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FLASHES OF VICE

Volume II

a collection of flash fiction stories

VINCENT DE PAUL

MYSTERY PUBLISHERS
Redefining African Stories

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For

Nishal Ron

Gentle scion, begotten of the Goddess of the forest.

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Terrorists and Freedom Fighters

One man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter.

Terrorism will never cease in a country where the so-called leaders are criminals and terrorists in disguise.

Michael Bassey Johnson

Bomb Nairobi

FARIHA ABDIWEY BOARDED THE NO.9 *matatu* from Eastleigh for the last time. She had bid her family goodbye for the glory of Allah.

Once in town, Fariha went straight to her hotel room at the Hilton, Nairobi. At least she was going to die in luxury.

The room overlooked the busy Moi Avenue. She sat on the bed with the laptop that had been her toy for the past three years. She opened the heavily encrypted application on the desktop. She typed in several codes then the window popped up with the city map and the blueprints of the buildings she wanted.

Outside, the city was a buzz, the trademark

Nairobi jam; hawkers selling their wares like nothing was going on. While the application loaded, Fariha went to the window to have a final look at the city she had lived in, and had called home, all her life.

It was electrifying for Fariha to be the chosen one. She had been entrusted with the mission. "Bomb Nairobi," she had been told.

The targets had been carefully selected and unique. Kenyans will forever talk about it. The 1998 Nairobi bomb blast, the 2002 Paradise Hotel bombing in Mombasa, and the 2013 Westgate Mall siege were nothing. The real terror attack was coming. There was no such thing as too much punishment for Kenya. Kenya had interfered way too much with her people, even after being warned.

The application on her laptop opened, and the screen displayed a kaleidoscope of the city's ultra-modern buildings. Seven of those were to be annihilated.

All the targets blinked green at her. An MS-DOS command prompt window was open at the bottom of the screen showing only two words against the black background: EXECUTE, y/n?

Fariha had no doubt. It was 'y'. That's the key she hit on the laptop keyboard.

Nothing happened for some soul-annihilat-

ing seconds. Then a loud explosion from the direction of Harambee House roared like thunder. She felt the walls of her hotel room vibrate, then shake, shortly before a series of explosions rocked the city.

She rushed to the window for the last time before the hotel she was in exploded. It was Armageddon outside. The sight filled her with indescribable pride.

At last, they had taken the war to Nairobi, as they had promised. Kenya had invaded her country and killed her people. Fariha felt her blood begin to boil in accomplishment.

"Istaqfurulah," she prayed.

For a little while, Fariha felt more at peace than she had ever known shortly before the Hotel Hilton tumbled down like an avalanche.

Alhamdulilah was her last word.

Heroes of Somalia

April 2012, 0730Hrs
DOD Headquarters,
Ulinzi House, Nairobi

"WHY ARE WE LOSING SOLDIERS all of a sudden? Are you not giving them timely intelligence?" the Chief of Defence Forces asked.

"We are, sir," said the Director of Military Intelligence.

"Then what is happening? Why are they getting killed?"

"Sir, we can't control what they do at the battlefront. We do our job; leave the rest to them …."

"How many were killed in last night's attack

—five, seven? Something is wrong somewhere. Our soldiers are well-trained. I don't expect this growing number of casualties unless they are not well briefed before an operation."

The DMI weighed what he was about to say next. Then, "Sir, those soldiers were not killed by enemy fire …"

"What?"

***

President's Speech, Mashujaa Day, 2012

"... AND in addition, I applaud our gallant soldiers in Somalia for their good work so far. They have made a great sacrifice in fighting for this country. They are our heroes.

"In particular, I would like to recognise the fallen soldiers who died from the enemy's bullet. The ground that sipped their blood may dry, and their memories may fade, but their sacrifice will never be forgotten. The nation will never forget. We honour them for their valiance with the heroes' medal of the Order of Grand Warriors of Kenya …."

***

May 2014,
The Sarova Stanley Hotel, Nairobi

"LYNN, I heard you have an investigative piece coming next week," he said over dessert. "Good work."

"Who told you?"

"I have my sources …."

"That's not why you asked me out, is it?"

"Well—"

"You son-of-a-bitch."

"Lynn, it's national security."

"People died for this country, gave their lives. Wives were widowed, children were orphaned, and mothers were left childless. Sorrow weighs upon them. They are grieving. Come on, Peter. It's two years now, and families of some of those soldiers who died in Somalia have not been compensated, and in particular the …."

"Lynn, you can't air that exposé. I know you love what you do, and God knows *we* love it too, but this one can't …."

"This date is over …."

"No, it isn't," he said.

Lynn started to get up. "Sit down, Lynn!"

Against her alpha female judgement, the *Ukweli TV (UTV)* investigative reporter perched her tight, denim-clad butt on the seat she had

barely vacated.

An ominous blanket of silence enveloped them before Peter tore it asunder.

"Lynn, you can't air that piece because those soldiers were not killed by enemy fire. They were traitors, Lynn."

Lynn's jaw dropped on the table and bounced twice before it dropped to the floor. Peter was still talking.

"… we had been following them for long. They were working for al-Shabaab. They always reported our troops' movement. Have you never wondered why most KDF soldiers were killed in ambushes? You are the investigative reporter …."

Lynn said nothing, just listened.

"The army can't pay them, *yet.* But they are heroes. Their families can never know the truth, Lynn. The soldiers were traitors, not heroes."

When Major Peter Thome was done, Lynn didn't say anything. Or she just decided not to.

An eternity stretched before the investigative reporter said, "I will call my producer." And with that, she rose to go.

Mujahideen

LEILAH FARDOSA ABDIKARIM MOHAMMED disembarked the UAE Airliner at Moi International Airport, Mombasa, straight from Kismayo, and breathed in the smell of the ocean. Ever since Somalia stabilised 30 years ago, travelling had become much easier. Flights were no longer being diverted to Wajir International Airport for clearance.

It had been one hell of a journey. A near soul-annihilating delay at Kismayo International Airport had gotten the better of her, but thank goodness she had now reached her destination.

Despite the coastal weather, she was in a *burqa*, her eyes scanning the international arrivals

behind the slit opening of the pall-black dress. It was much easier to dress this way in Kenya without raising suspicion than in the ever-so-paranoid West.

However, she had been warned that all airports in Kenya swarmed with armed security guards, customs, anti-terror police, security agents, and a whole horde of behavioural detection officers ever since spates of terror attacks rocked the country 50 years before.

