Abole had the taste of the rough race. Some broke halfway through the run while some injured their fragile feet while on the walk. No one loved the race. After a lengthy run Abole emerged out of the forest and found herself in a village camp, flooded with young girls like her. She fell on the ground and fainted. She was exhausted from the long cutting race that led her through every bush in the dark forest. Immediately she was taken into a hut, the tired women arrived pulling themselves with heavy feet.

"Have...ha...haaave you seen a young girl run through here? She's dressed in preparations for circumcision. Have you?" Asked one of the women.

"Yes, we have. She is now in safe hands. You can leave." Shouted from the back, Adeyo took a stiff stand before her village women.

"Adeyo! What are you doing here? Everyone has been talking about you.

Are you now a rebel?" The woman asked in wonder. Her name is Alukhale, the seer.

"I am not a rebel. I am just a girl who wants to see no more girls suffer from your ill culture. We must stop this! We must stop this!" She commanded the congregation of girls that now stood behind her.

"WE MUST STOP!"
"WE MUST STOP!"
"WE MUST STOP!"
"WE MUST STOP!"
"WE MUST STOP!"

They sung as they pushed themselves towards Adeyo's village women who turned their backs to them and rushed away into the forest. They could not stand the faces of the angry and hungry young girls. They ran and never looked back.

Their knives were left to rot in the bushes as they served a run for their lives into the village square. Never again to pick them from the dark bushy forest.

THE SPIRIT OF VENGEANCE

Onyango Charles

Blood Bath in Jimo Olwalo

Yesterday I went to bed feeling a slight headache and neck ache. Sleep deserted me for some time. I buried myself in social media seeing this and that. Sleep started visiting me around 1 am. I turned and tossed, lulling myself to sleep. It finally took me. It is in the dead of the night, that time when wives are turned for late supper, that I travel to the land of spirits.

The spirits take me to Osuoume Market. Here I meet a familiar face. A colleague from Mabera. It is surprising that he has a shop at Osuoume Market. We converse. He tells me that the market is flowing with money. One-thousand-shilling notes start raining along the way. I pick until I can't hold anymore. I decide to leave the money heist scene with full pockets of notes. I embark on a journey back home. I follow the main road towards Kilong River.

As I approach Kilong, I see a charged crowd moving towards me. In front are faces so familiar. I see a grandson of Onyango and Nyawara handcuffed and being dragged along. Apart from the handcuffs, he is tightly tied with sisal ropes. From his looks, he is badly bruised.

Holding the end of the rope is another grandson of Onyango and Nyawara. I move closer to them to inquire.

The spirits fly with me to around Kanyaramba Ogelo. I see a procession of mourners heading towards Onyango and Nyawara's

home. I cannot locate who has died but it looks like a high-profile death.

Then I see the young man remove a handcuff from his pocket and cuff his hands, rolling on the ground swearing that he will not remove the handcuffs until the dead person is buried. A scuffle ensues and the crowd descends on him. There is an agreement that he should be frogmarched to Pap Onditi Police Station! A group of rowdy youth volunteered to perform the duty.

Again, the spirits take me back to Kilong. I bypass the captive and move straight to the crowd behind him. I spot my uncle, son of Onyango and Nyawara, approaching. I hear him lament that I'm going to spoil their plans of punishing the errant boy. I move closer; he laments that it was not his plan but the community's. In the crowd are familiar faces of sons of Nyaila and Wanda baying for the blood of the boy. My eyes are held on to three men. Two from Nyaila in coats, carrying a bag on their left shoulders and a bible in their right hands. One from Kawanda, carrying a stick of authority. They try to seek my attention but I ignore them.

A stone's throw away, the boy has collapsed and the crowd descends on him. I run to save him. The spirits give me the strength to cut through the crowd. I reach him; he looks at me with sympathy. He loudly cries, 'Wuodnyochietha, don’t let these people kill me!'

I turn mad at the crowd and yell at them, 'Why do you want to kill him? What crime has he committed? If you want to hand him to the police, must you kill him first? And by the way, is this the direction to Pap Onditi? Why are you taking him to Osuoume?'

'We are taking him to Kagwenge where he was drinking to know the source of the handcuff!' the crowd hissed angrily back at me.

"Even if that was the case, must you kill him? Do you want to kill him the way you killed Josep Ochutho, my grandfather?'

When I mentioned the name Josep Ochutho, the crowd vanished. The handcuffed boy transfigured into a very bright light and then there was total darkness that lasted a minute. In the darkness, I was alone. Then a beam of light shone on the spot where the boy had lain. The body was badly bruised, blood oozing from the back of the head and the entire backside. Then, he turned to look at me.

The face was not his but that of my once slain grandfather, Ochutho Kokwany. I was not moved. The spirits were still with me. He turned and took my hands and led me towards Osuoume. I let his flowing blood drench my hands. He took me up the hills until we reached a desolate place. From afar, I could see Rakwaro Secondary School. He sat on a stone and looked at me straight in the eye: "This is where I breathed my last, Wuodnyochietha. This is where I excreted on myself. This is where my body was lain for twelve hours. This is where people threw heaps and heaps of twigs on me. This is where they killed me." I saw tears of sadness and vengeance in his eyes. 'They may have buried my body but my spirit is still hovering around crying for justice! Please tell my story to the world. Tell them that I was innocent. Tell them that my blood has refused to dry on this rock.' I saw a rivulet of blood flow from his veins down the rock and form an oxbow lake around the rock.

"Please tell me more about what happened?" I implored him.

"Don't worry, I will visit you again with the full story..."

He smiled at me and vanished into thin air. A butterfly flew and perched on my shoulder and whispered to me, "Please tell my story!"

I woke up and found my body drenched in sweat. My headache gone and my heart panting to write. Here I am now, waiting for the spirits to visit me with the whole story. When they do, the story will be told verbatim from the voice of the spirits of my late grandfather Josep Ochutho.

A dark cloud covered the sky that morning. The year is 1996. An abomination had been committed by sons of the soil to their kinsman. The whole village smelt of blood. The winds refused to blow. The trees had no strength to sway nor whistle. A sad cry of an owl is what ushered in dawn. Strange, wasn't it? It was on a Monday morning. As my siblings and I trod to school it was strange to note that the morning dew smelt of blood. The Assembly Bell was rung at 7:00am instead of the usual 7:45am. The head teacher, Mr. Ojunga Aiti, in a solemn tone, broke the news of the abomination. He released us to go home and warned that our faces should not be spotted at the scene of the crime. His words were law to be obeyed and not to be questioned, so we obliged. Whatever we knew was that Joseph Ochutho was beaten to death by the villagers on account of stealing a goat. This is the story I knew until four days ago when his spirit visited me pleading for his story to be heard; the story of a spirit full of rage and a face imprinted with vengeance asking: "Why did you kill me?"

His spirit promised to visit me. As is the nature of anxiety, I waited impatiently for the second visit. The more I waited the more the spirit kept quiet. The gods are wise, so are the spirits; they leave no contacts. So yesterday, the spirits sent me a crazy sign. I developed a corona-like flu; I sneezed the whole day, my veins overstretched. The more I took piriton tablets, the more I sneezed through my nose, through my mouth, through my ears and finally my eyes gave them moral support through hard tears that soaked my whole face. My face became swampy. My anus, feeling neglected in the sneezing competition, decided to accompany- every sneeze with a congruent magnitude of deafening thunderstorms of farts. My whole body became a weather station. Those were missed calls from the spirits.

Sleep divorced me for some time. At around midnight when spirits take control of the physical realm, they sent me a heavy head. Too heavy and bulky to be turned. Then they threw me into the dark abyss of the underworld. From nowhere, I found myself at a dining table. The guests looked familiar if not family. At the farthest end were two elderly male and female; their smile alone made me identify them as Okwany Ochutho and Adhiambo Nyoluga, my great grandparents; beside them on the right side, I saw Joram Nyamanga and Olodhi Onoro Okekakelo; on the left I saw Osano Nyamanga, Daniel Kisera, Onyango Nyochietha, Otieno Kabani and Lucas Aduda; then closely next to me was him— Joseph Ochutho. I shook a bit and faced the other side only to be met by the sight of Agery Owadgi Rina with his head bowed on the table.

In front of each one of us was a golden glass served to the brim with what looked like red wine. Everyone tossed the golden glasses and

galloped the content. I hesitated to drown my own. When I lifted my glass to my mouth, the content turned into blood! It bubbled and split on the table. It formed a rivulet of thick paste that dripped in droplets onto the ground under the table. I peeped to see what was happening under the table and what do I see—the droplets were drawn into a fountain pen. A whisper into my ears, "You are too young to dine with the spirits. Pick the pen, my grandson, use the ink of my own blood to tell my story!" I obliged.

With the pen in my right hand, I erected my head and saw the table members smile and wave to me and in unison, they chorused, "Go and tell the world the truth."

With those words they turned into beautiful butterflies and flew out of the room save for my captor, Ochutho Kokwany, and my uncle Agery Owadgi Rina still burying his head on the table. I tried to shake him up but my captor signalled me to stop.

"Come, let's take a ride!" The spirit of Ochutho took my left hand and off we went. I closed my eyes tight during the whole ride in the wilderness of the underworld. When I opened my eyes, I found myself in a lonely grass thatched hut. We are seated on a metallic bed with a 2millimeter-thick worn-out multicolored shreds of a mattress. Next to it, is a translucent tobacco-stinking Raymond "Kalara" blanket.

At the centre of the roof, I can see the clear sky outside, full of stars. I cannot locate where we are.

"This is where they picked me," he spoke.

"Where is this place?" I inquired.

"This is Obonyo Ogonda's home. You know my wife died in the late 1970s during the first cholera outbreak in Kenya, on her way to Pap Onditi. She left behind three sons and two daughters. I decided not to remarry but to take care of my children. However, you know a man's body has excess heat that if not transferred to a woman, may burn him up to death. When Obonyo Ogonda joined his ancestors, I took it upon myself to ensure the wife dies not of cold. I inherited her and so here is where I spent most of my nights. The wife was called Zippy, so was my late wife."

"You loved the Zippys too much. There must be something special to ladies with this name," I intoned.

"Hahahoohoo!" The spirit of my captor roared and choked in laughter. "Nyakwar Onoro, you are spoilt.

You know it is wrong to make a spirit laugh. May your ancestors make you meet a Zippy in your life! As I was saying, it was on a Sunday evening at around 8:00pm, when my son Agery Nyamanga knocked at my door. He told me he had an emergency the following day and he has been forced to sell his own goat. He requested me to take him to Kamgan at Oselo's home to sell his goat. I was hesitant but he mentioned that on our way back, we may branch at Kapiere Dongo for a 'lebo paa' of 'Amuna'. On mentioning that, my appetite arose, I licked my tongue, picked my walking stick, threw my brown coat over my shoulder and off we went." He paused a bit and faced the sky sighing ruefully. He patted me on the back and told me to record that in my notebook. I removed my notebook and inscribed the details using the

blood-inked fountain pen. After every full stop, the punctuation mark would change to a human skull oozing fire from the nostrils.

"I am through with the first episode, Wuod Okwany."

"Good. That's why I chose you!"

"But why me if I may ask?"

"A good question. When my father, Okwany Ochutho, sired me, he was aged. He left me in the custody of Orodi Nyabolo and Olodhi Okwany, my brother. He could have left me to Nyamanga Okwany but Adhiambo Nyoluga adamantly refused because there was no love lost between her and Ongere Nyar Abel, the daughter-in-law. In fact, my home was just next to the home of your father, Nyochietha. Even when Nyochietha was seducing Nyodando, I used to help him entice her by ensuring there was constant meat supply in the house when she came visiting. In 2004, your father joined us and informed me that he has sent you to the university to learn how to write. I told him I shall wait for you and now the time is ripe." This revelation made me shed tears. Tears of admiration. Tears of wanting to talk to my father and thank him for believing in me.

"We reached Oselo's place. We found him and bargained the price of the goat. We settled at 250/-. He however told us that he did not have enough cash and so we could return the following day in the morning. We pleaded with him to even give us even part of the money but he adamantly stood his ground. I told Agery that morning is not far. So, we left but I told Agery that with or without money, we cannot go back home with empty heads. We decided to go and write our mouth at Kapiere Dongo with the knowledge that we will be moneyed the

following day. She accepted and gave us 'lebo paa' to locate our heads. We returned home. Agery went to his simba while I branched to Kogonda's abode. I arrived and Zippy welcomed me.

We ate and went to bed to continue from where we stopped the previous day. Then around midnight we hear footsteps all over the compound...."

He paused and drew in a gallon of breath and loudly exhaled puffs of choking air that made me breathless a bit. I glanced at his face and found it contorted into a gothic shadow of anger. I saw tears of blood dancing in his eyeballs. A thread of salty peppermint of sweat cascaded his forehead. The ghostly nature shook me a bit and I found myself letting out a loud fart that made the spirit burst into a corroded echo of laughter that relaxed his facial veins. I thanked the gods for sending me the fart.

"When we heard the footsteps, we placed a comma to our night time gymnastics. We eavesdropped keenly following the footsteps with our ears and hearts.

The sound of the footsteps grew louder as they approached the house. We heard them surround the house. Our hearts played hop and skip in our chests. Then, there was a systematic three loud knocks on the wooden door that is a preserve of secret detectives or government officials: Who is that? I found my voice.

'I'm the local area Sub Chief, and I would like to have a word with you?'

'At this time of the night?'

'Kwaru, why are you disturbing my sleep?' intoned Zippy finding her voice at last.

'Open this door or we break it!' echoed voices round the house.

'Okay, I'm coming out. Who am I not to heed the call of Ruoth. I'm a law-abiding citizen.' I responded and reached for my trousers. Out of anxiety and fear, two buttons around my zip area popped and hit the wall. My sisal woven belt helped me to hold the trouser. With help of the wall, I traced my way to the door. There were murmurs and silent war cries among the shadowy figures surrounding the house. I could hear Zippy silently following me. I reached the door knob and turned it to open the door. Before I could figure out who were standing at the door, several rays of bright spotlights blinded my vision, a huge hand grabbed me by my shirt collar and an electric slap punched on my face that printed a wavy and spiral galaxy of stars in my eyes. Another double slaps on my both cheeks made my ears to play a conglomeration of Reggae and Lingala tunes with shrilling Ongengo sounds. I felt a metallic front of a soldier like boots scoop the heart of my anus, sending me rolling on the ground three times.

'Stop beating him. Let me interrogate him first!' I heard a voice loudly oozing orders. They militantly helped me sit on the wet grass at the centre of the compound. I could hear the voice of Zippy wailing that they should not kill me in her compound. She lamented that she cannot withstand losing two men in her compound. She just buried her own husband the other year and now a blood thirsty group of youths have come to grab her inheritor from her bosoms.

When I raised my face, I could identify the faces. Standing directly in front of me was the Area Sub Chief. Next to him were three village elders; one from Nyaila and two from Kawanda. Surrounding me were rowdy youths from the two sub clans.

'Why did you steal a goat?' asked the local administrator.

'Which goat?' Snow drops of slaps and kicks rained on me.

'Stop it!' cried the interrogator. 'Wuod Okwany, did you sell a goat in Kamgan this evening?'

By mentioning Kamgan, I recalled that I accompanied Agery to Oselo's home to sell a goat. But the goat belonged to him. Is helping one to sell his goat tantamount to stealing? I boiled up and rose from the ground and held the interrogator by his waist and yelled:

'Is that why you people are beating me? Who has told you that the goat was stolen? Who has told you that we sold a goat in Kamgan? Why couldn't you ask me about the same without torturing me? Why are you treating me like a criminal before you gather enough information? The goat in question belonged to my son Agery. Who has told you, that I, Ochutho Okwany, stole the goat? Who is the complainant? Is it you? You? You? Or you?' I asked pointing at different dark faces around me. 'Just relax. I'm sorry for what has happened. You young men, I've not instructed anyone to beat the suspect. Can you wait for instructions from me? Jaduong Ochutho, I've received information from Chief Adundo, that you crept into Oselo's compound with a goat in the company of your son, Agery. Oselo reported to the chief that you two looked suspicious and that's why he couldn't pay you. Now that you claim that the goat belongs to Agery. May you accompany us

to your brother Nyamanga's home to ascertain the truth. I'm sorry for the actions of my youths. To my mother Zippy, I'm sorry for what has happened to your love and for disturbing your sleep. I promise to return him to you alive before dawn. Just allow us go with him to know the truth.' concluded the administrator.

I stood and tidied myself. I went back to the house for my walking stick. Zippy followed me to the house and tightly hugged me. She bitterly sobbed on my chest, pasting it with tears and mucus. I promised her that I'll come back safe and sound. She released me to go. I left her kneeling in her sitting room praying and crying to her God. The journey to my brother's home was event free apart from the ranting, grunting, yapping and yelling of the bloodhounds who were baying for my blood. They promised to teach me a lesson of my life if they confirm that the goat was stolen. As we were moving, the youths were branching into nearby homes to awaken fellow youths so that by the time we neared my brother's home, the youths had formed a sizeable crowd of killers. They smoked bhang in the presence of the local administrator, to get their heads and energy for the job ahead.

Reaching the outskirts of my brother's home, the youths stormed the compound from all corners and surrounded Agery's home chanting and yelling, 'Ere jakuogno! Where is that thief? Agery! Come out!' This commotion awoke my elder brother from his peaceful sleep and he- yelled, 'Ongere Nyarabel, what are those satanic voices that are yelling in my compound?' Before she could answer, the door had been pushed open and a sizeable crowd entered the house with me leap frogged in. The sons and wives of both Kisera and Agery had also

reached the scene. The angry youths were still chanting outside, 'He has escaped! The thief is not at home!'

The local administrator calmed the youths and narrated the whole episode to my elder brother and the relations that had gathered. Upon interrogations and investigations, it was discovered that the goat belonged to Daniel Kisera, Agery's elder brother and that he had picked it without his brother's consent. In fact, when it occurred, the elder brother was away on an official function as an agriculturalist. Now that Agery had escaped, I remained the only suspect in the whole saga.

My elder brother listened to the whole story keenly. He then read a verse from the book of Galatians that stated: dear brothers, let us now sit together and resolve our differences. He then made an appeal to the local administrator, 'I salute you, our area chief. I bow before you and your powerful office.

I appreciate the good work you do to ensure there is law and order in our village. Tonight's case is a testimony of your selfless and tireless effort to curb livestock rustling in our Jimo Village. May the gods of Ramogi and God of Abraham, abundantly reward you for this. Were it not for you, we could not have known who took my son's goat. It pains me that my own son picked his own brother's goat. The case is more heartbreaking because my son adjoined my own younger brother in this ordeal. Now my son has gone AWOL. This is what our forefather, Ojunga, would term, A snake has entered the milk gourd. Should we break the gourd and spill the milk in order to kill the snake or do we find- a way of removing the snake without destroying the gourd? My dear chief, I beseech you. This is a case of a brother stealing from a

brother. A father enlisted in it, complicates the whole saga. We humbly request you to allow us sort this as the family of Okwany. I will call the elders of Onyango and Nyawara, and we shall find the best way of punishing the culprits. Joseph Ochutho is my younger brother. I will call my other brother, Onoro Okekakelo and we shall cane and clobber him properly for getting involved in the rustling. Allow us resolve this as a family. That is my humble appeal to you, my Lord.'

There was a moment of silence. The local administrator asked for time to consult with his village elders. Permission was granted. They conversed in low tones. All we could see were occasional nodding and shaking of their heads. Finally, there were nods from all of them and they stamped their walking sticks on the ground in unison then moved-back to the public court of justice. The local administrator cleared his throat and spoke:

'My elders and youths of my village, I greet you all. I'm your son and when I was appointed the village sub chief, you gave me your blessings. You told me to ensure that there are peace and order in this village. You gave me village elders to help me. You all called on me that I should stem out livestock theft in this village. My tenure as your chief has been tainted with constant sporadic incidences of theft to the point I've been accused of dining with the thieves. I've been praying and crying to God to help me just find one thief. The Lord has answered my prayers. My father, I have been moved by your speech and it puts me in an awkward situation. If I give in to your request, I'll be setting a very bad precedence upon which future cases of the same magnitude would be anchored. My hands are tied and for that matter, let the law take its course. Upon deliberations with my elders, we shall

take the suspect to Kamgan to identify the goat, after which we shall hand him over to the police. Now that Daniel Kisera is not home, we shall ask the wife or eldest son to accompany us on the mission. I have spoken!'

'My son, I respect your decision. If that is the case, I have only one request; do not harm my brother. Do not let these blood thirsty youths spill the blood of my brother. You just hand him to the police. As a family, we shall pick the case from Pap Onditi. I cannot give you the wife of my son at night without his consent. Washy, you are the eldest son of my son. Accompany them.

I could have accompanied them myself but now I'm on a wheelchair. How I wish Onoro was here. Record everything that happens during the journey. You are our only witness. Do not allow them to kill my brother. Wuod Ochutho, just cooperate with the administration. All shall be well. To my chief, if anything happens to my brother, his blood shall be on your head. Let me pray for you as you leave.'

Before I could close my eyes, the youths had swept me off the ground. All I heard Nyamanga Okwany say: Do not shed the blood of my brother!"

A mosquito came close to my ears. It sang a familiar song: WE ARE BUT SOJOURNERS IN THIS WORLD. The song grew louder and louder than the tune all of a sudden changed. It went off key. A shrilling pain pierced through my nerves. I slapped my cheeks so hard that I woke up. I found my whole body full of cold sweat. There were goose bumps on my skin. My teeth were clattering. My whole being was shaking from the sole of my feet to the threads of my hair that were

erect. What a horrifying dream! What a revelation! Why did they have to do it to him? Why kill an old man in such a horrendous manner? I looked around and saw my wife deep asleep, unperturbed.

I wish she knew where I was from! The underworld. With time, my body's climate returned to its factory setting and on my wife's breasts, I rested my head.

She involuntarily cuddled me in her arms and inserted my left thigh in between hers. The warmth lulled me back to slumber land.

The spirits are patient. I found they had paused the journey exactly where the mosquito had awoken me. I saw the spirit of Adhiambo Nyoluga next to me. In front, was Okwany Ochutho, my great grandfather. I followed them dumbfoundedly. At a safe distance, they frogmarched him. Joseph Ochutho. His spirit left me to watch firsthand what transpired. As we moved, the crowd swelled. We reached Koluga junction and we were joined by youths from upper Nyaila who had heard the news. I saw them. Then one from the disciplined forces yelled: 'What are you still doing with a thief?' This ignited the thirst and fire of violence in the youths. They descended on him. I tried to get my way through them to save him but his spirit held me with a caution: "Wuod Nyochietha, I brought you here to tell my story, not to rescue a soul that is already in the underworld. Allow them to do what they did, so that the world may know how my own people; my own sons, fathers and brothers killed me." I obliged.

The journey continued amid beatings, threats and intimidation from the crowd. The local administrator kept quiet and turned deaf to the cries and the pleas of the innocent thief. Reaching Kona Kogony, hell

broke loose. One of my uncles from Onyango and Nyawara arrived on the scene from his house.

He demanded to know why his father was being beaten. After getting a briefing from Washy, he turned mad. He thoroughly caned the sub chief and his village elders before the crowd overpowered him.

He was disarmed but not before he worked on the perpetrators of the heinous act well. The local administrator, threatened by the incident, decreed that Ochutho should be taken to Jaduong Apilo Matindo for the way forward. So, the crowd headed to Jaduong's homestead. At least sanity was prevailing now. On reaching the homestead, we found Jaduong at his gate and he deterred the crowd from entering his stead. He was briefed of the whole ordeal. With his walking stick in his left hand and a machete in his right hand, he sighed and kept quiet for some time. He then intoned:

'When a child defecates along the road, he or she may be forgiven but, if the child points at the faeces to his father and the father does not ask about the defecator, then the faeces now belong to the father who overfed the child until it defecated along the road. The father has now slid on the same faeces that he had ignored. May the father be forced to clean the faeces off the road, for it not to choke innocent travellers who frequently use the road. A bull that pricks an anthill with its horn must be ready to be bitten by the ants. Sons of Nyaila and Wanda, you are the builders of the anthill of Jimo, your own son that feels he is more of a bull than all of you, has pricked the anthill of peace and order in our village. Are we going to keep quiet and let the bull be?'

'No way! The bull must be beaten!' roared the charged crowd. Two notorious youths clobbered the captive on the back scathingly.

'Stop it. You cannot beat the bull to death at my gate. Take it to where the anthill was pricked!' Jaduong roared.

The marching to Golgotha ensued. Through the meandering routes, we found ourselves at Kilong. Around this place, the old man was tired and requested to rest. The rowdy youths could not listen. The more he collapsed, the more they resuscitated him with kicks and blows.

One youth who was quite knowledgeable on how to torture a criminal to death, informed the others on the vital parts to aim at. His instructions worked. Immediately they implemented his ideologies, the old man defecated on himself. The more they touched the parts, the more the old man defecated. By the time the crowd reached Kamgan at Oselo's home, my grandfather's long trousers were drenched in his own diarrhea. Diarrhea inflicted through beatings. His coat was torn and soiled. His face was oozing blood. His lips were swollen. I could not recognise him anymore. His spirit came close to my ears and whispered hot air of vengeance, "My grandson, look at how your grandfather looks like. See how they persecuted me. Look at how I pleaded with them to spare my life. Look at how they broke my limbs." I saw him shed tears of blood. His nose oozed and sprayed bloody mucus of rage. His eyeballs were burning embers of a setting sun orb. I got scared! He tapped my shoulders and told me, "My story begins now. Watch and record everything."

When we arrived at Oselo's home, we found their area chief in his compound. Oselo narrated the whole incident as it occurred. My

grandfather accepted that all that was said was true but insisted he did not steal the goat. This only called for more beatings. The local administrator had a word with the other chief and they agreed to forward the suspect to Pap Onditi Police Station with the goat as the exhibit. The crowd marched out of the compound with the rope tied around the waist of the suspect.

Around twenty metres from the homestead, I saw him collapse with a thud. The crowd rained blows, sticks and crude weapons on him. He slightly raised his head as if doing head counts, he gazed at each of them, one after the other. He gazed at them as if he was recording their names. He then gazed at the Eastern horizon where the morning sun was- glimpsing from the sky to welcome the new day, for it was already dawn, after which he faced the ground. With his fingers, he grasped the morning dew and mud and formed a fist with both hands and breathed his last...

I woke up trembling in fear and rage. My whole body, full of goose bumps, was drenched in cold chilling rivulets of sweat. My heart throbbed loud enough to awaken the dead. Tears involuntarily flowed down my cheeks with some dropping in my nostrils and the corner of my lips. My throat was coarse and sore.

It seemed I mourned my grandfather in the underworld where he took me. How I wish I could have stayed longer to know what happened after his death, but just like a woman who is eager to be pregnant and nothing happens, I waited infinitely for the third visit of the spirits. For two weeks, my sleep was uneventful till I thought the spirits deserted me. In the third week I gave up the wait and decided to focus on the living until last night when it happened again.

I slept late last night after spending ample time on social media reading, watching, sighing and smiling at this and that post from the wise and the otherwise. At around midnight, the madness of slumber engulfed me and before I knew it, I was deep asleep. It began as a gentle and friendly flowing of land breeze; the clouds were performing a graceful dodo dance flying their white snowy sisal skirts exposing their slightly dark buttocks of heavy clouds beneath. The trees were bending effortlessly to the tune of the wind flow. As the intensity of the flow heightened, the dodo dance of the clouds turned into a wild vigorous dance of Nyawawa. I could hear the cries of babies, wailing of women and trotting of men. The whole village of Jimo was covered with wild whirlpools, deafening thunderstorms and blinding lightning.

The sky was pregnantly dark with heavy clouds. The clouds had scary forms of black ghosts with bleeding round red orbs for eyes. The thunder roared and rumbled through the smoking nose and dangerous sparkles of lightning oozed through their mouths, eyes and ears. I found myself glued at the mouth of River Kilong with my hands covering my ears and face.

I had only a torn undergarment and a tattered dirty brown vest. I was freezing and my buttocks were grinding sacks of flour. My pipe of irrigation freely let out barrels of urine that flooded my torn undergarment and found its way to the mother earth. It started to drizzle and then there was heavy downpour. I could not move. I let the rain and hailstones hit me freely. The stream of the raindrops was thick and heavy. I felt pain all over my body but I could not move. I felt a heavy hand lift me up but I was scared to open my eyes. I could feel

we were flying high up in the sky. I heard a voice whisper in my ears, "Open your eyes..."

I slowly opened my eyes and true to my feelings, I am high up in the sky and below us it is still heavily raining. I checked beside me and I saw him: Joseph Ochutho. He holds me by my shoulders. Next to us are other spirits. I saw Nyamanga Okwany, Onoro Okekakelo, Adhiambo Nyoluga, Ongere Nyarabel, Orodi Nyabolo, Nyochietha, Daniel Kisera and far behind us flapping his wings disgracefully is Agery. I glimpsed on the earth and saw River Kilong and River Atwanga full to the brim, flowing dangerously and ululating loud wails of evil spirits. The waters mysteriously turned into thick blood. The spirits of my ancestors began to descend on earth and we perched on the grave of Joseph Ochutho. The grave opened up and a sword appeared; Ochutho grabbed it with his right hand. An axe popped up and this he also grabbed with his left hand. I saw the eyes of the spirits turn red and start oozing blood; Agery turned his back on us.

The blood trickled on the ground and started to flow forming a bloody path towards the gate, the spirit of Ochutho tapped me on the shoulder and commanded, "Follow the bloody path and see how my tormentors are reaping a bountiful harvest of miseries!"

I stepped on the bloody path and I floated on it. The path gracefully swept me to the main road and took me to the home of one of the village elders present during the persecution. I saw him lie on his deathbed. He was in pain. He was suffering from an unknown disease. At the corner of the house, I saw my grandfather Ochutho with a remote like device. The device had buttons of different colours. Whenever he pressed a colour, the body of the dying man would

change into that colour. Blue, yellow, green, orange, red and white, the body metamorphosed. This came with a lot of pain. Only the dying man and I could see the spirit. The spirit moved nearer to him and choked him to death saying, "I'll come back for your children!" With these utterances, I floated through the bloody path back to the main road.

Through the main road, the bloody path negotiated a corner at Ochutho Abega's junction and took the direction to Kawanda. At Nyaila-Wanda boundary, the bloody path branched into two homesteads. The spirits split my body into two and took me into the two homesteads simultaneously. In the right homestead, I saw a young man in his late thirties but his facial expression was that of a 90-year-old man.

He was emaciated, distressed, with wounded scars all over. Wifeless, childless and houseless, the young man was like a corpse waiting to be pronounced dead. I wondered why the spirit was tormenting him without killing him. The spirit intoned, "I sympathize with this soul. He was a mere teenager then. He is among the people who struck blows at my vital organs on instructions from the experienced murderers.

I've made him suffer for his sins but spirits never kill the underage. He will suffer and die gradually paying for his sins. I cannot soil my hands to choke the spirit of a child. I can only torment him." My left side was at the same time taken to the grave of a young man. Here I saw a desolate home full of graves. In this particular grave, the spirit informed me how he made sure that the young man became impotent, died a bachelor and no one remembers that he even existed. The spirit said he was the one who slapped and kicked him from the house of

Zippy on the dreadful night of his murder and continually beat him till he breathed his last.

The two bloody paths then converged again at the main road and off it flowed towards Jimo-Kabodho boundary. Here, the bloody path took me to different homes of his victims. In one home, he showed me the man going to the latrine for a long call. The spirit jumps on his neck, slaps him, boxes him, makes him defecate on himself before strangling him to death. I saw him drop dead. The spirit takes me to his grave and spits on it. In the adjacent home, the spirit makes me see grave after grave of a home that once was full of sons. In this home remains a single son who is equally half dead and has done more harm than good to his kins. Among these graves, the spirit shows me how he killed each one of them through strange illnesses and incomprehensible accidents. I looked at the mother of the home; she was an empty shell of herself. The bloody path descended with me back to the main road.

I travelled on the bloody path back to Ochutho Abega's junction. It went against the law of gravity up the hills towards Oruko's home. In the middle of the hill, the bloody path branched into a home. He takes me to a home. In the home, lies a mere caricature of a human being. The human being has a ceaseless diarrhea. In his house, there is nothing tangible. He has sold everything. His mother wishes him death to ease his suffering. The spirit steps on his windpipe.

With his eyes popping out, he suffocates to death and dies with his eyes wide open. We leave the house as the mother struggles to shut the eyes of the dead son.

The bloody journey takes me to the heart of Nyaila. It branches into different homes showing me the dead, the maimed and the tormented. The spirit takes me to a home. In this home, there are sons. Each son has his story to tell. The sons do not see each other face to face. Each accuses the other of witchcraft. Their children suffer strange illnesses and evil attacks. Prayers have been conducted to no avail. They have tried different witches but instead it is the witches who succumb mysteriously. They now remain with no witch to consult. Curses surround the homestead.