Hyperventilating could get you picked for questioning. So was rapid eye movement. Or sweaty palms. But she knew that MIA was the easiest to slip through.

Everything was going on like a dream—albeit in a crawl—passport control, luggage screening. Then, she was out. She had made it.

Leilah took the way to her next destination imprinted on her mind. Photographic memory. That's why The Council liked her and always picked her. She never needed a map or notes.

Through grimy streets and dark alleys, which she had used only once, and at night, almost 25 years ago, she wove her way through *makuti* thatched houses and coconut plantations until she saw the ghoulish silhouette of the mosque. The slain Sheikh, who was her mentor and teacher, had given her a copy of the key to the

secret door. “Just in case,” he had said.

The Kenya government closed the Masjid Musa Mosque in 2014 after a series of Islamic extremism-instigated violence hit the country. Muslims were simply fighting for their freedom, demonstrating against government killings targeting them. The government spewed radicalisation propaganda.

The mosque was always being watched, but the security devils did not know that there was secret access to it.

Leilah went around the darkened mosque and found the well-concealed entrance. She fumbled for the key in her purse, extracted it and inserted it into the keyhole. When she turned it, nothing happened. But she expected it. Her identity was being verified electronically by a super-fast computer in the basement.

After what seemed like an eternity, about twelve-and-a-half nanoseconds later, a voice asked her to say in whose arms Prophet Mohammed died.

Leilah smiled as she mouthed the secret code that The Council had given her to gain access to join her brothers and sisters.

Leilah entered the darkened mosque and was received by a portly woman in her prime.

“Welcome home, White Sister,” the woman

said in Arabic. "Auntie Sherafiyah awaits you."

Leilah could hear *Qiyaam al-Layl* prayer coming through the walls. The woman stopped at a tall carved door and let her inside. She didn't follow.

Auntie Sherafiyah hadn't changed a bit since Leilah last saw her. If anything, she had become glued to the wheelchair.

"Mama," Leilah said as she rushed to where Auntie Sherafiyah was anchored.

"Samantha!" Auntie Sherafiyah said.

"I've missed you so."

Leilah hugged her mother amid tears. "I'm sorry I didn't call."

Auntie Sherafiyah waved her off. "You were right not to call," she said. "This place is crawling with the infidel devils thirsting for our blood. They listen to everything. Now you are home. Sit, don't be sorry."

She was, but Leilah listened to her mother, whom everybody called Auntie Sherafiyah.

"I came without any incidence," Leilah told her mother. "Thanks to you, Mama."

"Now you are home, Samantha. Get rid of that *burqa,* and let me see my lovely daughter."

Leilah did as she was told. She tore off the stuffy dressing and stood before her mother in her European clothes, clothes from home. Her

mother looked at her and grinned.

There stood the girl who, at five years old, had said without faltering that she would be Mujahideen when she grew up.

State Secrets

The Script

Characters:
Director National Intelligence Service (DNSIS)
Criminal Investigation Department Boss (CID Boss)
Police Commissioner (PC)

Chief of Defence Forces (CDF)

Undisclosed location

DNSIS: That was a classic performance out there, George. You handled those idiots well.

CID BOSS: You know what the media jackals need. You just have to throw them the bait, and they will fight for it.

PC: Pop the champagne. Cheers, we drink to the freaking weekend. Now the government is going to fund the war on terrorism like yesterday.

CDF: Before you celebrate, Nick, pray that our boys finish the job well. I don't think we should be here in the first place. We should be out there with the masses. Knowing that we are out there is enough motivation for the soldiers and police officers.

DNSIS: Come on, John. We are way past that. The boys know their job.

CDF: Patrick, what happened to you? You know what we say in the army. Or has civilian life rusted you?"

DNSIS: John, the Director National Security Intelligence Service is not supposed to be publicly seen. Don't tell me you don't know that.

CDF: Oh, come on, Patrick. It is our troops we are sacrificing there. They need motivation. Just by them knowing we

are there …

DNSIS: Relax, Mister Chief of Defence Forces. Your boys have been in Somalia. What are you afraid of? That they would die more than in Somalia?

CID BOSS: Dudes, you should be debating about that some other time. I think we have played our part well …

PC: As the Police Commissioner, I am cocksure the plan is foolproof. Nothing will happen to jeopardise us.

DNSIS: I believe you, Nick. We have tried for long to get the government to increase our funding. What do we get? A lot of political bickering and all. This should wake them from their apathy.

CDF: But lives would be lost unless you want to risk blowing this up.

CID BOSS: I expected better from the Chief of Defence Forces. Of all people, you know that casualties are acceptable in war.

CDF: Yes, but kept to a minimum.

DNSIS: And who said they will be maximum?

CDF: And how do you know those goons there won't go gaga and massacre everyone?

P.C.: They are well briefed; they know what they are supposed to do. CIA and Mossad vouched for them. They have had tremendous success in Libya, Syria, Nigeria, Egypt, and for years, Afghanistan.

CID BOSS: But why are you so concerned about it anyway? You were there during the initial planning. Westgate Siege, as the media now call it, must be a terrorist act like any other.

CDF: I was left out of when the actual operation was to be launched. For God's sake, my family is in there …

DNSIS: What?

PC.: Well, there is nothing we can do now.

Plus, this is a CIA-Mossad thing. Ours was just to facilitate.

CDF: I don't feel right about this.

DNSIS: It would be alright. If it goes as per plan, no life will be lost.

CDF: What has happened to casualties in war?

P.C.: If they happen, it'd be collateral damage, and that's acceptable. After all, it'd be lives lost for the greater good. Don't tell us you have not had casualties in Somalia.

DNSIS: I'm reading something in you, General. Are you thinking of baulking out now? It's too late. It would not be long before *Jicho Pevu* puts the pieces together, and *voila!* You need to be in here where you can't be touched.

CDF: If it comes to that, so help me, God, to hell with state secrets.

FADE OUT

Terrorists of Eastleigh

Memoirs of an Army Officer;

THE PRE-WESTGATE ATTACK DAYS OF laxity were long gone. We were more proactive than before, ever since the establishment of the Nairobi Metropolitan Command.

Police could well fight criminals and drug barons, which we left to them, but ours was to combat terrorism with whatever we had, even if it meant going nuclear. The 1998 US embassy bombing in Nairobi was unexpected, and so was the 2002 Paradise Hotel bombing in Mombasa.

But the Westgate Mall attack on 21st September 2013 caught us by surprise. It was completely out of the blue. Well, who would have guessed we could be talking of such attacks in Africa, let

alone Kenya?