One particular son spends sleepless nights due to evil spirits ever hovering around his home. Peace has deserted the homestead. I see the spirit of Ochutho smile and he tells me, "The worst is yet to befall them."

The bloody path takes me back to the grave of Joseph Ochutho and he safely throws back the sword and the axe into the grave. The bloody path flows into the grave and the earth covers the grave. The spirits gather around it and in unison, they roar, "The grave is still crying for more blood. It is upon people of Jimo to appease the spirit to stop the blood path!" The spirit of Ochutho then goes for Agery and brings him to join them by the grave. Agery looks at me pitifully and says, "I have a confession to make.... I will soon also come for my killers! I have paid the wages of my sins and so they must also pay!"

A mosquito bites my cheeks and I loudly slap it, awakening me in the process. I light a solar lamp next to my bed and find my palm with a thick paste of my own blood and next to it, the dead mosquito.

The blood of vengeance and the avenged at the palm of my hands. The spirits have spoken.

HOME IS NEVER FAR

Clare Asis

Clare is a passionate writer who hails from Port Victoria in Busia County. She is a former student of Mt. Carmel Girls High School – Myanga in Bungoma County. Clare loves art and also likes trying new experiences. That's what inspires her every day.

"Out! Out of my house!" my ugly mother-in-law shouted. "You cannot bear any child; you are a curse." She continued shouting with her awful voice. I felt like killing myself for the words she always said to me. I did not have anything to do but to ask her to allow me to stay, at least for some more time, days?

"Stop there! Who is your mother here? I cannot bear a barren child like you. Idiot! Out of my house.'' She screamed at me. She yelled at every space she found towards my darling ears and left me for grabs, for the wild streets of pain that surfaced every inch around me.

She walked with her bow-legs, entered my room and came out with my little bag that contained every sample of a thing I owned in that home. I stared at her as she pushed herself towards my direction. The alarm rang in my head with weird sets of pain clinging to my chest.

"You are not welcomed here understood? Rubbish! Leave my presence at once girl!''

I bent down and picked up my bag. My eyes took on an almost dead posture and tears started pushing towards the bare floor. I had no place to run to, nor think of. My husband was out at work. My parents had long left for the grave and so the world stared at me with no amount

of- mercy to save me. I stood there looking around myself, trying to understand the world that so much wanted to frustrate me with every piece it could. My journey to the unknown was going to take no actual shape, I had nowhere to run to. I started walking with no exact picture of a decent destination. I then heard her shout to the guard;

“Don’t ever allow that awkward girl to enter into this compound, understood?”

While I was out walking, hunger struck me. Since I had nothing to eat or anywhere to lay my head, I chose to settle on the street, undecidedly. Before dusk, I was already awake. I sat there, by the road with the face of a homeless crap. I had nothing to pour onto my dry mouth, nothing to chew either. I was blank and barely dead and buried by frustrations but no one seemed to care about what I was going through. I was left with a bare and empty stomach. It was then that I decided to raise my weak and thirsty self, go around looking for something to do so I could raise a shilling for a meal. I looked through hotels and inquired about house help chores around the city but nothing seemed to add up to a desirable task that would fit my distorted self, since I had no single piece of paper that proved I had a skill in anything. Immediately after I got tired and was about to sit in a hungry stature, I saw a poster on a post written, “WE WANT A HOUSE HELP.” I therefore decided to try my luck.

I took to myself and headed to the home in need of a house help. I knocked on the gate and a short stout man opened and showed me in.

“Hello,’’ I greeted as I was moving towards a lady who was busy cleaning her TV. Fear filled my whole self and left me with a silent prayer, that she would allow me the job.

“How can I help you?” she asked with a charming smile, proving a rare composure of hospitality. She seemed humble and caring. I cannot dare say more, she was beautiful and had a lovely face.

“I’m in need of a job; can I get a chance?’’ I inquired, then continued, “I saw a poster back hanged on a tree around the streets saying you needed a house help.

“Yes, you do, you are welcomed. Today you can start preparing your room which I will show you and you will start work tomorrow, okay?’’ I pulled myself and knelt down as a sign of respect and gratefulness.

I woke up earlier than anyone else in the house every day. Everyone woke up to a well-presented day that I had aligned. Everything was fine and inspired my daily routine. No one seemed to follow me up. No one seemed to bother me. I was all comfortable and settled. I built a credible and healthy relationship with every member of the household that the daughter of my boss became so close to me. I felt the love and care I had missed through and through my life. Living with my mother-in-law was the most disastrous thing that ever happened to me. Every scar that showed up on my heart was inspired by her. My husband, Kubuyo had nothing to say every time he visited. I always narrated every experience but he kept saying he would handle it.

One day however, I woke up to a monster I never saw during my one-month service at her home. Mrs. Munasi, my boss, dragged me to a

hole that swallowed my whole confidence. She ordered me to carry a sackful of maize to her store across the town. The pain that cut across my head was one of a kind. When I returned to the house, I found her waiting for me with a stick.

“Little lady, why the hell do you spend all day doing a single thing. Don’t you know that every space in this house must be cleaned?” she yelled at me with a creamy angry voice that cut across my heart. The sound of her voice pulled together all the strings and awakened the wounds that were long dead, healed. I couldn’t bring myself to say anything. I had no defence mechanism and so I stayed dumb and waited for her to say more.

“You better do your work, or else I will make you do it. Understood?” I nodded and she left. I sunk into a bucket of thoughts and was led into confusion. Actually, where was all that coming from? I was deep lost in thoughts when she stormed back into the house and found me seated comfortably on the sofa, uncomfortable in fact since I was in a disturbed mode.

“I will pay if I please, because I employed you when I needed.’’ She told me. I felt like the world did not want me to live, everybody hated me, no- one wanted me anywhere. I then became so bitter with myself, and her. I raised my head and pushed my eyes onto hers.

“Listen lady; I did not come here to be mistreated. I came here to work and I had done enough of that. I have pushed myself beyond the extremes and this is how you treat me? Like a dog that serves you and you kill it? Please, lady, give me my money. I will leave immediately.” My eyes were deeply flooded and almost protruded from the sockets.

I was still bitter, and angry. I was lost in pain and sorrow. I felt like I needed to be buried.

“You came here begging for work, and now you are a warthog trying to fight a lion? That’s why you don’t have a place to stay. Oh, poor girl. Why are poor people so stubborn?” she started laughing and then continued. “You better start packing and leave before I chase you like a homeless dog, understood?’’

I was left with no more thought. One minute I had a place to put my head, the next I was all thrown into the streets, like a used can. The voice of vengeance rang in my mind. The bitterness that did rounds in my heart couldn’t let the thought go. I promised to pay her handsomely, since she refused to pay my salary. I left. The streets grabbed me again. They hugged me like a long-lost friend had finally returned.

After weeks around the daring streets, I joined a gang that terrorized residents around town. They approached me one fine morning while I was happily watching young kids play football on the streets.

I loved the show. They told me they had a thing for me since they had realized I had no home, or a decent place to stay. They had stalked me for days and came up with factual conclusions. I gave into their idea and had to run my first errand that night. We successfully hijacked a car. However, things didn’t go well with me on the first day. I wasn’t paid as promised but I never asked questions. We did our second gig and I was the mastermind. It went on to succeed but again, they underpaid me. On asking a question, the gang leader threatened to kill

me. I sunk into fear and made a plan. I grabbed him aside and made him think I had fallen for him. He actually fell for it and with that I utilized my darling chance, killed him and took off.

I later realized that I was pregnant, with Kubuyo, my ex-husband. That made me feel exhausted until I gave birth to a bouncy strong baby boy. He resembled his father and had eyes that took after me. I remember very well how my son and I could laugh after giving each other a joke, this made me forget my past life. We could play hide and seek, sometimes we could compete running.

Months later I got a job at a ranch. It was an amazing thing to hold onto. My son and I moved to a house close to the ranch where he would grow playing along other kids, not alone on the bare streets. One day, after a tiresome day, I walked into a pub for a fine drink. I wanted to relax myself after the walk around the huge ranch. I drunk myself into a tired woman who couldn't carry herself home.

"Morning Liz." A male voice sounded from behind me. "I know you're worried and wondering where you are. This is my place. How are you feeling?" I felt ashamed of myself. I did not know whether to answer his greeting or just to pretend I was still not sober enough. "Are you still shocked?" He added in an insisting tone

"No, I am just okay. Morning to you. What did you say your name is?"

"I am Mike; don't you remember me from yesterday?" He added in an almost soothing voice then looked in the direction of the bathroom and said, "take a bath and your clothes are in the wardrobe." "Thanks, but I have to go home, my son has not gone to school and he has nothing to eat." I told him.

“Your son has already gone to school and has even finished eating,’’ he said calmly. “How did you know my son and where I live?’’ my voice turned sour in wonder. How could he know me so well already? That’s insane.

“You told me about your son and gave me your address yesterday.’’ He said smiling. His smile might be the thing that stole my drunk self into his apartment. I could feel its vibe cutting across me even then, I was sober enough to remember.

“Is there something I have not told you yet?’’ I inquired, with questions cutting across my head. How stupid am I to let a stranger understand me so fast?

“You told me everything but you did not tell me why you drank a lot yesterday.”

“Let’s talk about that another time,’’ I quit the conversation. After taking a bath, I dressed myself and headed to the dining table. Mike had set the table into a magnificent balance of food and romance. He actually looked to prove a point which I wanted to avoid by every means possible.

“Welcome! You look great, I know the clothes can fit you, which means I am also fit….” Before he could finish his daring statement, I lifted my heavy tongue and cut him short, “I am married, let’s eat first.’’ We ate quietly without any talk. After the meal we talked a little and Mike said my son, Haman would be picked later that evening and taken to his house. I left for work.

Later that evening, I walked to Mike's house and met Haman at the door. He ran so fast and hugged me. I bet he had missed me, from the way he held onto me, so tight. He was afraid, I sensed it.

"How was your school?" I asked. "It was as good as always." I entered the house but didn't find Mike, I decided it was time to leave for my house, with my darling son.

A few hours later, I heard a knock on the door.

"Come in" I said walking towards the door. "Mike what do you want here at this time of the day?" "I have come to check …"

"I am good, my son and I are having a discussion. Actually, we're more than okay, could you?"

"Ok," he said.

"Wait, mum who is this man? And why did he take me to school?" my son asked. "This man is your uncle." I said pushing away the conversation. My son was the kind that would ask a million questions if you let him. He was so curious, about almost everything that surrounded him. Mike, Haman and I started spending most of our free time together and we would visit each other. As days went by, I started to like Mike so much, so was Haman. I developed deep feelings for him. His actions and handling of my son and I gave me more striking liking of him than doubt. Love grew, and grew without questions.

Haman was growing, so was his brain. His questioning grew daily and he started asking about his father. He had seen his friends at school with their fathers, and wanted to understand why his own was never around. I had, at several instances, pointed out that his father was no

more but that didn't stop him from asking. He asked me to take him to his father's grave, which in reality didn't exist. That left me questioning my own loyalty, to my son and self. I was not being honest with him. However, I wouldn't let him know that Mark Kubuyo was his father, not while I was still sucking the clean air of the world.

"Liz, have you heard the news? Your former house. It has been burnt to the ground." Mike came running to me, he looked shocked and expected me to be too.

"Yes. I've heard the news. That, I expected. It's no news to me. That's why I left that place." My response, which didn't show worry or wonder, made Mike ask himself so many questions which he couldn't answer. Who is Liz? Who's this woman? Nothing came right to him.

"And Liz, where is your husband? You once mentioned that you were married." Mike turned so fast and pointed to a mystery I never wanted to narrate.

"I'm no longer married. I was, years before Haman was born."

"What happened?"

"Mike, can we not talk about this? It's just too much. Just know that I'm not married." I said in a voice that pushed him into consoling me before I came to. "And you? What about you?"

Mike talked about the woman he loved so hard but who betrayed him. They had grown to a trust bound atmosphere that he let her access everything that was even a secret to himself. Months later, the said woman flew to Ethiopia having taken all the money he had saved in his bank. He sunk into a mysterious faith of pain that almost consumed

him. He never thought of a woman ever again, until he met me. His story threw me to my past life. The pain and adversities that held me in pain.

“Liz, are you okay?” he asked moving towards me. I was lost in the near past, not hearing whatever he said. After coming back to him, tears couldn’t hide behind my eyes, they flashed out like a flooded river. I had to let out everything that I went through in the past. I told him every detail; from my rowdy mother-in-law to the killing of the gang leader who wanted to use me for his gain. The next flood broke from my eyes, Mike held me so tight, to soothe and soothe a crying soul. I felt so comfortable under his warm hands. I had never felt that before, not with Mark Kubuyo, not with any other man. His warmth made me feel a kind of queenly touch covering the sound atmosphere in his well-furnished- apartment. I didn’t want to let go of him, I stuck on him, clung to his chest and felt so well.

A day swung open and the sun rose with tranquillity. The air was so warm that you could bathe with it. Mike had arrived at my door to pick Haman up for school, like he always did. I opened the door for him and the look that stared at Haman and I was a different look. We had never seen him in such a calm suit. His shoes reflected the rays of the warm sun running onto us. I stood staring at him before I could allow him in.

“Liz, today I’m going out. Out of the country for a business trip. Two weeks away in Ethiopia.” He wildly said with a clean clear smile. Before I could respond Haman was all around him begging him not to go. He had got used to the road trips they made together on Sundays. He did not want to miss him. He was practically attached to him.

I also knew that letting him go could mean losing him because his Ex-girlfriend had gone to Ethiopia.

“I don’t think you should go. Tell your assistant to replace you,” I said with a clear fake smile poured out to him. However, he only wanted to hear my reaction. He had tricked me into understanding if I had feelings for him. We laughed out aloud and I let him take Haman to school. I was left in thought. I was happy, and worried. I didn’t know if trusting him with my heart was good enough but I just did.

The day was so good. Everything went on well because of the events of the morning. I felt so wide and excited which proved how much I loved Mike. However, the atmosphere changed from sweet to bitter later that evening when, after a knock at the door, I met Mark’s face on opening the door.

“What do you want? And who showed you, my home?” I shouted at him once he tried to push himself in.

“Elizabeth, I’m sorry for everything. I didn’t know you were pregnant when I asked my mother to push you away. Please let me in so we can talk this out.” He cried out to me but I could not just take it.

“Liza, we’re truly sorry. Forgive us.” I heard his mother’s voice from behind him. That voice sucked. It took me back a long way with memories of pain, that which drained me of my confidence. When my son heard us arguing he came, “Mama, who are these people? And why are you so hard on them?”

“Oh, my darling grandson. Your father is here.” The cracking voice of Mark’s mother sounded towards Haman. She made a statement that

crushed my heart, I almost fell onto the bare floor. In no time, Mike ran from the washroom on hearing what was going on.

“Is this your husband?’’ Mike inquired with some sound of doubt in his voice. “Yes, he is,’’ I pointed out without hesitating. I knew things had changed so fast and therefore required fast responses.

“Mama, did you say that this is my papa?’’ Haman inquired with some doubt. He had known his father was dead, not existing. “Yes, he is your dad,’’ I said as I was trembling.

“But mama, you said dad died long ago and I don’t have any family left only you and uncle.’’

“Who is your uncle?’’ Mark asked in a voice that depicted doubt and suspicion.

“Mike is my uncle,’’ Haman answered.

“Your uncle! You don’t have any uncle,’’ his dad told him.

“But mama told me he is my uncle,’’

“He is not your uncle, ask your mom who he is.’’

“Mama, is this my real uncle? Or you were lying,’’ Haman shouted moving away from me. He worried me and that made me tremble with anger. I did not want him to know of his father like he did.

“I can explain son don’t go away from me.’’

“You have nothing to explain mama. You’re just a liar. All these years mama?’’

“Son, you don’t understand, at least give me a chance to explain everything. How it all happened. I wanted the best for you, and I still do.” My eyes were burning red; tears clung to the eyeballs while I struggled not to let them drag me down to the ground.

“Son allow your mom to explain,” Mark said.

“Allow her what!” Haman shouted.

“But she’s your mother. Don’t let her tears speak a curse on you son. Please” Mark pleaded with him and he let me in. I used the chance handsomely. The narration wasn’t long enough because of every painful touch that accompanied it. Every time I pulled myself together, I broke down again. Every word that fell from my mouth made sense to everyone that stood there. Mike ran to me and held me to comfort, not allowing me to break any further.

“Please, I am sorry. I did not know that you were pregnant. Please forgive us and come back to Mark. I believe you are the best woman for him.” Mark’s mother cried out to me, but I couldn’t dare leave a man who stood with me in every tear and pain for one who caused it all.

“I’ve let it all out and so I feel relieved. For every pain you’ve caused me, I forgive you, but I cannot come back to you. To say that I still love you will be a bigger lie than the one I’ve made my son live through. The man I so dearly love is right here, and I won’t betray his trust.

Please allow me a chance to love this man for he is worth it.” Every word I spit was worth an award for it made Mike feel the warmth and love. My utterances were honest, to everyone that stood there with us.

Before Mark and all the others left, I saw police officers coming our way.

“Who is Miss Elizabeth Pospori??” one of the officers asked. I pulled myself from the door and pushed my tired self close to them. I knew they had found me, and I was required to pay for my sins. However, I was happy for my son was going home. Home is never far from one who’s still alive.

“Here I am,” I responded. “You are under arrest for the murder of Mr. Alwanda Omuse, six years ago.’

GRIEF OF HAPPINESS

Onyango, Charles

(The events in this story are based on a true story with the characters artistically chosen for the aesthetic effect. The setting is also sacredly chosen. The timing; the distant present with a bitter past)

Love at first sight, or is it at the first scene or at first seen, remains a hypothesis that sociologists have carefully avoided but silently practiced for their own hearts' satisfaction. Obuolo, a man who was denied vertical privilege but blessed with circumferential presence; deprived of physical beauty but gifted with wallet body makeup; a young man that was seducing his teenage life to stay a little bit longer to remain relevant however late until the beautiful ones are born; became a victim of the above assertion.

It was not long after he had celebrated the first anniversary of the birth of the bush between his legs that it happened. It was one virgin Sunday morning when the sun was perpendicularly caressing the heart of his bald head that he met her. Asusy, a beauty that must have been created on the eve of Christmas, was more of a sea goddess than mere flesh and blood. Many men had committed suicide when speeding vehicles swept them off their feet as they strained their necks, escorting the disappearing shadow of the beautiful Asusy. If men fell in love at first sight, what happened to Obuolo was a fatal accident. Obuolo was electrocuted and paralysed by the beauty of Asusy. He tried to smile,

but his face contorted into a gloomy miniature of a horror star. He experienced the first grief of happiness.

What is meant to be must be, and so was Obuolo's and Asusy's chemistry that soon metamorphosed into biological warfare of extreme passion and ecstasy. Soon one plus one became three; the national examiners and scheme coordinators of love marked it right. The recipe for altar vows was prepared with all ingredients carefully chosen. It was at this point that Obuolo experienced the second grief of happiness. Asusy seductively informed him that the recipe of the altar vows wouldn't be complete without her two daughters and son being drafted in as flower girls and page boy. Obuolo's heart was painfully electrocuted, but due to paralysis of his head caused by the beauty of Asusy, he incoherently whispered to her that he would accept them even if they were six. "Whatever comes from your canal of creation is ours..." croaked his voice.

The marriage was blissful with sweet words oozed in descending order of heart feelings from babe to sweety, sweety to darling, darling to Abebo, Abebo to bae, bae to ba, later ba became a mere consonant /b/. The sweet words became more difficult to pronounce until now, and gestures replaced the mouth dysentery of love. All this while, Obuolo kept his word. He loved Asusy with the whole of his heart. His heart was big enough to accommodate her two daughters, Magy and Megy, and her son Nyatonglo. Obuolo worked hard, and soon, Asusy's canal of creation brought forth twins.

I wish I could paint the happiness that arrested the loins of Obuolo. He walked around the whole neighborhood bare chested, and women

were all over him, secretly admiring his sacred hand of pottery that he carefully hid between his legs for fear of being snatched. He experienced a third happily painful grief of happiness.

A man's heart is so big it can accommodate many hearts; no wonder men have succeeded in keeping so many a heart of different daughters of Eve without breaking any; unless it is she that jerks off her own heart from the fridge of the man's heart, breaking it in the process. In fact, a man's heart has so many rooms built so that the numerous ladies can stay in without meeting in the dining hall of the heart. It takes the recklessness and restlessness of the ladies to bump into each other ending up having heart collisions with disastrous consequences. Obuolo was a different man. He had a big heart without compartments. It was a bedsitter heart, and he gave it all to Asusy. This was until a slight heartache forced him to divide the bedsitter heart with a patio. His heart was pierced with a sharp needle that reached his aorta one morning. Magy and Megy were fighting, and he reached in time to separate them, carrying them by their squirrel-like ears!

"Obuolo! Leave us alone! You are not our father! See yourself!"

A thunderous lightning of shock ran through his hands' veins, and with a thud, he let go of the two demonlets. They fell on the rough concrete that numbed their buttocks before they felt the pain pricking their dots of- butts. Obuolo sulked into his cracking greaseless sofa set and buried his head in his palms. His heart bled profusely, and the blood clot created an indelible wall in his heart. He grimaced as an idea crossed his mind. He felt grief of perpetual happiness knock his heart.

Obuolo and Asusy had a long in-blanket talk show that lasted for half a night. No amount of sweet words from Asusy could melt the blood clot wall cemented in Obuolo's heart. Not even the voluptuous hips that Asusy rubbed on his lower abdomen could arouse his electric plug. The pillowy breasts that he rested his head on every night turned into the, rugged rocks of Golgotha. Her sweet saliva that she painted on his lips had an ammonia-like pungent effect on his nostrils. The son of his mother remained ice-cold throughout the night.

The images of the three demonlets that invaded his homestead choked his mind that night. The devil took advantage to dance horrendously before him. He saw how the uninvited trio was draining the family food granary. The devil showed him how different and ugly they were, dotting his beautiful home with ogre-like appearances. The devil even revealed to him how Asusy frequently yet secretly took the three orangutans to see their sire over the holidays in the name of going to visit the maternal grandmother. The devil even whispered to him that whenever they visit the demonlets' father, Asusy always gave him an explosive deuteronomy of wild happiness; no wonder whenever she came back, she gave him one-week dry spell of love- may be to let the well cool off the hot magma from the volcanic eruption of her ex-inner, core expert. Obuolo had to make a painful decision. A decision that will bring both grief and happiness- a grief of happiness.

At the hour when men turn women for morning glory, Obuolo wildly slapped Asusy's bulging butts that made her scream, "Babe, I'm all yours!" However, this morning never smelt like other mornings. She

reached for his electric switch but realized that his electric tokens had run out. There was a total blackout.

"We need to talk, Asusy!" This shocked her. Since they met, Obuolo had never called her by her name. This spelt doom.

"Yes, honey, my honey sanitizer," Asusy seductively responded.

"Nyef, don't honey me with your pepper hot tongue!" roared Obuolo.

" What is it, my love?"

For a moment, Obuolo was quiet. Maybe composing, writing, and editing the speech in his mind. A speech that will beautifully contort the happiness held the family hostage. A speech that would paint the horrendous portrait of grief engulfing his heart since the abominable utterances of the two demonlets.

"Susalia Nyaoro, the daughter of Presila Nyanduk and Jonathan Randiki, listen and do it well. If you have wax in your ears, you better remove it," Obuolo began.

When a man refers to you by your full names and throws caution to the armpits of the world to call your parents' name nakedly without any wink of fear, then it only means one thing: no love is lost between you.

"When I first saw you, an image of a goddess; a beauty that maimed and slaughtered great men of our land- I fell in love; the deep sea of emotions swept me to your bosoms. I jailed myself in your prison of affection. I have never regretted it. You've served me love in attractive

bowls of delicacies. The only tears I have shed are those of joy and grievous pleasure of passion. With this love, I wholeheartedly took in Magy, Megy, and Nyatonglo as my own loinsprings. My world was complete when you gave birth to Opiyo and Adongo, our twins. Then, it happened...." At this point, Obuolo snorted and inhaled a lungful of dry air of sad emotions.

"Magy and Megy baptized me a stranger in my own home. I have accepted. I won't force them to call me father. Neither would I force Nyatonglo. I took a vow to love you till death do us part. I married you, not your children who know their father or fathers. In my culture, a woman cannot be polygamous! Susalia Nyaoro, how many husbands do you have?"

The silence that followed could have made the ghosts of dumbness jealous. The silence was loud enough to yell back to them. The sun had set, and the eastern horizon smiled sadly at them as beams of sunlight, oblivious of the tension herein, publicly kissed the room romantically. This angered Obuolo more. Asusy was silent but inwardly writhing in pain and the sad reality of the situation.

"Obuolo Rabondo Kabondo, son of Yuanita Kokego and Ondiegi Bondo, I have heard you. Indeed, a woman cannot have many husbands. The love we have shared with you has been sacred and sweet. You've loved me as a man should love his wife. I owe it to you. I found a husband; in you, I saw the blindness of love; I cherished happiness- the painful happiness of having what your heart desires but cannot sire. I am sorry, my love. The light has eaten the darkness and left me naked in shame. I shall return the so-called demonlets to their

sire. I shall not leave Nyatonglo behind. Let them go and torment their father. I am sorry, my love."

It was now Obuolo's turn to be quiet. With their backs on each other, they both sobbed silently without heaving. Obuolo was first to leave the bed, took his walking stick, and left the room, the house, and the compound. He only returned when the sun was kissing the day goodbye.

There was no one at home. The kitchen door stranded the chickens. The cattle were still in their shed with the hollow stomachs of yesterday. Dunya, the family dog, was too hungry to bark. Obuolo reached for the doorknob, but the door opened itself. There it was on the table; a note...
"I HAVE RETURNED ALL THE CHILDREN TO THEIR FATHERS, THE TWINS INCLUDED. SEE YOU SOON, MY LOVE."

Obuolo read the note ten times; each time, his smile broadened, and he finally let out a loud yell of happiness. The happiness of grief. He looked at his loin and laughed even louder. He laughed at himself so loud that the laughter deafened him. He could not hear his laughter. The following day, the lifeless body of Obuolo was found dangling behind his house with a smile on his face. Asusy never returned, for she was also found dead at the exact spot where they met with a similar smile on her face. They both grieved in the happiness of the afterward.

A SECRETARY TO MY GRAVE
Isaac Anyolo

Isaac Ongere is a graduate from Mount Kenya University. He has produced plays that have won national competitions, such as The Bill, Dark Shadows, Tempest at the Cathedral, and Kisima cha Machozi. He is also the author of Son of the Soil. He has received an award from Enhancing Border Africa for one of his Swahili plays

All I ever did was love her with all my life. She is all I have despite me not being Amina's biological father. Here on my deathbed, she grasps my hand tightly as my face comes in contact with her innocent face. I sophisticatedly close my eyes to hide my tears from her. I wanted to confess to her the truth that I was not her biological father but I couldn't gather the courage. Especially because she is a product of rape.

What if she finds out that this priest standing before me to give me the last holy communion is her biological father? A secret her mother had asked me to keep on her dying breath.

" Should I break her mother's promise?"

"Am I really being just? Allowing her to continue living believing that she is an orphan when in fact her father is alive and standing right in front of her?"

Thinking about this brings me to yet another painful reality that her mother had made an attempt to abort her.

“Why has fate chosen this absurd game?”

“And on her birthday?”

A day when her mother passed away. It was on that day that my heart was cut both ways. I lost Jennifer and was blessed to have this bundle of joy called Amina.

“Will she withstand the torments of this naked fact?”

Right here smiling, she must be full of hope that all will be well. Deep down, I realize that this might as well be my last moment with her. Death is knocking on my door and I can feel my wife waiting for me on the other side.

But, before I join you Jennifer, you should know that I am in a quagmire of confusion. I wish you could allow me to tell our lovely daughter this painful secret that I have lived with since your demise.

Maybe then will I finally rest in peace. As I open my eyes, I believe she is ready to face the brutal world with the courage of a heroine. I wish it didn’t end like this but my time has come.

As I observe her with tenderness in my eyes, I cannot help but notice the resemblance she has with her mother. Time has really given us its back so quickly. I remember the first time I met Jennifer in a hopeless state on the streets of Kitale. It was late in the evening as I strolled to

my, house around Mitume suburb from one of the hotels where I worked as an accountant. As I approached the social hall, I could see someone writhing in pain. Seeing her I was beside myself and so decided to step in and help and closely noted that she was half conscious lying in a pool of blood.

Standing there on the now empty street, I echoed a confused pregnant lizard. My small mind was racing with lots of questions.

“What if I help her and she dies on my hands?”

“What might have thrown her to this state?”

“Or is it robbery with violence?”

Helping her might change the situation hence landing me in prison.

“She is a stranger and I cannot afford to have her dying on me.” I concluded as I hurriedly walked away. Unfortunately, my conscience would not let me have it.

“Surely, it won’t hurt to offer a helping hand, would it? If I let her die here, my spirit will not be at peace and neither will hers.”

I observed her undecidedly as she painfully cried for my help. One thing was for sure; I was not about to leave this woman in such a saddening state. And so, I did. I tried to carry her but she was so heavy. “mwanaume Ni effort” could not apply here. If I was going to do this, then I was going to need help.

“But who will help?” I thought as I hurriedly skimmed through my contact list.

“Mr. Kizito!” I beamed as I dialled him.

” Where are you?”, I asked.

“Am at the taxi stage”, He answered.

“That’s not too far. I need your help. Could you please come pick me up? I have an emergency.” “Where?” he asked.

“At social hall near Wamaitha morgue.”

” I’m on my way.”

Luckily enough, he arrived in no time and soon enough we were on our way to Mount Elgon hospital. Upon arrival the nurses attended to her promptly and she was soon admitted to the women’s ward. I waited outside and silently whispered a prayer or two hoping for the best. I had to know that I was the one who brought her in.

After the long wait, I watched as the doctor came out of the ward. I could already read the good news written all over his face.

” Excuse me, I want to believe you are the man who brought in the bleeding patient?” he asked.

” Yes, I am”, I answered.

” I am doctor Dr. Wasike”, he introduced himself.

“What about you?” he continued.

Not like the doctors I’m used to. He was more friendly compared to the ones I had previously encountered.

“I am Wangila”, I answered.

“You look so familiar”, he claimed.

“Really?”

“I have seen you at Kivuline exotic resort group of hotels”, Dr. Wasike said.

“Oh yes sure I recognize the face too”, I replied.

The conversation was then followed by praises of our hotel services. I was glad he had such good thoughts of the place. I could tell that Dr. Wasike was a true professional. A man who loved his job. I say this because of the way he had served the wounded lady I had brought in.

It was amidst this conversation that he finally said, “Wangila your wife is pregnant and almost miscarried. It seems she wanted to procure an abortion. Stress is a contributing factor to miscarriage so try not to annoy her. Also, you will need to accompany her for her maternal services. I can assure you that you will benefit from the services here.”, he had said as he extended a card he had birthed from his pocket.

“This is my number don’t hesitate to call me. We can even have coffee and maybe talk business.”

“Yes sure” I heard myself say as I collected the card from his hand.

“She is now in stable condition you can go to the accountant clear your bill and take her home. She needs sufficient rest.”

” Thank you, doctor,” I said as we parted ways. I had no time to explain to the doctor that she was just a stranger to me. Instead, I went and, cleared her medical bill using a few of my savings. She was discharged and we made our way out of the hospital.

“Why did you want to procure an abortion?” I asked her. And all I got in reply were tears streaking down her cheeks. I suddenly felt sorry for asking.

“Sorry for the bother where do you live?” I asked but the tears didn’t seem to stop flowing.

“Please talk to me” I begged.

“I am homeless.” she finally said.

“What? How come?”

“My father disowned me. He said I have brought him much shame and that he wants nothing to do with me.”

I was beside myself. I couldn’t walk out on her anymore. Whether I liked it or not, I had to help her.

“Can I take you to my place if you don’t mind?”

“I’m fine you have done enough for me I don’t know how I will pay back”, she responded.

“Have I complained about you bothering me?” I told her.

“No but really, you have done enough”, she said.

“It won’t be good of me knowing you have nowhere to go and still let you go. I will have to take you with me.” I concluded.

She tried to hesitate but I never accepted what she anticipated. She stayed at my place as she recovered. Besides, my two-bedroomed apartment was big enough for the both of us. I therefore suggested that she occupy the extra room as her own. It hadn’t crossed my mind that I didn’t even know her name.

Then one day after a long and exhausting day at work, I came home to a sumptuous meal prepared for me. We had our dinner happily just like a normal family over a string of conversations.

She was already opening up to me. Having gone through what we had; we were no longer strangers. It was during this time that we got to know each other.

“Wangila”, she called. It was at this exact moment that I paid attention to her beautiful features. Our eyes met in an instant but she immediately looked away.

“I was once a reverend sister.” She continued. “I had given my life to serve Jesus. But I never knew that evil existed in church too.” Tears

now getting the best of her. I could feel my own tears threatening to get the best of me too.

“The kindness you have showed me from the day we met; you are a thousand times better than that priest who caused me this pain.” “A priest? What happened to you?” I asked her surprisingly.