The crackdown commenced, albeit secretly, after the attack when the president gave the green light for the establishment of the Nairobi Metropolitan Command of the military. Well, it had been there, a closely guarded state secret.

Racial profiling was much worse than post-9/11 in the USA. Eastleigh, christened Little Mogadishu by the media, became a military target, and despite the much-talked-about new constitution, national security took precedence over human and constitutional rights.

This day was no different. After so many days of surveillance, we moved in on the target. He was a well-known businessman; he owned half of Little Mogadishu. His 40 days of terrorism were over.

Alpha Team, the one I commanded, picked him up as he left Markazul Mosque for *Qiyaam al-Layl*. His screams were nothing as he hurled insults at us and barked about his constitutional rights.

"You'll have your rights when we are done with you," I told him. We had a terror attack to stop.

His rants and raves continued, but I was undeterred. For me, it was personal. And the Guantanamo we took them was not the basement of

Nyayo House. It was real hell. They either gave us something or died for *my* cause.

I am Muslim, of Arabic descent. My mother died in the 1998 bomb blast, and my father died in the Westgate Mall attack. He was just enjoying the fruits of the life he had worked so hard for.

"Listen very carefully, Mughniya Muktar Badr Abdi. You'll talk to me if you ever want to see your wife and daughter again. What's the target …?"

He shook in rage. The family threat was working. But when I thought I was breaking him, he reeled back and spit into my face. That got me. I went berserk. He never saw the blows as he became my human piñata.

When I took a break, sweating, he looked at me, his eyes about to be swallowed in his swollen face, and smiled, an arrogant smile, before he said, *"Allahu Akbar!"*

That's when I saw the discreetly concealed switch.

The Terrorist's Virgins

ABUBAKAR ALI WAFULA BECAME A terrorist because the sheikh said he would get an eternal supply of virgins if and when he died for Allah. His cousin, Zephaniah Wamalwa, had become the heartbeat of the nation from his part of the country when he married an Indian girl who was rebelling against her parents. Abubakar, aka Hellon Wafula, envied his cousin for having the prettiest girl in the county when the country recovered from the high-octane media frenzy of the couple.

Abubakar could only imagine how lucky he would be to have cardamom-skinned sylph-like virgin girls forever who were nothing like

his charcoal-complexioned girls, thanks to his assimilation into Islam and joining the ranks of Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen.

Abubakar rained terror in Mombasa and Nairobi for all it was worth, undetected and unscathed. His bank account, for which his mother was the beneficiary when his wedding would be ongoing in paradise, grew fatter by the day.

The last mission was suicide. He wore the vest with determination. His cousin could have his share of bliss and glory on earth, but Abubakar would have them, girls, for eternity.

When the moment came, Abubakar walked straight-facedly to his end as expected of the mujahideen he was.

The police outriders of the president's convoy appeared, then the lead vehicles with the infamous MIB (men in black) flanking them.

Abubakar counted the cars as they crawled towards Uhuru Park until he saw the right car and then pushed through the thick crowd. When he was near, he uttered the words: *Allahu Akbar*. That was the bit he liked—it sounded like his name.

"Take the president from here!" was the last thing he heard as everything blew to smithereens.

***

ABUBAKAR slit open his eyes and stared at a snow-white ceiling—paradise. A beautiful face loomed over him, a blessed bust hovering just above him, exposing the softest creamy breasts he had ever seen. He cleared the cobwebs in his eyes and realised it was real. The sheikh was not lying after all.

"Where are the others?" he asked the lady.

"Who?"

"You are supposed to be seventy—"

The nurse understood. The patient was dreaming. He was coming out of the coma. There were many explanations.

"Hey, easy. You survived. You are in hospital. You will be just fine. You…"

Abubakar did not want to hear that. He did not even hear that. All he wanted were his virgins.



Sex & the City

Sex itself is a substitute for God.

When we desire another human being sexually, we are really only trying to fill our longing for ecstasy and union with the infinite.

Cathryn Michon



Endless Circle of Infidelity

FRANK STOOD BESIDE THE BED semi-nude, a snow-white hotel towel wrapped around his teeny-weeny waist for a man. When he saw me enter, he froze. Obviously, he was not expecting company let alone me.

Since we made up (for the umpteenth time), and he vowed never to touch another woman apart from me, we had rejuvenated our love and romance. Anne Hooper gives handy tips in her book *Dare to … Sex Guide.*

I was naked beneath my fur coat, my idea of surprising my husband of 13 years at lunchtime at the hotel where his company was having a trade symposium. What is more romantic than

belching that company-paid buffet with hot steamy hurried sex before the boring afternoon session?

I dropped my fur coat on the floor and stood naked before my other half. "Isn't this a nice surprise, babe?" I asked my Prince Charming.

"Hi, cutie pie," he said. I wondered why the hell he called me by food names. Well, I was not complaining so long as it sounded romantic.

Instead of answering, the love of my life swallowed so hard that I heard the gurgle. His Adam's apple bobbed up and down his giraffe neck before saying, "Honey, I think you should …"

"Should what?"

I turned towards the voice that Frank's words were not meant for. It was from the direction of the bathroom that had just opened. Before my very eyes stood a naked, damp, dripping woman, the kind of trophy wife any man would want, with a slender tanned back, perky breasts and Michelangelo sculpted thighs that any model would envy—everything that I am not.

Well, I drag with me about ten pounds or so of fat, my boobs sag a little such that I use push-up bras to look sexy according to men's dictionary, and my butt is kinda symphony of flesh when I walk; it's like a twerking ass. I withered soon

after my fairy tale marriage to the man I so loved more than life itself, add a couple of pregnancies (that I miscarried, sadly, thanks to my Frank for the stress he put me through) to that, and you get a woman who's very loved by her husband because she has nowhere else to go.

"Oh my God," the modelesque woman screamed as she reddened, retreated back into the bathroom, and slammed the door.

Just as that was happening, I saw a gazillion stars in front of me. Suddenly I was too heavy for my knees to support my weight. I felt myself do what I had been doing for the past 13 years—fainting—after realising (for the umpteenth time) that marriage is an endless circle of infidelity.

Before I succumbed to the haze of unconsciousness, I heard myself mumble, *oh my God, it's happening again.*

Mira's Love Affair

IT FELT LIKE I WAS connected to my wife's car by a tow hook. I could see her through the rear-view mirror, holding her cell phone to her ear as she told me how the business trip to Mombasa had been a mistake.

Here it is, Mira. Your moment of truth.

"Babe, I'm missing you so. I was thinking maybe it was a mistake to come on this stupid trip. The meeting is such a bore."

"It's work. I understand. See you over the weekend, Mira." *If not tonight.*

Thirty minutes later, I stood in the dark watching my wife get the kiss of her lifetime, all bubbly like a schoolgirl. I had seen the guy kissing my

wife on the cover of *Pulse* and *Buzz* magazines once, one of those bad boys, gangsta celebrity wannabes. The celebrity kids who ride on the wave of fame by buying off the media.

It took a long mind-and-body-numbing eternity to realise what had just happened. I smiled at the sweet logic of it.

***

"I really enjoyed it," she said, staring him in the eye. "I was hungry for you, but now I think I don't need you anymore."

"Why do you say that, Mira?" he asked her.

"Because we both have had what we wanted, there's nothing more left to want."

"Mira, I am sorry about my impulsiveness and haste. You can forgive that, can't you?"

"Yes, I can, but what I can't do is have a boy with me."

That stung, and he took an exasperated sigh, wiped a thin film of sweat on his upper lip and continued. "I'm afraid I love you. Hell, I love you, Mira."

Mira almost laughed her sweet guts out loud.

"Come on, Dill, or whatever you call yourself. You are too naïve. That's why I said I can't be with a boy."

"I said I'm sorry for what I did."

"You are such a drool. I have a family, for f*ck's sake."

"You're a big girl, Mira; smart and intelligent. I am sure you know what to do."

"And then what? Will you marry me?"

Dill, aka Dilman Makena, mulled over that. The weight of what Mira had said showed on his face. Mira was watching him.

"Yeah, I guessed so," Mira said when Dill said nothing.

"Look, I—" Dill boy started to say something, but Mira stopped him with the wave of a hand like a traffic cop.

"I have a family, Dilman. I wanted a nice time. It's over. Limp on. In my world, there's nothing like love."

"I can't help what I'm feeling for you. I want more—"

"Listen, my marriage may be on the verge of incinerating itself; I may not get what I want from my husband, but he is still my husband. I love him in my own way, and he does love me. We love each other. I can't just give up all that to be with you. We wanted to have a good time, and we had it. Now let's move on."

"That's what I'm trying to do, but something always comes out of the blue and gets to me."

"Don't be stupid, hip-hop boy. I'm not one of your female fans who throw their pants at you on stage."

"That's why I'm saying I feel something more for you."

"I may have cheated on my husband, I may be the cougar all the lot of you are chasing after to further your celebrity-deluded careers, but I am not that vile. To be precise, I am not the type of woman you shag for her hard-earned money, celeb boy, all for carnal pleasure."

"What makes you think I am not any better?"

"You behave like a schoolboy who has just had his first kiss."

"So, what was all this about? We are going to be like it never happened?"

"For Jove's sake, a woman needs to be safe. I am safe where I am. I can't just throw away years of marriage for a celebrity wannabe who'll—"

"God, Mira!"

"I've a family, Dilman. A husband and children I love very much."

"Look, I love you and want to be with you. I give you what your husband doesn't."

"Yeah, drugs," Mira said, snorting. "You turn me to this fantasy girl I barely know. Truth is, I love this girl. That's what I want, but it's not what I need."

He touched her, and she trembled. He wondered whether it was from the cold or desire. It was not going to be their first in the car, though.

"Stop it! STOP! Nothing more happens. This never happened."

"But you just cheated on your husband."

She saw him wet his lips in disguised amusement. At that moment, it dawned on her what he was implying.

"Don't you dare blackmail me," she said, smiling even wider. She had her secret wild card to play. "You, of all people, should not be thinking of playing that game, especially when a career like yours is pegged on business."

Dilman squinted at Mira, and then everything tumbled onto him. Her blackmail was worse than his.

"That's it, celebrity kid. I appreciate you loving me, but boys love their mothers."

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DRESSED in all black and crouched in the shadows, I watched my beloved wife, who was in Mombasa, drop off her lover at his Karen house. *There* was the man who was reaping where he had not sown.

Stealthily, I crept out of the shadows as my

wife's car taillights disappeared around the corner. *Time to show this wife-snatching celebrity kid the error of his ways.*

Then suddenly, horribly, there was an explosion. A fireball went airborne from where I had seen my wife's car disappear. An amazing sight. It then plummeted down. I heard a deafening crunch, metal against the asphalt.

Whether I was being foolish or brave, it didn't matter. I headed in the direction of the explosion.

Whatever had exploded lay on the road burning, an inferno. A few metres from the burning heap, I stepped onto something and stopped to pick it up. It was a rectangular piece of metal—the number plate of my wife's car.

Mira's Love Affair – 2

EVER SINCE I WAS BRANDED the newest kid on the block of Kenyan music, I have been making headlines. The fame is like canonisation. I am a saint of sorts. The popes of hip-pop(e) beatified me in front of the crowds of boys who tore their shirts off for me to expose their dad bods and loyal, overly hormonal women who threw their thongs at me on the stage. But before then, there were ups and downs, untold unsuccessful attempts at this noble profession of gangster-wannabes.

Being a hip-hop musician is romantic, brassy, healing, and rejuvenating. The rapping, rhythmic, and rhyming lyrics endear you to women, both young and old. You are their fantasies come

true, a god they can worship and sacrilege with.

Mira was the best of them all. When she bared her boobs during one of my performances at Carnivore, my mouth went like 'Whack!' stopping me mid-lyrics. Her chirpy breasts pointed to the heavens as though her bust was thanking the gods of beauty for such a blessing. After the show, we went to my crib, where we stood the whole night and, the morning after, I told her I wanted her to be mine for keeps. She knew the myriad ways of lovemaking, a woman so true to herself that I was a liar before her eyes. Her beauty was beyond convention and defied description.

However, Mira, the truest free-spirited woman I had ever met, told me in words so plain that we couldn't be any more on our fifth date.

"I was hungry for you, but now I think I don't need you anymore."

"Why do you say that, Mira?" I asked.

"Because we both have had what we wanted, there's nothing more left to want."

"Mira, I am sorry about my impulsiveness and haste. You can forgive that, can't you?"

"Yes, I can, but what I can't do is have a boy with me."

That stung, and I took an exasperated sigh, wiped a thin film of sweat on my upper lip and

continued. "I'm afraid I love you. Hell, I love you, Mira."