“One of the priests called Fr. Manoti raped me. He took advantage of me and robbed me of my innocence. I abhor him.”

I could see the hate burning in her eyes as she sobbed bitterly.

“I was helpless. I didn’t have anyone to run to for help.”

“Why did you not report him to the archbishop?” I asked.

“How could I when my life was being threatened?”

“I had missed my period. I assumed it was one of those delays but I opted to buy a pregnancy kit to confirm. When the results came in, I was taken aback. Upon telling the priest, he instead suggested that I have an abortion so as to “quietly” solve the problem.

“I pointed out to him that an abortion was a crime but he instead shamelessly questioned his role in the pregnancy, claiming that I was a loose woman who wanted to stain his image!

“Later on, of course, I was stripped of my position as a sister. My father, ridden with shame, also disowned me as his daughter. Why had God allowed me, a faithful servant, to undergo such torment?”

I sat and listened to her narrate how she had gone days without food now that her father had kicked her out of her home. I listened to her talk about how she feared for her life and that of her unborn baby.

“When my child is born, am I to tell him/her that they are a product of rape?” she asked.

I listened as she confessed how she had decided to ingest poison on that fateful day when I found her unconscious. Looking at her, I’m glad her plan to end her life and that of her baby didn’t fall through. I came to love and be a source of hope for her. I was ready to take her in and make her my everything.

We got married and she soon took on my last name. Jennifer was no doubt a phenomenal woman. It’s now 21 years since she left me with Amina. Raising her as a single father has not been a walk in the park but I know without a shadow of a doubt that I gave my all to make her happy.

As I breathe my last breath, I choose to honor my promise to Jennifer and so take this dreadful secret with me to my grave.

MARRY ME NOT
Scholastic Chao

Scholastic Chao is a former student of Mt. Carmel Girls High School – Myanga in Bungoma County. She is one very inspired by art and therefore does more through art. She has written many stories which are yet to be published, but proves her love for art.

"Ken, I don’t know what’s going on but whatever it is, deal with it. It's affecting the family,"

I heard my mum shout at my dad, who came in the middle of the night drunk. Even with the drinking habit, he still loved us, especially me, being his first born. He was the most wonderful father anyone could ask for. His drinking habit was the only thing we disliked about him. I used to imagine that he loved alcohol more because he spent more time drinking than he could with my sister and me. My dad then responded:

I'm just enjoying the work of my hands, lady. I’m enjoying money. He walked out of his room and I heard him slam the door behind him, and my mum followed. My sister and I walked out of our rooms. They acted as if everything that morning was okay; they thought we were still young enough to read between the lines.

"Samantha, you'll make us breakfast for us and Sasha," my mom told me. I did as instruct. During breakfast, Sasha said that she wanted to go to a band she had been invited to.

"I will go with you." I shouted, and she immediately declined. Mum then told her that if she couldn’t go with me, she had no choice but to remain at home.

"But mummy," she pleaded.

"No buts, Sasha, no buts." If you can’t go with your sister, then don’t go. " I was happy to take her to the band, but she never wanted my company. We prepared and left. While we were walking, I was thinking that maybe I left my parents to make up and be the loving couple that everyone wanted them to be.

"Sasha, why did you not want me to come with you to the band?" I asked.

"Sam, you know what, I hate the way you dress. I don’t like the way you grab all the attention I deserve. When we are around people, everyone thinks I am older than you. I love being without you around. I felt bad and could not imagine my baby sister saying such words to me.

"I will not go in with you. I will wait for you to finish, then we can go home together."

"Who told you I would go home after practice?" Don’t you know I am now 18 years old? I am no longer a child, Sam. Go hang out with your friends. You disgust me. "Just disappear from my sight. She walked into the social hall, leaving me out in the silent air. Just then, I resolved to call some of my friends. Unfortunately, I was left deeply disappointed- because no one could be found or responded to my call.

I cursed and cured myself, but nothing really changed. I sat in a corner, putting my head between my legs and thinking of where I would go next. I did not want to offend her, thinking that maybe it was pressure from my mum and dad fighting and that she just needed space. I stood up and started walking without necessarily looking at where I was walking to. I was lost in deep thoughts that sank me into daylight dreams. Someone I had knocked on the road woke me up;

"I am sorry." I didn't mean to, "I said to him absentmindedly, without pushing my eyes towards his to avoid the embarrassment that might come."

"Hey, are you all, right?" You don't look okay, do you? I know it's not my business to care about you, but you've mysteriously and adequately caught my attention. " His sentimental comments made me raise my head to look at him. My eyes were glued to tears that were at the brim of facing the dry earth.

"I don't want to be with anyone right now." I cried out, walking away fast enough.

"Can I have only two minutes of your time?" He asked politely, then added, "I insist." I had no reason to say no, though I hated conversing with strangers, a notion that was planted on me by my dear mother. However, this situation seemed different. My heart was moving at a pace that pointed to no trouble, and so I trusted my instincts.

"My name is Jake." His voice then hit me so well that I admired the sound of it. I then lifted my head high enough that I looked straight at his admirable face. His height suited my intended kind of man.

I couldn’t hold a defection in mind. His physique was quite enticing. I just loved the way he looked and presented himself.

I finally gathered the courage to roar my name, though in a low tone.

"Will you join me and sing with us in the band?" He asked.

"No, I was on my way back home and I am afraid to face a crowd. I’d term it stage fright."

"I always sing whenever I feel stressed or depressed. It helps." Give me a minute, I will be back. I’d wish to accompany you home. " He ran inside the hall, but he reemerged in less than a minute. In the few seconds he was away, my mind had run through so many things that I never remembered a single one of them.

"I won’t be in the band today," he said, ganging his big eyes on me. "There’s a girl in the band who resembles you." Is she your sister? "

"Yes, her name is Sasha."

"Is she your only sister?"

"Yes. Only the two of us. What about you, any siblings?"

“I have two sisters and a brother. I am the second last."

"Awesome! I am the first born," I said, curving a suspicious smile, "and the second last." He laughed. I joined the laughter, and we were lost in an excitement that took us from strangers to acquaintances. He seemed at ease in my company, as did I.

I had never had such a comfortable stance beside a male counterpart. This felt like a new chapter in my life. The world seemed to have stopped revolving and rotating just to allow a moment of excitement and company to walk across my life. It felt good, like forever. I ended up revealing the incident with my envious sister; how she felt about me being a part of her company.

"You know what, Sam, that's not bad. She didn't lie. Sasha just wanted you to feel bad about something you should be proud of. "Look, you caught my attention even before I saw your beautiful face," he whispered in my ears, causing a wide weird smile to force its way through my tough face. "We need to go back." "Sam, I must hear you sing," he joked, laughing out loud.

"No." I intervened with finality. It was obviously time to part ways since we were close to my father's compound. I stopped and thanked him for, the company. He smiled and forced a hug, which I must attest I so much wanted but was full of pretence. He walked away as I watched, until his left foot followed his tall stature into a corner.

"I want a boy, Relsa! "I want a boy child!" my dad shouted at the top of his voice, not holding back. His voice felt sad and desperate.

"Ken, are you implying that our daughters are worthless?" cried my mother. It felt as though she was taking the blame her dad was pouring upon her. She accepted her daughters and couldn't thank God enough for what he had given to them.

"No, I love my girls very much, and thank you for giving me beautiful creatures. But the society, my wife said, the society. My people want

me to marry another wife. " I understood, from the clear cries of the-desperation that society had forced my father into, Why so? "Are we girls not human?" I thought to myself, It can never be enough for a backward society.

I knocked on the door and my father came only to meet my hard face. I did not say a word to him or to my mum. I just walked past them, straight to my room, engaged with weird, disturbing thoughts. I never imagined my dad could say such hash words to my mom, a woman he's had for over two decades. If that's what marriage would ever look like, I would better stay alone, without a man as a husband.

"Sam, can I come in?" Sasha asked with a seeming sorry voice.

'Yes, dear sister, you're welcomed." I said wiping off the fierce tears that covered my face.

I am sorry for the way I acted today. I was only angry that you got everything first. Now I understand that you care for me and love me. I will accept my place as the youngest. " I rushed my body up and gave her a cold-tight hug.

The next morning, my sweet-bitter sister, Sasha, set aside a dress for me. However, the dress she chose was my worst nightmare. Since papa purchased it, I have never liked the idea of putting on that dress. He even asked me at one point why I avoided putting it on. I just had to accept it since I wanted to impress Sasha. She had asked me to accompany her to the social hall band session for the daily practice. My dad worked as a manager for Warried Paper Industries. My mom, on the other hand, was a business woman. She ran a boutique at the

heart of the town. They left for work and left us in the house. I couldn't bear a lone stay at home.

So, when Sasha asked me to accompany her the previous night, I took no single second to accept.

We arrived at a weird crowd that did voice overs to test the instruments and set the pace for the day. Jake had not yet arrived. Sasha then took the stage and treated the audience to an enticing session with her soothing voice. She then walked down the stage, smiling. She progressed towards me and said;

"Come on, darling sister, sing with us today."

She pulled me to the podium forcefully and handed me the microphone. When the instruments started playing, I couldn't do anything. I was so afraid of the wide crowd that faced me with so many expectations. Sasha ran towards me and said to me,

"Sis, you can do this." Breathe in! out! Give us a cool sound of your magnificent voice. "

When I pulled the first few words of the verse to the ears of the expectant crowd, I was more than moved when I saw how excited they were. Just the Jake pushed himself in and saw me taking the stage by storm. I was so ecstatic that I could move such a small crowd of singers to loving my first performance.

"Samantha, your voice is beautiful like you." That was so good. "You need to do this often," said the excited Jake. "Are you staying today?"

"Yes, I want to listen to my sister sing, and I wouldn't mind hearing your voice too."

I started spending more time with Jake and it was really great to have him as a friend. This was the first time I had a best friend. He listened and understood me better than any of my family members. I knew more about him too. He used to tell me about a girl he was with in medicine school at that time before he came for the long holidays. He said that the lady was now with someone else and the guy kept mistreating her and- disrespecting her. Though he told me how much he wanted to get a chance with Hether, I still fell in love with him.

He would ask me at what age I would want to get married. My response was always the same; prioritize getting a child and move on with life without being attached to a man. He would think of me as a spoilt African woman who needed a lot of counselling. The idea would roll on and on between us every time we met.

I need to tell you something today. I know I have been talking about Hether a lot, but... I think I love you, Sam. It feels like I've known him for a very long time. Would you? " said Jake, pushing his eyes towards my weak eyes that were then pushed to the floor.

"Listen, Jake. I've had the same feeling. Your actions and position have shown your liking for me, but I need some time to think about it. Do you mind? " My response seemed like a cold bomb that had been triggered to create a little space between us. He then said that he would leave for school in two days' time, and so came the worry. That evening was filled with thoughts about Jake. I thought about my dad's

depreciated love towards my mom, and that made me doubt a relationship commitment.

"Hello Dina, What do you mean you've seen him enter her house? Let me come, yes immediately. " My mom put on her cloak and a hat and left the room. Her friend had called and said that my father had been-seen getting into a house helped by a woman, who happened to be a bar attendant. In an hour's time, they emerged from the cold, rainy darkness and clumped into the house. My mom was wearing a wet face. My sister and I worried that her face had been cleaned by tears. My father was so drunk that he couldn't talk to us. However, whenever my mother tried saying a word, he would slap the voice out of her, leaving her in painful silence. He then moved and kicked her belly, leaving her unconscious. Just then, he realized he had made a mistake. Sasha cut a cold, loud scream across the air as I ran towards the door. I went to Mr. Alumbe's house, our neighbour, and came back with him, to help, maybe.

After leaving the hospital, my mother vowed not to go back to our home again. She rented a house, and we followed her. During this time, I had been dragged close to Sasha as never before. I told her about Jake's proposal and my plans to not get married. She advised:

"Just because mum and dad are not working out doesn't mean yours too cannot work, dear sis." She said, pulling me close to her. One would think she was the eldest. Then she continued,

"You have to call Jake and tell him how much you love him and that you deserve better." She took my phone and called Jake.

"Hello! I was planning to call you today." roared Jake from the other side of the phone.

"I have something to tell you, Jake." I took myself in.

"I also have some news to tell you." "Okay. You

first. " I told him.

"Samantha" I asked you if you could be my girlfriend, and you never said a word. I therefore accept to be a friend, not more, not less. " "He's back with me," he declared emphatically. These sentiments moved me. I felt as though something had left me. My heart felt so dull and empty.

"Sam, are you there?" Please say something. "

"Yes...! Yeah! I'm here, Jake," I said, trying not to sound desperate, "I'm happy for you." Oh...I wanted to tell you that mom is okay now, that's all. Can we talk some other time, please? I really have to go. " I dropped my phone and sank into a world full of desperation.

Since the incident, I have avoided getting into contact with Jake. I didn't pick up his messages or calls. It had been seven years of no communication. There was rust holding us apart, between our communication lines. Since my business was booming, I had started developing cravings for a child, but then, I didn't want to get involved with a man. I tried to think away from that, but it couldn't add up. I thought of visiting a doctor. The first person that clipped onto my mind was Jake, and so I called him. He agreed to meet me later that night for a dinner date at a restaurant, Bloomy Eatery.

"Been long, Sam. How have you been? " His overly enticing voice roared through my eardrums until I felt what had left seven years earlier, getting back to hold onto my heart.

"Been good." You? "

"Good! Sasha? "

"She’s good but away, in Britain to further her studies."

"Woow! Impressive! " He couldn’t say much, so I couldn’t. We couldn’t say anymore over the dinner date. He tried as much not to include Hether in the conversation since I didn’t inquire about her. I was unable to bridge the subject of the night, even after he enquired. We left, and he offered to drop me off at my apartment.

"Jake, if I may ask." How can I get pregnant without getting intimate? " I resurrected the buried silence.

Samantha, are you seriously asking me that question?"

"Will you be kind enough to answer me?" I said, looking at him, his eyes fixed on the dark road.

"I will only respond to that, Sam." You have a lot on you and so there's a need for a psychiatrist. " I took his advice because I had been feeling disconnected from reality for seven years.

After a session that lasted six months, Jake then explained everything about artificial ways of getting pregnant, one of which was quite dangerous. However, he helped me find a sperm donor who would

help in the process. It worked after a few trials. I was pregnant with a donor sperm. Jake moved closer to me and the unborn and never wanted to stay away. He said he loved both of us and wanted the best for us. This worried me. I didn't trust my instincts about his words, although I loved him as well.

My father had long gone through rehabilitation, and he was no longer an alcoholic. He had reconciled with my mother. When I visited them, I saw the bounce of emotions that took over them when they saw me heavy-laden. My dad would joke that the emotions around the home were overwhelming,

"I know that's a fellow man. Not a guess." And we would laugh our lungs out in the silent nights that gathered us around the old dining table.

Every day of my visits to the clinic, I was accompanied by Jake. He wouldn't give a more important reason for doing so, but would just walk me to the hospital. It never hit me to think of it all. I, however, enjoyed his company on every visit. On the delivery day, he danced uncomfortably outside the delivery room. He was a doctor, yes, but couldn't help me deliver since he took me to a different hospital that-night. His discomfort raised questions in my mind. But I never thought of anything awkward about him; he was just a caring friend.

The next day, after getting discharged, Jake walked into my house with a huge bag. He unpacked it, and what came out startled me. Baby

clothes, napkins, shoes, and many more things for the newborn. He then pulled me to my bed and said that we needed to talk.

"Sam, I still love you." I was with Hether, but I just never felt anything close to what we had. What we have I just love you? I know you want nothing to do with a man, but I must say, a purely honest confession, I want you. I love you, Sam. “I cut him short before he could say anything more that enticed my heart.

Jake, I love you, but I just don’t want us to get into that. "If you don’t mind, you can leave my house," I said, turning away from him, "and... thank you for everything."

Samantha, please do not do this. I love you and my son too. I want to be you... Please! “I cried, poor Jake. I turned to face him right away. I wanted to tick him off the idea of saying Jim was his son.

"Jim is not your son, Jake."

I’m the donor! I gave you my sperm, Sam! “That hit me differently. I got to my feet and moved around the room. I turned to face the baby who was lying on his back on my bed.

"Baby boy," Have you heard of him? The man I’ve loved. He claims to be your father, and he never said a word. "Listen baby, he’s confessed." He was still on his knees, tears streaming down his cheeks, when I turned around and looked him in the watery eyes.

"I heard all you said..." he cried out, but then I cut him short, smiling and sobbing uncontrollably.

"No, you got it wrong, Jake. Why didn't you tell me? Not even a clue? "After these questions, he stood up without saying a word and headed for the door.

("Jake?" I called with a slightly soft voice. I tried to sound as sweet as possible.

"What now? Let me leave. I'll leave you two alone, forever. "He cried out, bitterness staring at me from his glowing eyes.

I want you to stay, Jake."

"Sam" I know this is difficult for you. I'm honestly sorry for disrupting your life plans. I want to be close to the boy. I love him very much. I promise never to ask you about marriage. I am willing to wait for you, however long it will take. The only thing I ask of you is to give me a chance to be close to the boy. I won't disappoint. I did all that because of the connection I felt between us. Otherwise, goodbye. "

After a year, having allowed him to visit his son, we had a good relationship. He would come, stay a day, and leave. The cycle continued for long enough that Jim got used to him and missed him when he didn't come. His son resembled him in every way.

"Today someone's moods are different." "Daddy!" Jim
shouted towards us.
That night, Jim and I fell asleep on the couch. Jake took Jim to his room, then came, woke me up, and led me to my room. He helped me get into the bed and turned to leave when I called for him.
"Jake? Will you stay with me tonight? "

"No, I can't, Sam. Let me head home. "

"No, you can’t do that. "Come on. I said, pulling myself from the bed. I moved towards him and held him in my arms. Reluctantly, he slowly wrapped his heavy arms around me. The atmosphere was quite enticing. I felt the touch of heaven ganging down on me. The clouds played above our heads as intimacy crawled in.

The room became warm with love and lust. Every sound that fell on my ears were his deep words that said he loved me. The night was taken into my heart, the best forever.

THE WHITE ANGEL

Job Kabula

Job Kabula holds a BED Arts (Geo/Rel) degree from the University Of Eldoret. He is an alumni of Maliki FYM Primary School and Chesamisi Boys High School all in Bungoma County-Kenya. He is a writer with one novel in print titled, Never Die Melinda (2022) and a short story, Before I Die published on yours2read.com. He is a high school teacher and a motivational speaker with undying passion in literature.

The outskirts of the town were gradually sinking into stillness, no more screeches especially from hawkers, this due to the overhead sun that was burning hot, directing every trader to a nearest shade, and maybe a refrigerated soft drink like Fanta or Sprite just to kill thirst. Inside her electronics shop, Nancy seemed calm and connected, she had switched off her sound system that would normally play loud music from dawn to twilight. Even her smartphone, not close to her. She was in her own pool, just alone, or maybe, with the White Angel.

Seated on a plastic chair close to the shop's counter, she pulled a drawer near her feet from which she collected two big envelopes; these were resignation letters she had printed ready to sign and divorce papers that she had already signed. Quickly, she reread the resignation letter but did, not finish and threw it close to her sound system. Minutes later, she stood up and walked towards the same unit, this time round, to switch on some music. Softly, Lucky Dube's Remember Me found space around her. The beats and the lyrics sounded the mood she wanted.

At the back of her mind, Nancy had numerous thoughts on her mental shelves. Her daughter Delilah, who she gave birth to at the age of twenty, was doing her second month in ICU. At this time, she prayed that Delilah would die so as to unpin her from the wall of pain she had lived on since Delilah's first birthday anniversary, now a grown up swiftly navigating into puberty but ever sick. Any time she thought about Delilah, Samson, her ex-boyfriend who also was Delilah's father, would enter her mind without knocking.

The two had their relationship end painfully when her parents chased her away from home after she got pregnant. A decision that greatly relied on the cultural beliefs of her people. Nancy's mother had given birth to her while still in her father's house; for these people therefore, it was considered a taboo for Nancy to give birth in the same house (her grandfather's house). She had to choose a forced marriage that still never worked. Samson winged away from her never to be traced again. No man is an island they say, and a charity organization came to her rescue where the non-governmental organization took care of her, catered for her college fees and even her post graduate studies, making her the- university lecturer she was. A journey that was wholly away from the sight of her parents.

In her mind, the idea of a man who skipped responsibilities of taking care of his child wanting to see the same child troubled her. Samson had taken a case to court demanding access to his child Delilah. Out of pain, Nancy found it an impossibility, though at some point, she had thought of Delilah meeting her father being the only therapy she needed to heal. Could it be so?

Also, in her bank account, a chain of problems called her. Phone calls from her parents and extended family members were unending. They wanted her support financially, for as they knew, university lecturers had a lot of money. So unrelenting it was to her; a car loan she had not paid to completion and a plot she was paying in instalments had all paralysed her account so she could not afford the lifestyle she needed. These financial strains had caused her to cherry-pick resignation over having so many people rely on her.

As Lucky Dube's second track on her playlist hit the roof of her shop, a customer came. Swiftly she moved to the counter to attend to the young man who appeared to be of her age.

"Hello madam, can I get a Bluetooth headset?" The gentleman asked. He was dressed in a sparkling clean Italian suit.

With a faked smile, Nancy responded calmly, "Yes sir, for one thousand shillings."

Looking directly into her eyes, the gentleman nailed a line for her before paying for the headset.

"In my eyes, you're striking."

"Thank you." Nancy responded as she pulled a box full of headsets near the counter.

This to her face gave birth to an existent smile, for they were words that had deserted her ears for years, possibly because of her marriage that wasn't working.

"I am Jared, a counselling psychologist in town, and you?"

"Nancy." She responded with no interest for a drawn-out conversation. "Nancy, in your eyes I see a White Angel," Jared said not knowing if he was maddening her.

"So, what do you mean?" She asked.

"That in you, there's a White Angel, who walks with you all days, who sets you free, and gives you solutions whenever you have to make a decision. Similar to the biblical Gabriel, the White Angel is. In heavenly glory, he lives watching over the lives of God's people, the sick, the oppressed, the depressed, and the poor among others.

The White Angel is also the brand name of my consultancy firm with a brick-and-mortar office right here in Eldoret town." Jared gave an exhaustive description of the White Angel.

"That's great, you'll leave me with your contacts, and I'll love to refer friends who are in need of your services." Nancy answered before the two parted.

On top of her shop's counter, a piece of paper on which Jared had written his contact was left to rest loosely for a while before it fell on the floor as Nancy watched helplessly. Effortlessly, she moved her eyes around the buildings, shops, cars, pedestrians and traders that were all in their own endeavours. It was such an ample view that once again, she was able to glue her eyes on Jared.

A fine-looking gentleman to her he was, African dark and tall, with a scent of financial stability compared to Alex, the man she had filed a divorce case with. Handsomeness that went beyond comparison, not close to Samson's, who she was fighting hard to forget everything about. So quickly, she missed the short-lived conversation they had.

Just as you'll expect, a thought of dating a guy like Jared wouldn't have missed- a chance in this. But as he walked majestically until Nancy lost sight of him, the idea of the divorce papers flew in.

She had been married to Alex for seven years and the two had been blessed with two children, a girl Annet and a boy Antony. So, agonizing it was for such a premature marriage to shelve divorce papers. She was tired of the constant fights, a man who ended a day not without kissing a bottle of wine. This caused him to arrive home not once but always in the middle of the night. Out of alcoholism, Alex had already lost his job as a bank accountant, and maybe for him, the only job that remained was to wrangle with his wife.

In their apartment, times came when everything turned shambolic. In a plot she purchased with her own money, she suffered the most, not to be allowed in when things went bad for the two. On several occasions, she had been forced to take her children to the neighbourhood for rescue. All this drama was the reason she had opted for a divorce. On her soft and tender skin, slight scars were punctured. A mark that she had been through some sort of violence that ignored her status, so true it became, that accidents will happen in the best regulated families.

With every thought in her mind, she felt a reduction in weight, a heavy heart that threatened to bust out of its ribcage, and a depressed mind.

She also thought of the day when she nearly danced with death. On this day, she drove away from home to the banks of Nzoia River.

Parked her Mercedes and stood along the bank of the great river. Losing her life happened to be the option she had chosen on this day.

The pain of the unrewarding marriage had exceeded the limits she had outlined. A marriage that was full of violence and unsatisfactoriness. The demands at her work place were also stressing.

A lot of exam papers were unmarked, with records showing that most of her classes had been missed, especially morning classes. As usual, she had to touch every corner of responsibilities in the house before leaving: preparing meals for her children, taking them to school, ensuring her alcoholic husband had something for breakfast and lunch, visiting her daughter in hospital which she did every day.

Alex believed it was her responsibility to ensure the house was in order. Thoughts of having a household helper to him was a no.

"I don't want you to be bossy, these are your responsibilities," he once debated against having a maid in his house.

Along the banks of the river, Nancy thought losing her life would make life easier for her. All she wanted was a way of not being anywhere close to her husband, a man who had refused anything to do with a divorce. Here, she stood for hours before memories of her children came in; she thought of a life they would live without her. Who would hospitalize Delilah? The rejected child who Alex never wanted to see? Her parents who forever hinge on her, she wondered who the couple-will- call in her absence, and also, she still thought of how Alex will live without her. Slowly, the idea of jumping into the river diminished, darkness came, and she drove back home.

It had been three weeks without reporting to her work station. To her seniors, she had requested a sick leave for she couldn’t manage to be all in a day’s work, only to stay at home, terminate the job contract of

her electronics shop attendant and take over the same responsibilities. A small business she was running in town as a side hustle just to minimize over dependence on her pay check. She had truly chosen not to lecture again. At the back of her mind, the white colour job was the cause of insecurity to her husband, over dependence on her by her relatives, and- also the reason Alex chose to lose his job carelessly. She had opted to resign.

For the stressing marriage, she felt a divorce would do her better, and if not, she'll execute a plan in her handbag. She was tired of the life around her, people who never supported her, cases she found no value in, and most importantly, injuries she had sustained from the man-eater husband.

As time went on, evening moved closer with a song of ending day light. Outside her shop, people had come back to sell, packed to capacity the town had grown, and from a distance, you'd easily fall under conviction- that every seller was selling highly except for her, whose counter remained deserted. For a whole day, she had sold a single headset alone. At 4:00pm, she closed her shop.

Whoever was close to her would easily read the downheartedness in her, a wounded heart, and scars from a man that always bit the hand that fed him, a life that had become not what she thought of. With the shop closed, and her leather handbag on her left arm, she entered the car, a drive towards the White Angel, though she wasn't aware of this.

In her handbag, a bottle of insecticides kept her company, maybe a drink for another day.

As she navigated the traffic jam that was steadily flooding on every tarmac, she grew weaker on realizing she was headed home, back to it, domestic violence, calls that had gone unanswered, a sleepless night where she had to stay awake waiting for the young man she had chosen as the love of her life. No more taste for a single meal, but a string of thoughts depressing her without compassion.

Along the way, from a tinted car window, she read a signpost written THE WHITE ANGEL. On the same signpost, the exact shop location for the agency had been written. With her eyes slaved on it, she parked her-- car on the road side, for Jared had already sunk in her mind. In slight trembles, she thought about the counsellor; would Jared help her?

Before she made her way out of the car in search of Jared's office, she unpacked her handbag, removed the insecticide she had and threw it on the back seat, repacked a few other items not to forget her tablet and walked towards a block on which Jared's office was. As she walked, one would easily read a frail young lady in her; she lacked her usual style of walking, maybe due to depression that had compromised her eating habits.

Into a lift, she entered solo and made her way to the fourth floor of 64 apartments. On arrival, she saw the exact office she was after and hesitated towards it, then remembered her handbag. All she had was a car key she had freely suspended on her middle finger. At Jared's office, she swiftly entered without knocking. Luckily for her, Jared was in, and him alone.

"Dear White Angel, I need your help," she went down on her knees in front of Jared with tears threatening to burst her eyes in torrents.

"Nancy, what's wrong?" Jared asked in surprise.

"A network of problems Jared, I'm a victim of domestic violence, I'm tired of my career, I'm loaded with divorce and designation papers, Delilah has forever been sick, my husband..." Nancy cried loudly, not able to finish.

"Calm down, and be on your feet." Jared beseeched.

Moments later, he asked her to move close to the mirror on the opposite side of his office.
"What are you seeing Nancy?" Jared asked.
"It's me."
"Are you at ease to be who you're seeing?" He asked her again. "No," she answered as she struggled to dry her cheeks in front of the mirror.
"Ok, the mirror is the White Angel, the Angel who gives you whatever you choose. Just like any other mirror, it shows you the finest details of whatever you place in front of it. The decision to be of contentment lies in your hand." Jared explained.
"What do you mean?" Nancy wondered.
"That your mind becomes what you put in it, you become what you choose, just like the mirror, it shows you whatever you place in front of it. I understand your situation; from far, I read that you are under depression, you mentioned about domestic violence. It's time you end that marriage. For the White Angel will give you whatever you ask. Do not stick to that which lowers your contentment. Calm down, take your time, to best find out what you want for yourself, and become

what you want. The White Angel is a force that gives you whatever you ask for and choose." Jared explained.

"Thank you, so you mean I've chosen all these problems?" She asked.

"Yes, it's time to make another choice, but before that, write a journal about whatever you are going through, write everything on paper to get, it out of your mind, reread it as if it's not yours, and find solutions to the troubled character in your journal." Jared added.

They conversed more and more as Jared's healing therapy brought to birth smiles in Nancy's face, smiles that could see her write a colourful journal to which she gave THE WHITE ANGEL as the title...!

CORNERED BY TIES

Brian Dredan Simiyu

Dredan is a teacher of English and Literature. He holds a BED Arts from Kibabii University. Dre, as known by his audience, is an experienced writer having been published twice. His first book, a novel, was published online by Smashwords. His secondo book is an anthology of poems, African Extreme Poetry published by Elong'o Publishers in 2020. He is a known social media poet holding a brand called DRE Arts.

One early morning, when the birds danced with their beaks uttering songs of celebration; when the sun had woken up and lifted its beautiful head climbing the hills; when Sebembe village was silent with no motivation of terror, a baby's cry burst from Okech Jagem's homestead. And almost immediately, another one dropped from the same hut; Nyar Jalang'o's house. Okech Jagem was moving from one site to the other as though he was investigating the possibility of the gender of his unborn offspring. Just then, a mkunga dashed from the house and announced under his feet;

"Mano ber yawa. It's twins!" Then she turned to leave before he called again.

"Neee! Are they boys?" He inquired, as though sure of the gender. Then his face shone with satisfaction after hearing that it was a boy and a girl. Okech felt the world under his feet. He had sired a substantial number of children, and many died afterwards.

He had never seen twins in his blood, but then his youngest wife decided to shine morning blessing to his home. That excited him. He felt a basketful of joy pouring on him.

"Finally, Nyar Jalang'o! You made me a father of a set. Oh nyasaye! How can I repay you?"

The naming ceremony followed. The preparations that fell in Jagem's homestead were outstanding. Kong'o was to be there in plenty as the old men had to gather around a pot sipping from it. A number of bulls were slaughtered under the order of Jagem. His wife's huts boiled with smoke that signified cooking. Women of the village walked to and from the Sebembe river with pots filled with water to the brim, just to ensure supply was enough. Dancers graced the stage, the best from across the village swung their waist for the visitors. Everything played right with no moment of terror. As it was the custom of the people of Gem, the twins were to be given names that related to culture. The boy was named Odongo, the girl, Apiyo. It was custom to name babies after a person who was admired by the community. This person must have had a character worth emulation.

They must not have been outcasts in the society because their character, like it was said, always went down to the children. Naming also went with the season one was born. Okech Jagem was born in a time when people had no food in their granaries, hence hunger, kech. This was the line of the culture and was always followed.

Time has no limit and thus can never hide growth. Odongo and Apiyo saw to that. They grew into teenagers soon enough and Apiyo was almost of age for marriage. Suitors started peeping into Jagem's home

expecting him to announce the battle, and the wait lived on. Apiyo grew into a definable young woman.

Her dark skin complexion was so fair that it accentuated so well with its fine texture. Her eyes, the flowing glows couldn't be ignored by the onlookers. They shone like a bright sunset that many felt lust choking them. Her agile body was so well designed; broadened hips that drew a fine picture. Her waist sunk so well into her curvature that the outcome sent men into prayers of tongues. Some swagged their tongues out on watching her waist swing left to right when she walked from the river.

"Nyako! Why don't you accept my proposal? I want to marry you and walk you out of your father's home. Can I?" Shouted the ever-lustful clown of the village, Abimbo. He was the crook that ran the village with troubles. He was punished under several instances of misconduct.

"Eheheee...omera, how can I, daughter of Okech Jagem, accept you, a useless son of Ongoma? Are you in your right mind?" Beautiful and brave, Apiyo responded with a bang that ran anger onto Abimbo. He bit his lower lips in anger and his eyes boiled into red glows. He started groaning while moving towards Apiyo.