Mira's mirth defied decorum. It was a mockery.

"Come on, Dill, or whatever you call yourself. You are too naïve. That's why I said I can't be with a boy."

"I said I'm sorry for what I did."

"You are such a drool. I have a family, for f*ck's sake."

"You're a big girl, Mira; smart and intelligent. I am sure you know what to do."

"And then what? Will you marry me?"

I didn't reply for a while, then I said, "Look, I—"

Mira stopped me with a wave of her hand like a traffic cop.

"I have a family, Dilman. I wanted a nice time. It's over. Limp on. In my world, there's nothing like love."

"I can't help what I'm feeling for you. I want more—"

"Listen, my marriage may be on the verge of incinerating itself. I may not get what I want from my husband, but he is still my husband, and I'm still married. I love him in my own way, and he does love me. We love each other. I can't just give up all that to be with you. We wanted a

good time, and we had it. Now let's move on."

"That's what I'm trying to do, but something always comes out of the blue and gets to me."

"Don't be stupid, hip-hop boy. I'm not one of your female fans who throw their pants at you on stage."

"That's why I'm saying I feel something more for you."

"I may have cheated on my husband, I may be the cougar all the lot of you are chasing after to further your music career, but I am not that vile. To be precise, I am not the type of woman you shag for her husband's hard-earned money, celeb boy, all for carnal pleasure."

"What makes you think I am not any better?"

"You behave like a school boy who has just had his first kiss."

"So, what was all this about? We are going to be like it never happened?"

"For Jove's sake, a woman needs to be safe. I am safe where I am. I can't just throw away years of marriage for stolen times."

"God, Mira —"

"I've a family, Dilman. A husband and children I love very much."

"Look, I love you and want to be with you. I give you what your husband doesn't—"

"Yeah, drugs," Mira said, snorting. "You turn

me to this fantasy girl I barely know. Truth is, I love this girl. That's what I want, but it's not what I need."

I touched her, and she trembled. I wondered whether it was from the cold blowing from her car's fan or it was desire.

"Stop it! STOP! Nothing more happens. This never happened," Mira screamed.

"But you just cheated on your husband." I wet my lips when I said this.

"Don't you dare blackmail me," she said, smiling even wider.

She knew something. She had her secret wild card to play, I guessed.

"You, of all people, should not be thinking of playing that game, especially when a career like yours is pegged on business."

I squinted at her, and then everything tumbled onto me. She, too, was going to blackmail me and ruin my career.

"That's it, celebrity kid. I appreciate you loving me, but boys love their mothers."

That stung like hell, but she wasn't supposed to know that much. Whether I had let my guard down or she had spied on me did not matter. Dating a cougar who could possibly further my music career was one thing, but that cougar knowing I was not just a user of the drugs I used

to give her to have multiple orgasms, was another thing. She could talk. Women gossip every other day. Who knew whom she could loosely talk to? Someone stumbling on such classified info could ruin political careers. Heck, the government could tumble if it was revealed that it was being run by a drug baron.

In my bag was a dirty bomb meant for one of my boss's rivals. It was too bad Mira had to die, but there is collateral damage in war.

"OK, fine," I told Mira. "If you want it that way, OK. I will go." But I knew I was not going anywhere; she was.

I got out of the car and headed to my house. As the gates closed electronically and her car's tail-lights disappeared round the corner, I dialled the number that was to detonate the bomb. Mira's car exploded. A fireball went airborne. It then plummeted down. I heard a deafening crunch, metal against the asphalt.

Choosing Sides

"YOU EITHER KEEP HER as a friend or lose me as your wife."

"Lisa and I have been friends for—like, what—forever? Jace, don't tell me you don't know that."

"Not anymore. She either leaves, or I will be the one to leave."

"You don't have to rub it in for whatever God knows. Do we really have to go through this again?"

"Guess we have to. I don't like how she looks at you, how the world comes to a standstill when it comes to her; you might as well leave your house on fire to go rescue her when she's playing the damsel in distress, you—"

"Please, Jace. I am losing my mind."

"No, you are losing your wife."

I had to let go of my BFF, even speed-dialled editors of all leading media houses in the country and booked a full page space where my apology went.

Melissa had been my best friend for as long as I can remember. We grew up together, skinned our hearts and skinned our knees.

During our courting, Jacinta never showed, in the slightest, that she would ever wage war on Melissa.

"Now that we are married," Jace said three days after the honeymoon, tinged by post-honeymoon blues, "Melissa has got to have a life of her own."

"She is *our* friend, and it's not like I am married to her."

"Well, it feels that way."

Yeah, new broom sweeps cleaner. Under new management, old curtains and rugs have to go.

That was then.

And *this* is now. "Explain to me why the man I gave my all, gave my heart to, and I love more than anything else in this world, finds it disgusting to have sex with his legally wedded wife. He is a vagabond when he has a home."

"There is nothing to explain, Jacinta," I quip.

"Yeah, ever since you buried your face between the glorious thighs of that whore, you don't have anything to say to me."

"Your insecurity is your—"

"You cheat on me and say I am insecure?"

"I know you, Jacinta. You declare all women who look at me or smile at me your enemy, and worse still if I talk to them. All people are not as conceited as you."

"Conceited? That slut—"

"No, that is me, *your husband*, in love with another woman."

"Without me, you are nothing. I have made you what you are. Now you think you can leave me?"

"I can't leave you, enhe? Watch me."

"Jack, you won't walk out on me. You will actually kiss my denim-clad ass, or God help me, you will regret—"

"You know what, Jacinta? Do your worst, and let it loose on me. I'm tired of your empty threats."

"Empty threats, enhe!" Jacinta, for the first time in years, contorts a smile, sad but a smile all the same. What secret weapon does she have against me?

One thing I know for a fact is that I have weapons of mass destruction to attrite her, Sun

Tzu way. As cunning as she is, she might have secretly amassed nuclear, biological and chemical weapons in a far-flung land away from civilisation. I don't want to be within a thousand-mile radius when she goes nuclear on me.

But guess that's what she does. I hear the 'missile launched' message in my mind. When she goes decisive, there is no stopping her.

Flashbulbs of what I will lose go on in my mind. Everything I own is hers, thanks to her money; my vasectomy will never be reversed, and I will forever be on the run for my dear miserable life.

"You choose, Jack," I hear her saying from a distance. "Wife or whore?"

Now is not the time for my infamous indecision. I let go of Melissa; why not this *whore?*

Wicked Attraction

"YOU HAVE A BEAUTIFUL face and nice eyes," I told her. By this, I meant her bust and boobs.