"How dare you insult me you moron. Come here!" He grabbed and pulled her close to him. The pot on Apiyo's head slipped and burst on the bare ground sending water in divergent series. She too started boiling with anger. Her pure pretty outlook turned to an ugly-sour face. Abimbo grabbed her harder and threw her into the nearby bush and jumped on her. Before he could do anything, Odongo bumped onto him with a heavy fist. He fell wholly onto Apiyo before she could push

him aside. Things turned ugly when Abimbo got to his feet. Apiyo raised an alarm with a sharp scream that alarmed the whole village while Abimbo struggled to cut through the thick bush.

Every road led towards Abimbo. He couldn't run any further and so he was cornered. He gave himself up after a defeat and was led into the village square. A messenger was sent to call every member of the families around Sebembe village. From children to babies, men to women, young to old. They all took space around the village square to hear what the elders would decide for Abimbo.

"JoSebembe amosou!" Started the chief, "we have seen our children getting terrorised. We have witnessed our goats and cows disappear. We have even woken up to an empty maize field when the previous night we'd left a fieldful of maize. The fingers of every victim always pointed to Abimbo son of Ongoma. Today he was caught trying to untidy our beautiful daughter, Apiyo who was rescued by her brother. Erokamano Odongo." The congregation cheered at the mention of Odongo.

"And so, my people. I'm, like you, so disappointed in this young man. We have given him so many chances but still he fails to uphold. He has failed to stand by the culture of the people of Gem. Today, we send him away for ten years." He declared and looked in the direction of Abimbo, "to you dear son, go to your uncles and stay there until you're called back."

The village roared with excitement and enthusiasm. Everyone had been tired of Abimbo, so was his father who always warned him until

he was left with no more air. Later that evening, when Apiyo had taken a plateful of ugali and fish to her father, he said to her;

"My darling daughter, I must talk to you." And so, she could not walk back to her mother's hut. "We have made you a beautiful daughter in every aspect. I love the woman you've grown to be, donge?" She-nodded- and placed a beautiful smile on her young face before letting him continue, "You can cook. You can dig. You can go to the river and-many good things. Now is the time to send you somewhere on a mission, to cook for someone and make him comfortable." This couldn't sink into her. She did not understand her father.

"Papa, what do you mean?" She inquired in an absolutely confused tone.

"My daughter, I mean good for you. You have to go to your own house. You're all grown daughter."

This new development scared her. How could she leave her mother and brother to go to some strange home as a wife? How could she even start sleeping with a man she has never known? How could she be the one to make the home comfortable?

She couldn't find an answer to all the questions. Was she really ready? Only God could tell.

When the negotiations for dowry for Okech Jagem's youngest wife, Nyar Jalang'o, were conducted, they had agreed to give their daughter to the parallel clan of the Jalang'o people with whom the wife came from. The time had come for Okech to fulfil the oath. He sent a messenger to the, Jalang'o people to inform them that a daughter is

prime for marriage. They responded by travelling to his home one morning.

"Jalang'o, you're welcomed. I'm sure your daughter has something for you." Roared Okech with utmost excitement. Just then, his wife strode her feet to the place where they had been settled. On her knees, she handed to them a pot full of kong'o.

"Kongoi Cheptanis. I can see you're fat enough. This man is taking good care of you." Exclaimed her father who had been eaten down by age. She nodded smiling then left without a word.

"So, you say our daughter's daughter is prime. Can we see the token?" One of the elders roared from close to Nyar Jalang'o's father.

"Sure. She must be close," Okech said turning his head to the direction of the house, "Apiyoo! Apiyoo nyathina. Bii ne."

Apiyo stormed out of the house running and stopped close to her father. She was breathing so fast and so she was allowed to calm down before anything could be said.

"My daughter, these are your grandparents. Greet them." Apiyo did as her father told her, with utmost respect before moving back to her father.

"You can now go and help your mother," she left and Okech turned to the Jalang'o elders, "you have seen the girl. How do you say?"

"She's beautiful. Excellent," commented one elder, "she must be worth what you're going to ask for."

"Yes, we believe so. Talking of worth, twenty heads is not bad. Considering it was a promise." Said one Gem elder.

"You mean twenty? You must be too stiff. Can we talk about that?" Exclaimed an elder.

"Yes, it's so. Twenty heads. Not less, not more."

The Jalang'o people pulled off to discuss the price. Some of them could be seen nodding while some seemed not to agree. They finally came to an agreement and moved back.

"Yes. Twenty heads. Deal." Declared an elder.

The deal was agreed. Twenty heads of cattle, three goats and a ram. All were to be driven into Okech Jagem's homestead before the next moon could be seen glowing on the fair sky.

The material day crawled so fast that Apiyo felt bad. The morning stared at her with the rays of the young agile sun cutting through the spaces on the window to her face. She woke up exhausted from the activity of the previous day. Her mother and she had been preparing foodstuffs she'd carry to her new home. They prepared yams, potatoes, sweet potatoes, maize and packed them in a full sack. Later on, they prepared groundnuts that she'd carry as a gift to her father-in-law. That had given her so much exhaustion. She sat up on her bed and stretched a full yawn before climbing off. Her face shone with beauty, and yet exhausted. She looked through the window and saw her mother fighting with a cow which didn't want her to milk it. She smiled and walked to the fireplace to set a fire.

"Daughter, you're awake!" Said Cheptanis Nyar Jalang'o.

"Yes mama. Did you milk?" She asked humorously.

"Apiyo. I know you. You want to laugh at your mother. Please light the fire, we're getting late," she said pulling away from the joke, "remember you'll start milking your own cow soon enough. And it's not just one, plenty of them. My people have many cows and goats, and you have to milk all of them. Wait and see."

Apiyo frowned. She looked at her mother disappointedly.

On arrival at Soliat village, the crowd had been waiting and so the party started. Warriors were given time to display their capabilities. They danced with vigour. Tall and muscular young men stepped onto the stage. They were covered in brown sukas.

Their faces played right for the mood of the day. They held stiff spears and shields that seemed to show superiority. The dance was quite a show that Apiyo enjoyed. The bridegroom then stepped forward and stretched his hand at Apiyo and broadened his face into a welcoming smile. Apiyo smiled back. She was handed over to Koech who led her into his house where he was to check- her virginity. He came out declaring that she was safe to live among the Jalang'o.

"How dare you return words to me? Are you now my husband? Didn't your parents teach you manners young lady? I'll teach you. You need to be circumcised so you can be considered meaningful. Seems that's the reason you're not respectful." Koech roared at Apiyo while hitting her so hard. She cried all night long while nursing her wounds. Life in Soliat had become hell and traumatizing. She had faced much hostility that made her desperate to go back to her father.

"You devil. You travelled all the way to come and spill your untidy self to our men. Go back home!" One woman would roar at her while the other would say;

"She thinks she's too beautiful to be circumcised. You will face the knife for you to be like us."

Apiyo cried every day. She slept in tears and woke up in tears. Her husband would make love to her forcefully, and she wouldn't push him so much away since it was his right, says the culture.

She just sunk into deep cries that couldn't heal her. Her face was ever wet, so was her bosom and stomach, from sweaty cries that never ended.

Odongo was on a stand. He had been informed by his father of the girl he was going to marry. The girl, Abebi Noela, was a touch of beauty that touched every male creature in her village, Mberesi. Her eyes were well placed in their sockets that they gave her a beautiful little sense of touch. They were big. Not too big. Not too small. They danced categorically to create a rhythmic world of admiration among men. Her waist, like Apiyo's, set out to dangle slowly into her curvature, that which was a deployed wide hip. This gave her an appearance of her own take; and so many girls from Mberesi were ever envious of her outlook.

Odongo took it to himself to pay Apiyo, his sister a visit and inform her of the idea. His walk was rough and long that he'd stop several times to rest. With the luggage of food dangling on his head, he felt the tough side of the journey. The sun was glowing hot that his face

poured buckets of sweat as he pushed up and down the valley, until he arrived in Soliat. His arrival was silent and unwelcoming. Everyone who was in his inlaws' homestead just stared at him, with a sour grin running on their faces. This made him wonder the creature he looked like. Just then, after greeting the people around the homestead he turned towards his sister's hut but one short man stopped him;

"Young man. You're not allowed in the hut for now. Please don't head there."

Just then, he heard his sister let out a sharp scream from the hut. He hurriedly threw the weight on his head to the brown hot ground and made a run towards the hut. He pushed the door but it couldn't move. He moved steps back then threw himself on the door so that it burst open. The women who were holding his sister trying to make her a decent woman turned to look at the storm. Just then, Apiyo saw her twin brother and shouted;

"Ayaya nyathiwa, don't let them kill me with their knives. Please take me home."

The women danced out of the hut and Odongo ran to untie his sister before a huge log fell on his head throwing him on the ground. He stood up and started wrestling the man who hit him; he overpowered him. He rushed back to his sister and untied her. They rushed out of the hut. Unfortunately, a crowd had gathered out and was ready to attack.

"Brother! Let's run this way," ordered Apiyo as she pulled her brother. They pushed through the bush but couldn't go far.

They were cornered and stones started raining on them. In tears, the two started singing knowing it was their last day on earth;

Wan wadhi ka nyasayee

Wan wadhii,

Wan wadhi ka nyasayee

Wan wadhi chamo ngimaa....

And the song couldn't go on for long enough. They fell onto the ground unconscious; the crowd left knowing everything was done. A few hours later, Odongo raised his head, with it covered in blood and looked towards his sister;

"Dada, are you okay?"

"No brother, I'm hurting. I can't walk." She cried in pain. They crawled and held each other in a pure painful cuddle.

A BLEEDING SOCIETY

Isaac Anyolo Ongere

#Son_of_the_soil

Isaac Ongere is a graduate from Mount Kenya University. He has produced plays that have won national competitions, such as The Bill, Dark Shadows, Tempest at the Cathedral, and Kisima cha Machozi. He is also the author of Son of the Soil. He has received an award from Enhancing Border Africa for one of his Swahili plays

PROLOGUE

PLOT: Your girlfriend wants you to meet her family. When you go there the elder sister is your ex-girlfriend. The younger brother is the boy you were fighting with over a girl. Her dad is the doctor who advised you to stop bringing girls for abortions. And finally, the mother is the sugar mommy who just bought you a car.

“What will you do?”

“Do you really love me, Isaac?” Suzanna asked with a doubting tone.

We had just reunited after a breakup. She recently caught me cheating on her with her closest friend.

We had decided to put our differences behind us and reunite. Her insecure eyes projected directly into my soul as she spoke to me. We were at Woodland Resort located in Standard suburb near St. Joseph’s Boys Kitale. She was dressed in a flowered Kitenge miniskirt that

clearly- projected her brown and juicy thighs. Love birds always match in everything, so was I, in shorts of the same Kitenge texture with a white t-shirt written "SOUL", while hers read "MATE", so when together you could read the word, “SOULMATE.”

“I love you so much, Suzanna,” I replied as the light in my eyes came in contact with her brown eyes. All this was happening in a reserved gazebo that the management had reserved for us. She had booked a Choma na Nyama get-together reservation package. The gazebo was built of bamboo and roofed with makuti. Flower pots surrounding it with rose flower decorations promoted serenity. There was a fridge inside the gazebo full of all sorts of drinks. I took a bottle of red wine with little ice cubes dropped inside the wine glasses and served. She took the glasses and handed one to me. “Be my guest”, she said. Holding glasses full of wine, we enjoyed the cool breeze of this sumptuous environment. We joyfully enjoyed roasting two kilograms of mutton. Burning furnaces of love were rejuvenating in us.

“Then come and see my parents,” she said. Those words almost made the wine choke me.

“You mean I come for an introduction?” I asked shockingly.

“Yes, my love. It is the highest time we take a bold step to move our relationship to the next level. It is my wish you be mine forever. I love you so much, Isaac, despite the fact that you have been hurting me more often. Like last time I caught you cheating on me with Sandra.” Tears of bitterness on the subject of betrayal started rolling down her cheeks. Suzanna was this kind of a go-getter; when she aims, she can’t

afford to miss. Her words pressured me. I knew it could not end well and I was the guilty one, so I interrupted before she continued.

“Give me the date,” I said to her. These words could cover my mistakes that she wanted to bring up.

“Tomorrow,” she replied happily. I don't know where her tears disappeared to. She is a drama queen indeed.

“Tomorrow is too close,” I said to her.

“Time waits for no man,” she said.

“I need to recollect myself and see how I will go about it,” I replied.

“But you bought a zero-mileage Benz from the showroom,” she said.

I moved close to her as my hands rested on her size eight hips and kissed her forehead.

“Matters of love cannot be compared with material objects. Introduction, my love, needs time,” I said to her.

“How long?” she asked.

“As soon as I am ready,” I sophisticatedly told her.

“Be specific,” she said while her sharp eyes got in contact with my eyes.

I went silent for a moment, I felt like I had been cornered. All I wanted was to evade the discussion of meeting her parents.

“Next month,” I replied.

“Next month?” she surprisingly asked.

“No hurry in Africa,” I jokingly said.

“Too long, but promise not to hurt me again,” she said.

“Your wish is my command. If only I had the ability to make you feel yourself from my heart, then you would understand exactly how I love and want you to be by my side forever.” I told her, smiling sheepishly.

“A lie,” she shyly said as she rested her head on my chest. An old friend once told me women are sophisticated. When they say yes, they mean yes and when they say no, they still mean yes. Here I knew I had won; next month it was.

“Not a lie, Suzanna, will you marry me?” I proposed, holding a ring in my hand.

“Yes, I will,” she said it with a lot of joy while I placed the gold-coated ring on her ring finger.

She was full of love and happiness over my move. Her sweet lips unexpectedly got in contact with mine. That was the most passionate feeling I had ever felt. Love always makes people do crazy things without fear. Her hands moved on my back with love as she was overwhelmed. “Can’t you find a room?” A voice from a nearby gazebo disrupted our merry. I wondered why some people never mind their own business. That is how her sweet kiss was short-lived as our senses came back, reminding us that we were in a public place. We discussed until we came to a consensus on the date I was to meet her parents. I think I knew what I was involving myself in. I had decided to settle down and start a family of my own, with Suzanna being my running

mate. The weekend ended well as we had utilized it maximally. We explored places like; Sirwo Resort and Saiwa Swamp over that weekend, rolling in the new Benz a sugar mummy had bought me as a gift.

Lady Makena was my jackpot sugar mummy and we have been together for quite some time. I didn't know much about her, but on one occasion while drunk she slipped and talked about her family. She talked about her two daughters, a son, and her ever-busy husband who is lazy in the bedroom. Lady Makena is extremely rich. She owns residential apartments in Millimani estate, Kibomet, and Standard. She is also a director in one of the international schools. Rumors are that she financially sponsored the Governor's campaign in the previous elections. The Benz she bought me was due to the good job I have been doing for her.

The day to meet Suzanna's parents had finally come. The guard opened the gate as I drove into their compound. She was waiting for me outside their mansion. We hugged each other as she directed me into the sitting room where the rest of the family was expecting me.

"Guess what?"

I was shocked by what I saw. Her elder sister is my ex-girlfriend, and my history with her is chaotic. The younger brother is the dude we once fought over a girl. To my surprise, her dad is Mr. Solai, the doctor who advised me to stop accompanying girls going for abortion. He once threatened me to leave Sandra alone, claiming that she was his woman. Finally, her mother is Lady Makena, the sugar mommy who

bought me a brand-new Mercedes Benz compressor. The house was silent, everyone looking at each other. I felt like talking, but what could I say? All this time Suzanna was standing beside me, holding me by my left hand, smiling…

UNBOWED DEFIANCE

Brian Dredan Simiyu

Dredan is a teacher of English and Literature. He holds a BED Arts from Kibabii University. Dre, as known by his audience, is an experienced writer having been published twice. His first book, a novel, was published online by Smashwords. His secondo book is an anthology of poems, African Extreme Poetry published by Elong'o Publishers in 2020. He is a known social media poet holding a brand called DRE Arts.

Ondiegi Siboe woke up to an alarm, which was raised by his little sister, Nasenya. Out of his well-furnished bed he jumped and ran to the living room. He found her yelling and groaning as though she were in pain. Her face wore a serious image that depicted nothing but pain. She was in a fierce nightmare. She had been running away from serious trouble but couldn't find herself out of it. In her sleep, she saw a face she thought was quite familiar but she could not locate its owner. The man was chasing after her and had succeeded in catching her.

"Leave me alone! Leave me alone! Who are you and what do you want?" She screamed from sleep.

"I'm here for your sugar pot. Let me have a taste." The man roared back.