"Are you tuning me?" she asked, "Because I am older than your mother."

"How about dinner tonight," I said, ignoring her completely. "Jo n' Jo's, nice place."

"Are you now asking me out on a date?"

Jeez, what it is with her and question marks, I wondered.

"We can hang out then, in my crib," I said, "As you wait for Mom."

"Your mother must hear this," she said and turned to go as though the threat was subtle enough. I zoomed in on her retreating back: tight

ass. You wouldn't believe at 48 years, with a couple of preteen brats, she still was as modelesque as any *Saturday Magazine* cover girl.

I'm just graduating from teen horniness, you know. Testosterone boosters with cougars have turned me into a freak of nature. My father should be afraid of me. I'm Oedipus incarnate.

Old is gold, right? They say, not me.

Linda's turning me down was expected. Her moral compass points North, thanks to her Mavuno Church brainwashing. But I go to that church too, ever since they put that sexy poster calling unto me and my ilk to go back to church to 'harvest' the goodies of Dame Church.

Well, this Mom's BFF was just a by-the-way. Just to tempt her. There is the one I am interested in, crazy about.

"Do you know how intriguing it is to have what you can't have?" I said, more of saying I will slap the devil a good one for the forbidden fruit.

"Jared, I'm not attracted to you."

"I am attracted to you."

"Would I, by any chance, have forgotten to put on my ring?"

"No, no, no. It's there—"

"Then what you are up to can't be."

"Can't or won't?"

I never saw the slap coming. Never mind she's my mother's sister.

Rogue Casanova

I ENJOYED THE TORMENT OF desperation I saw in their eyes, all of them. Women, when they are desperate, are of great service.

Joan's an insurance sales lady way past her sell-by date. When I told her that I was moving on with my (not) fucked up life, she cried rivers. She even offered me much more than I thought she could—all her life savings (that she had kept top secret) if I stayed. If that's the case, she had to sell part of her muddied soul to the devil himself. Apart from being a full-time fuck buddy (no strings attached, lest she forgot), janitoress and the laundry girl, she had to perform unorthodox sex acts, some off the curves, with my gang

of intellectually challenged, drug-conditioned human guinea pigs and me. I met her just when her body was beginning to wither from overuse by the many men she had sold insurance policies to and offered her Rubenesque body as a bonus. In her wildest dreams, she wanted to settle down, and I was the ideal idiot, but she had not known that she had met a self-proclaimed, celebrated Casanova and sex maniac with tendencies bordering on predatory.

Jackie's a rich dad's girl. Apart from having a trust fund running into millions of dollars, she cruises the streets with the latest state-of-the-art sports utilities that snake through traffic like a puff adder. The only problem is the dad doesn't know she's hooked to meth as she is to me. Without either, she is lady gaga. When (and if) Dad knows this, she will lose everything. So, when I told her I needed to be kept good, she agreed to extort her potbellied politician father of hundreds of thousands weekly. I use the money for my research and experimenting on humans. I am a sexologist, the misunderstood meaning, that is. I fuck everything female so long as it's not inanimate. Thanks to technological advancement, I just discovered that the vagina can be operated on to increase pleasure levels to unscaled heights. I have this dream, like the Martin Luther King, Jr

guy, where sex would be the only thing happening in this world. Then I would be a demigod.

Then there's Pastor Will's worse half. Not even the faith of Abraham and her husband's speaking in tongues had satisfied her to the point of absorbing his cursed seed to bear him a child. One tryst led to another until it became routine after one chilly evening when I spotted her speaking to a pimp, who turned out to be me, at a high-end motel. From then on, I enjoyed the fruit in the centre of the Garden of Eden without hearing the voice of God walking in the garden. She just gave birth to her second born, and her prayerful husband offered thanksgiving to God.

I've just got my new catch, the First Lady of this republic. Never mind how, I bumped into her during one of her out-of-the-house-on-the-hill campaigns, and since I am a medical doctor to be touted for a Nobel Peace Prize soon, we hit it off. Turns out the father of the nation is neglecting the First Lady—matters of national importance take precedence. Let's say I just became her gynaecologist.

Playing my cards well with these women has given me some satisfaction, a feeling that I'm a genius, but what I enjoy most is the shenanigans, the best thing to happen to them since their first kiss.

What I think of is, 'Man, King Solomon must not have a palace'.

Duty Booty

"MADAM, CAN I CHANGE THE hotel?" Lieutenant Sammy Masika asked the morning after.

"Seriously, officer? You are not even talking of changing rooms." Captain Muthoni felt surprisingly bawled over by the proposition. "You know that that's not possible. DOD has paid full board for the entire period. But why, if I may ask?"

"Because I can't be here. I've thought about it from every which way, and each time I come up with … the impossibility of my stay here."

"But what about your bills? What about the security in that hotel you are thinking of going to, has it been cleared by DOD to host us? If you go, you pay for yourself. I can't request an LSO

for a single officer, plus it's too late, and you know that."

"NO," Lieutenant Sammy was final. "I'm going to change hotels. Ask the management not to charge DOD for my stay here, or they refund the money, and you give it to me."

Captain Muthoni considered, "You mean I make a local arrangement for you?"

"It wouldn't cost anything," Sammy replied. "The hotel would ultimately be paid; they would just be compensated for the money—"

"I can't do that," Captain Muthoni said with finality. "You know the army billets officers at specific hotels, and you just can't choose where to go. That's why we are issued with a Local Service Order. It specifies who, when and where to stay. So, you don't get to choose where to stay."

And so no working arrangement was forged.

Sammy was stung by the disappointment and had to put up with seeing Captain Muthoni around all the time. He had fallen for her like a ton of bricks the minute he saw her when she welcomed them at the 12th Battalion of the Kenya Rifles (12 KR), Nyali Barracks.

Captain Muthoni could not agree to Lieutenant Masika's proposition for three reasons: one, it was too late for that; two, the Chief Personnel & Logistics from DOD owned the hotel

where the officers were staying, and there was no way he was going to agree to his profit margin being reduced; besides, Sammy's proposition was a service offence (according to the Defence Forces Act), and she was not to be caught dead in the malfeasance, it was her job on the line and; three, the main reason, she had fallen head over heels for the lieutenant. She wanted him to be around. She was sure by the time the officers' one-week educational visit to the Coast was over, she would have had her wildest (and weirdest) fantasy since she set eyes on him.

Lieutenant Sammy and a group of 20 other officers were from Nairobi. They were on a Mechanical Transport Officer's course from the Army's School of Transport in Nairobi and, according to the syllabus, the student officers had to visit the customs and Kenya Ports Authority offices in Mombasa for an apprisal on sea transport, customs and port procedures before visiting Kenya Pipeline Company and Refinery.

The adjutant of the local military unit was required to arrange for the officers' accommodation at certain hotels used by the military. The officers, once they arrived, were to contact the adjutant who would ensure their admin during their stay at the Coast. Being the senior most of the pack, it was Lieutenant Sammy's responsibil-

ity to ensure such was provided. He could not avoid meeting the adjutant every now and then.

Of course, he could delegate to his second-in-command, but he did not want to. Being near the adjutant made him feel like he was going to drag her to bed the next minute, peeling off her immaculate, well-pressed camouflage uniform layer by layer to lay her bare in the hotel bed and make love to her.

It was the policy that the officers staying at the hotel be in uniform during the day, but they could change to civics (street clothes) in the evening. Most officers went to the nearby Club Casablanca, a walking distance from the Castle Royal Hotel they were staying, to extol the virtues of bingeing, drinking, and strippers.

Casablanca, famous for its nightlife, a loud split-level bar-club pulls in plenty of Westerners and men to be mobbed mercilessly on the dance floor and VIP lounges by a *lot* of prostitutes and strippers amid the music.

For any Nairobian visiting Mombasa city, the cliché *Mombasa raha* applies literally. On the first day, after checking in and launching an insidious attack on the buffet at Castle Royal Hotel, the whole pack, like wolves, flocked to Casablanca. That's where it officially started.

Captain Muthoni, indistinguishable from any

other booty-shaker around, was on the floor doing her thing. Seeing her body moving in a symphony of choreographed moves soared Sammy's T-Juice levels to *unscaled* heights. He joined her on the dance floor and she, dancing like a dervish, did the unexpected thing: she kissed him. And he, taken by surprise, kissed her back. Then it was as if a searing fire had swept over them. One minute they were dancing the infamous *Bend Over* style; the next, they were touching in places they shouldn't.

They then embraced as though dancing a slow waltz, Muthoni's luscious lips brushing lightly on Sammy's. She thrust her size 38 bust into his face, pulled back and smiled at him, licking her lips seductively. Sammy liked it, his lifelong fantasy. Muthoni got closer, talking but not quite touching, her eyes boring into his.

"I can't," Sammy gasped. "I can't wait a minute longer."

"Neither can I," she choked back and sank into the ocean that was his arms. Every move they made felt like champagne bubbles effervescing in a goblet. The hunger for touch made every inch of their skin ache, and all the deep pockets of sensual tissue filled and swelled and grew until each glaze was tinged with pleasure so intense it was like a razor. The pain pierced

them and stilled them. Soon, this aching delight led them out of the club, taking the fastest taxi to their hotel, where they practically flew past the reception to the elevators.

They started kissing the minute the elevator doors closed, their hands threatening to undress each other faster than the ache to make love commanded and demanded obeisance. Every nanosecond was the last to zero-hour to the detonation of the nuclear bomb that was their lust.

The doors opened almost too soon, and they stumbled into Sammy's room. They tore off each other's clothes, embraced, and their bodies savoured each other's texture, gliding, roughly rubbing flesh on flesh. Their hands added layer upon layer of sensation upon each other, the build-up of sensation like a time bomb.

Words tumbled out of their mouths with no meaning. Wonderful, aching, extraordinary sensation mounting until the pleasure was shot through with the arrow of craving and the next thing was to do what they had to. Then, "I can't do it," Muthoni said.

"What?" Sammy shot back. "It's only sex, isn't it?" Sammy's voice was shaky.

"Well, yes, of course."

"Then what? Why? I thought you wanted—"

"Sex is sex," Captain Muthoni said. "I want

more than that."

There was a long pause, and then Sammy said, "Well, yes."

Muthoni had been ready for it, but not that. Sex, yes, she would have had it, then what? Another of her celebrated nightstands in her carefree life? No, if she went ahead, she wouldn't be able to tear herself off Sammy. She had fallen in love with him. Sex would make it worse. She did not want to fail in love (again).

She kissed Sammy passionately and untangled herself from the embrace, collected her clothes and started dressing, and though she did not like what she saw in Lieutenant Sammy's eyes, she left. That was the right decision.

"Yes, ma'am," Lieutenant Sammy said. The captain had spoken.

***

THAT night, Captain Muthoni snuck into Sammy's room. She had colluded with one of the hotel attendants to get a master key card. Earlier in the day, she had picked out the perfect lingerie that concealed nothing. Very few men, if any, would have the power to resist.

This was the tricky part. She could be forgiven for running away the other night, but what about

breaking and entering to take herself to the man she had run from?

Sammy was not asleep. He was lying in bed, mulling things over. He shot up the minute the door cracked open at that witch hour, adrenaline pumping through his system in overdrive.

Counting slowly to ten, Muthoni entered stealthily, exhaled deeply and switched on the lights. Sammy could not tear his gaze away from her boobs. Slowly, his eyes roved all over her, and he saw everything. The Secret Garden.

Sammy just sat in bed, in his briefs, wondering what to do next whilst berating himself for not having supernatural powers to know what was going on.

Then it happened. Captain Muthoni made for the bed. His body started responding. Her running away the previous night had been unexpected. Now he was sure.

"The much I want this is the much I don't want," she said when she was near the bed. "Each nerve of my body tells me to, but something else slams the brakes."

Sammy was lost for words. He did not know what she was implying. She was wearing the demonic lingerie, with nothing underneath, then sending mixed signals?

Sammy kept staring at her, wondering what

was going through her mind. At last, he said, "You can't keep on doing this. It's bad enough we lust for each other, but this is not right. I can't—"

Then, unconsciously, she climbed into bed, slid in the covers and snuggled up to him.

"Can we just hold till morning?" she asked.

They cuddled and huddled, their bodies warming each other, pulsating in a symphony of touch and desires not satisfied.

Pregnant (My Story)

"I'M PREGNANT," I BLURTED OUT.

I knew I now had his undivided attention, like when he sweet-talked me out of my knickers.

"I'm pregnant, J …"

"I heard you," he said, a slight tinge of irritation distinct in his voice.