Before anything could happen, her brother woke her out of the nightmare. She sat up almost immediately, pouring waterfalls of

sweat, like a lumberjack who has struggled to clear a forest full of hardwoods.
Her eyes poured out a glowing floodlight.

"What is it, little sister?" Inquired Ondiegi.

"I had a bad dream. The same old dream. I don't understand why." She implored.

"You mean the same man was in the dream?"

"Yes, brother. And this time he went too far. He was about to hurt me. Rape me!"

"Shindweeee!" He screamed, using the phrase his mother would use every time hell seemed to break loose.

"Amen!" Added Nasenya, "Oh, it's already 8am. Aren't you going to work, bro?"

"No. You forgot today is Labour Day? I'm off work today." He said walking away but then remembered something. "Huh! Did you pick up your admission letter? We need to see what is needed."

"Yes! I have it in my room. Let me bring it to you." She left and came back with a brown envelope.

"Here!" She handed it to him. "I'm sorry I slept on the couch. I thought you had not come home so I was waiting. At what time did you arrive?"

Ondiegi looked at her and roared with laughter, "little sister! I arrived at around 7 last night. I guess you were in the bathroom. Didn't you realize the car keys on the table?"

"No, I didn't." She responded in low spirits.

"I can see they offered you the course, Journalism! Congratulations darling. Can we go somewhere and celebrate?" He inquired excitedly.

Her obvious response was an excited yes. They got ready and took a long walk into the city of Abuja, their home since birth.

Ondiegi had lived beside his sister on the streets of Abuja for seven years before getting on their feet. Having grown up with their parents in the early years, they enjoyed every breath taken into their nostrils. It was not until their parents were gunned down. Mugambi, the father, had just left work, and as was his routine, he drove to pick up his wife who would wait outside her work place. However, on that fateful day he did not find his wife waiting. She was out of sight. The bank, in which she worked, normally had workers walk out in a hurry at that exact time, but no one was seen coming out. Mugambi took out his phone to call Ohanjo, his wife, but there was no reply. He decided to go into the bank and inquire about his wife. Pushing the door slowly, he saw people lying on their bellies. His wife was among the hostages. He called out her name in desperation and that triggered the robbers. Bullets were rained on him; blood flashed out and poured like a burst tank. Ohanjo could not hold back. She got to her feet screaming while running towards the love of her life. A love story was cut short under a roof full of billions of cash. A story that could be told for generations to come. A story that started in a slum in the city of Nairobi, in Kenya. A story died before it could hit its intended menopause. They sunk under the bullets. Slept on a floor flooded with blood.

Nasenya had waited for her pick up for what felt like almost the whole day. Her parents would always pick her up before they joined her brother, Ondiegi, at home. That day she had a turmoil of feelings gang up on her. She thought something was up and running. Having stood by the school gate until late, she decided to board a matatu headed home. She found her brother enjoying the after-news drama that they loved watching together.

"Bobo, where is mama, papa?" She inquired angrily.

"Dada, you're home! I thought you were with them. I haven't seen them." He responded with excitement at seeing his sister back home. "Let me call them." He tried his mother's number, then his father's, but they could not go through. "They're unavailable dear. Don't worry, they'll be home soon. I suppose."

Nasenya went on to lay her tired young body on the couch and sleep caught up with her.

During the 9pm news, it was reported that two people were shot and killed at the ABSA bank. Ondiegi took a keen interest in the news.

"Dada! Dada! Wake up! See this!" He shouted, which alarmed her.

"What is it? Ni nini?" She inquired.

It was then that they learnt the news of their parents' demise. Sorrow and pain clouded the house unsparingly. They sobbed and sunk into nothing productive. Nothing made sense to them at that very moment. Nasenya wailed and rolled herself on the floor, not knowing what would follow. She implored that God should also take her away, since she was nothing without them. Ondiegi sat without moving any part

of him. He cried inside his heart. He moaned and desperately thought about what was going to happen next. He sunk into nothing, nothing at all. He was dead, and buried from the world. He was clearly buried.

The later consequential damages arising from the death of Mr. and Mrs. Mugambi were disastrous. The house they lived in was a rental. After months of substantial patience, the owner of the house decided to stand against his own odds and push Ondiegi and Nasenya out of the house.
They were to find refuge on the outer streets of Abuja.

To toil in oily stairs of trouble and try not to tumble. The streets were not fair enough to them. Finding a less comfortable place to lay their heads was harder than trying to walk with a broken limb. They'd walk from street to street, spending several nights on shop verandas. They had to sell off all the clothes they had as their only possession to afford meals. The only pair of clothes they were left in were unlikable. Ondiegi was left with a white shirt turned brown. Its collars eaten to the ground by constant friction that played from his unwashed neck. The buttons of the shirt were nearly dead, tied by threads to at least hide his hairy bosom and stomach. His trousers, tied around his waist by a yellow string, held it tight. It was broken and had holes that exposed his dark hairy skin to the world. Under his feet, danced a nearly buried pair of sandals. Nasenya on the other hand, looked as indescribably indecent as her loved brother. All her dresses and pairs of fine cotton clothes were sold off. The dress she was in wasn't hers previously. She had picked it from a heap of waste when she'd gone to hunt for food a few days before. The jungle green dress accentuated well with her wealthy fleshy body. It shrunk into her that it deployed

a well-structured teenage girl. However, the dress wouldn't be termed as clean. It was smeared by every kind of dirt that she came across on the streets. It had also started developing holes that left her brown complexion stare out at the world. She was unlikable. You wouldn't look at her twice without spitting saliva from your sweet looking mouth.

The damage kept revisiting the two foreigners walking around the streets of Abuja until Ondiegi found a job at a car wash. He would earn at least two hundred Naira every day. That would be enough to feed them the whole day and leave some balance.

They kept on balancing the equations until, one day, they rented a roof over their head. The house was in the outskirts of the city of Abuja.

The environment couldn't be satisfactory but gave them a place to call home. It was congested and flooded with sewages that stank all night long. The nights were quarrelsome as they fought hard battles with mosquitoes that wanted to have their blood by force.

Misfortunes turned into fortunes as time crept by. They moved from the slums to a better house. It was Ondiegi's hard-fought trials that uplifted them from the dim stinking slum life to a better environment. He would wake up so early that the birds wondered why they wouldn't beat him. Run to town and do some casual errands before embarking on his normal car wash business. In no time, he had his own car wash business. He employed a few individuals to run it as he worked out other plans. This enabled him to take his sister back to school. And things took a foreign turn that saved them from death. No better story

would be told after the hard-fought battle that delivered victory their way.

Amazed by the turn of events—how struggles and strangles turned into celebration on her admission day—Nasenya was less traumatized. She walked, beside her brother, through the University of Abuja gate and felt her smile taking account of her face. She was held hostage by excitement. Her heart danced as they walked through the highways inside the school to the admission hall.

She felt the touch of Christ's blood coated on her skin, and so she prayed silently. The look inside the institution is what amazed her the most. The outer surfaces were as clean as the clear sky that rained hot sunshine on them. How green the school looked gave her a craving for a taste of all of it. The grass, floored in most parts of the school, outlasted the pain and warmth that the hot sun played on her. She felt like she was on her way to a home of angels and the Almighty, heaven.

She walked as though she were being pulled away from looking at every magnificent structure that swayed across her eyes. But still, she moved.

"Hello Abe. What do you want?" Roared the professor as he swayed in his armchair.

"I came to see you over the missing mark. You asked those who had such cases to see you today." Nasenya said, her hands tied against each other as though she was about to pray.

"Oh, I see. Such a beautiful young girl. How can you be having a missing mark? Did you do the exam?" The professor said, chewing his lower lip, getting to his feet. He moved towards her but then passed

and reached for the door. He shut it and turned back to her. He tried to grab her but she pushed herself away. "Abe, ah... don't pretend like you feel ashamed. You want the marks?"

"Ashamed! Pretend? What do you mean?" She inquired in an almost angry voice.

"I'm the HOD and I can fix things. Don't you see that? Don't you want to fix things? Your beauty cuts across the air like the fragrance of a rose. Your frown, just like the smile, accentuates well with your brain. Can I..." She cut him short before he could dumb his red-hot lips on her skin. The professor looked like a sick toad. His face had scratch-like scars that gave him a purely and heavenly ugly look. His lips, playing bare outside, were red and smelling of blood. His eyes poured out of their sockets so that, she thought, he slept with his eyes wide open.

"Don't touch me. I don't need you to smear yourself around me. Don't you have manners, professor? Let me go!" She cried, heading for the door but it was locked. "Please open the door. I better leave this hell." She implored. The professor looked at her grinning. He was boiling with anger and desperation.

"Don't you dare come here asking for marks again, hear me?" He screamed as though he was snoring.

Being her final year at the university, Nasenya was worried about her possibility of graduating after the turn of events. How was she going to say it to her expectant brother? Would he take it all in? Or would he just write her off and abuse her? Would he consider her vulnerable to

such? Would he console her and soothe her to sleep like he always did? Would he be as accommodative as he always was?

She was worried and beaten at the same time. She had no clear way of telling everything to her brother. He had promised to take her to Kenya, their homeland, after graduation. But would that really happen after the new developments? They were to travel eastwards in an attempt to try and find their home. Their father had, at one point, talked about a town in western Kenya called Chavakali. He'd said the town was a few kilometres from Kisumu city and that their grandparents still lived there. They would travel and inquire about Mugambi Musoma of the Kali clan, if it'd work for them. Later on, they would try to find their mother's home which was said to be at the slopes of Mt. Elgon. All these were to be done after Nasenya had graduated. What if she didn't graduate? She had a great deal of thoughts that left her more confused than she was when she left Prof. Nyamwanga's office.

She walked back home that evening and found her brother, with his favourite friend playing a game on their play station.

"Dada, you're home. Karibu," flaunted Ondiegi, "how was school?"
"Not bad." She responded coldly. Her brother understood her very well and was therefore alarmed by the abnormal psychology in his sister's response. He said nothing more.

"Abe, I'm told you're to graduate this year." Intruded Obi, the friend. He'd had malicious interest in Nasenya for some time but couldn't let it out. He feared it could sabotage the relationship he had with

Ondiegi. He carried himself respectfully around Ondiegi to avoid getting noticed, but still, he stole some weird glances at her.

"Yes Obi. It's this year." She responded, forcibly smiling at him. She then saw them off and rushed to her room.

Later that evening, after Obi had left, Ondiegi intruded into his sister's bedroom.

"Dada, what's happening? You didn't sound good. You're so cold. Did something happen at school?" His words took her into dim and deep thoughts.

She thought about the events that transpired in the professor's office. What if he'd raped her? What if she was stupid enough to give in? She couldn't come to the right side of it. Was hope dead?

"Dada, talk to me!" It was until he pressed her again that she said;

"Bobo, I am not good. I'm worried about school. I didn't want to tell you this but I just have to," she said sitting up, "I have a missing mark in a unit, which might block me from graduating. However, this professor who happens to handle the case wanted me to sleep..." He shouted, cutting her short;

"Shindweeee! Who does he think he is? Why would he do such a wicked thing?" He cried out aloud walking around the room. "It's my hard-earned money. I pay for everything. You cannot accept that, dada, you hear me?" She nodded and he left without a word. He thought about the issue for several minutes but couldn't find an answer to everything. Why would someone want to block him from seeing his

sister succeed? Why are things just odd and unrealistic? Why just them?

The next few weeks at school were quite hard for Nasenya to handle. Every time the professor entered the class to teach, she would see a-monster in him. It wasn't the same old professor she admired. She designed so many evil thoughts about him. She would picture herself with him in the office, in the act, and that would irritate her. She would think of strangling him to death and make things straight. Nothing could add up.

A few days later, she approached a female professor, Magdalena Obwega, who was her friend. She talked to her about her case, having no marks on Prof. Nyamwanga's unit. Prof. Obwega promised to look into it and confirm. Nasenya was excited when she finally left for home.

"Prof. Obwega wants to see you, Abe. She's in her office." Said Alade, their class representative.

Nasenya ran as fast as she could so as not to annoy the professor. On reaching her office, she was told the professor had said she didn't do the exam and so no marks would be available.

"No, but I did the exam ma'am. Here is my exam card with his signature." She implored.

"Okay. Can you accompany me to his office?" She requested and Nasenya accepted. On reaching his office, Prof. Nyamwanga looked at Nasenya with extreme bitterness and that made Prof. Obwega realize something.

"Professor. This girl here did the exam. Here is proof with your signature. Where did you keep the booklets for the past exam?" Inquired professor Obwega.

"There. In that carton. Like I said, I never saw her exam booklet." Prof. Nyamwanga said, pouring his bitter ugly eyes at Nasenya. "Look for it, if only you can find it."

The two bowed down looking through the hundreds of booklets inside the carton box. After an unfruitful adventure, they announced their disappointment. However, Nasenya seemed to have noticed something; the professor was trying hard to duck his head so they could not see what was behind him. To his disappointment Nasenya pointed out;

"Ma'am! I can see something behind him. Over there!"

"Prof, let's have a look at those ones. It might be there." Obwega requested in a low tone, quite accommodating.

After looking through the fifteen booklets, they found Nasenya's booklet. To their surprise, many more stared at them; those who complained of missing marks had the same fate. Prof. Nyamwanga had lured them into office sexual contact before fishing out their marks. Prof. Obwega didn't realize that, though she suspected it since all the booklets belonged to girls, beautiful young ladies. They walked out without a word.

"Did he try to lure you into something? Sex? Money? Anything?" Prof. Obwega asked. She realized something fishy was being done in that office but had no proof.

"Yes ma'am. I couldn't take it though."

"I knew it. I'll be watching him."

"You've made it! You're a winner!" Ondiegi shouted excitedly, as he ran to hug his sister. It was on her graduation day. Though she had much grabbing her away from destiny, Nasenya had managed to emerge top of her class, with a first-class honour.

That excitingly impressed her expectant brother. They swam and basked in grey shades of warm clouds. Their faces flooded with tears raining like hailstones, they were ecstatic. The day they had waited for poured down to them like the loaves and fish that Jesus fed to the five thousand people, Amen.

The flight to Kenya came two weeks after graduation. The excitement and anticipation for a better outcome in their home country carried them all the way. Nasenya looked through the window admiring the vegetation that ran in the opposite direction under them. She smiled outwardly so that other passengers wondered at her excitement.

Their arrival at the Jomo Kenyatta International Airport wasn't like that of most of the other passengers. Nobody received them. They looked at the difference in the landscape between Abuja and Nairobi. They then took another flight to Kisumu. After alighting, they saw the excitement in the faces of the dark-skinned men who almost looked alike.

"Omera! Udhi kanye?" Inquired a man who confused them to be Luos like him.

"What are you saying? We can't get you." Asked Ondiegi.

"Oh, I am sorry our esteemed visitors. Where can my two-tyred machine, which uses well prepared oil from a far country in the east, take you?" The dark Luo man roared excitedly. Ondiegi and Nasenya looked at each other in wonder, then laughed before accepting his help.

"We want to travel to Chavakali. Can you?"

"Yes, my well-accentuated customers. Can I please stretch my flabbergasted hand to you so I can carry your expensive automated msigo?" He took their bags and led the way. They followed his fastwalking feet so that he almost lost them.

They went all the way looking for an old man named Musoma; that's all they knew about their father's father. They walked across every home that stared at their foreign language but couldn't find the home. They decided to walk back to Chavakali town and find a place to rest. On their way back, they met a drunk middle-aged man shouting repeatedly on his way home.

"Hakuna! Huwezi niambia...ia kitu. Utoreke nyumbani in the name of work. After miaka mingi hujarudi. Your father is dying. Ohh baba yangu, Mugambi Musoma, usife iko hapa..." He couldn't say any more; they bumped into him with questions.

"Did you say Mugambi Musoma? We're looking for him. We're his grandchildren, from Nigeria. And who are you?"

"Shindweeee! Nyinyi nani mnataka kuniibia? Are you thieves of the village? Leave me! I want to go home!" The drunkard cried as he pushed himself away from them.

"Please tell us. We're the children of Siboe Mugambi. Do you know him?" When he heard that name, the drunk man almost ran sober. He stood on his feet silently and didn't stagger.

"So, you're from Abuja? Where is Siboe? Why did he send you?" He roared with anger.

"He's dead. And our mother too. He didn't send us. We came looking. Where is our grandfather?" Ondiegi inquired imploringly.

"Follow me!" The drunkard said and led the way; they followed.

On arrival, they found women wailing at the top of their voices; men stood in groups, disturbed and in discussions. The two strangers realized that something was wrong. From the atmosphere they met, something terrible must have happened. The drunk man, whom they later realized was their father's brother, led them to the house, and the storm hit. Mugambi Musoma was dead.