That's not the classic response when the boy who broke your virginity, drank himself to a stupor on your squirt and other pheromonal substances that your body secreted when he was enjoying the shenanigans and went gaga when you showed a slight hesitation to jump the sack when you told him that you have just been rewarded, big time, with a bundle of joy in the

making.

The man who had a moment ago sucked on my titties and kissed me down there in anticipation of another round of filling the crossword puzzle just dropped to zero degrees Fahrenheit in a fraction of a nanosecond at the mention of the 'P' word.

Well, I got it. I expected it. All my friends, the ones I had avoided and called bitches and haters when they complained I was ignoring them ever since I met this Jimmy guy, had told me they would still be there when the guy showed himself out and hit the road. Now he had, and he was saying what nearly all men say, "What are you going to do?"

Yeah, right. It was my problem. How had I gotten myself pregnant in the first place? Seriously? That coming from Jimmy? I didn't expect him to say that.

"What are you going to do?" I threw back the question to him.

"It's me who asked you."

"And I'm asking you. It's yours too," I said. "It's our baby."

"Are you sure?"

"Jeez, Jimmy. You ask me that like I've been screwing around behind your back?"

"No, I did not mean that—"

"Then what? You just got me pregnant. I was a virgin." Not like, 'I had never slept with anyone before you, and I never cheated on you, babe', but 'I was a fucking virgin, you idiot, and you messed me up'.

"Yeah, that I noticed. For God's sake, how the hell did you get pregnant? We were always using protection?"

"Perhaps the condom burst and leaked or something like I swallowed your semen during one of the blowjobs you so much like."

There was a pause, time which I just guessed what could be happening in his mind. Like how had I got myself pregnant, wasn't I on the pill (maybe I lied about that once), didn't I say I was safe (just that one day I wanted to feel skin against the skin—and God, it was awesome—or seeing his dreams of a much more lissome, young and beautiful wife (undoubtedly not me) coming years later fading before his very eyes.

"Well, that poses a problem."

"What problem?" I asked.

"I have wanted to talk to you about us—"

"What about us?"

"I'll be going to college next month, and I thought we should take a break from each other. Like go out more, see more people."

I knew it. He was giving me the boot. He

didn't have to look for excuses.

Definitely, that's what he was doing.

A fast-forwarding movie of my dreams being ruined played in my mind—education, job, prosperity, and a family I had thought we'd have together, a happily thereafter kind of a thing—everything moving beyond reach forever but a mouth to feed, a body to cloth, and a brat to bring up.

Jeez, how did it come to this!?



As you look back upon your life, you will find that the moments when you have really lived are when you have done things in a spirit of love.

Henry Drummond

Mother's Love

Mona

THIRTY YEARS AGO TODAY, I scooped the Mother of the Year Award for Dereliction of Motherhood Duties. I defended the title for fifteen good years. I had swung from depression to exhilaration, and when I couldn't sleep, I was slovenly wide-eyed and agitated. I reached the breaking point. That's when the plan formed in my head to hurt my baby: smothering her with the shawls, drowning her as I washed her, cutting her into pieces and preparing her for dinner, or bludgeoning her with a *mwiko.*

She used to look up at me as if she had seen my face before but couldn't place it. I looked down at her too. I did not know how the child could have

come from me. I kept waiting for the primordial instinct to sacrifice everything for her—the way mothers have for their children—to set in me, but it never came. I just wasn't ready.

She had been born early. I needed more time, at least another month, to prepare. Her gums clamped down on my nipples mercilessly; it hurt too much to be right. She screamed through the night, howled at nothing in particular, yowled at the slightest innocent provocation, and she was greedy, a seventy-inch tyrant queen-she-devil that held me slave day and night by turning my breasts to food pouches. She took away what was left of my life. I became afraid of her than she ought to be of the world she had loved so to come out of me, where I had protected her from everything, one month before she was due.

There had to be some explanation for why I hated her. There was a reason why I was not fit for her. There was a reason she was safer away from the fluid arms of her mother. She was better off without a mother who wanted to marinate her for dinner. I was not good for my baby. That's why I had to leave my one-week-old baby before I sautéed her, hurt her, threw her into the toilet, or dumped her at Dandora.

I suppose I had known all along that I was going to leave. Right from the time I knew I was

pregnant *again*. I was not ready to be a mother. Some people were not meant to be.

When I made the first step away from home, my spirit started bubbling from deep inside. It was that liberating. I would go and forget I had a husband and a baby. I would go and never look back, I decided. I told myself even when and if I figured how to be a mother, I won't go back. My baby needed me away; I was doing her a favour, giving her life back.

My mother used to say that once you had sex, everyone could tell. I wondered whether it was true for abortions, and when I committed the crime, I eloped with another man on the day I was to go to college before she could read my face and threw away my life. When my husband celebrated *our* pregnancy, the face of the child I had killed danced in front of me. That's when I knew I was not meant to be a mother.

Fifteen years later, when all my friends were rushing to deactivate their ticking biological clocks, I figured out how to be a mother. My thirteen-year-old daughter seems to know boys at an alarming rate; I wonder whether I would know when she has sex like my mother knew about me.

I now see the grown doppelganger of the baby I abandoned 30 years ago. It has haunted me for weeks now. It has made it perfectly clear that the

past is not to be forgiven.

***

Vivian,

IN the 30 years I've been alive, I hear my father mention my mother's name for the first time today. "Mona," he says when he opens the door for me. He's called me by my mother's name, but what I really hear is *'mourn her'*.

I don't move. For an instant, I stand frozen at the door. He blinks severally, takes a step back and then says, "Oh, Viv." He shakes his head as though he can't believe it, wraps me in a firm lingering hug, and whispers, "You're the image of your mother."

I realize that my father has never given up on my mother. He keeps hoping that one day she will walk through the door, and he will welcome her with open arms, with everything he can offer. Is that what love does to people?

I, too, have been hoping I will see her one day. Except I've never tried to find her. Instead, it feels like she has been the one trying to find me. She's always there when I look over my shoulder, begging to come back into my life.

Until now, I had believed she was the rea-

son my father was ulcerative, and the reason he didn't smile, the reason I had never been in a relationship. I saw her at the root of every woe that besieged us. But now I wonder if she was to blame. After all, we all seemed to follow in her footsteps, running from ourselves. She ran away and abandoned Dad and me for some reason, and maybe if we knew her reasons, we would understand. For all I know, I could be just like my mother.

"Dad," I whisper back. "How come you never tried to find her?"

***

John,

THIRTY years ago today, my wife walked out on us—our less-than-a-week-old baby and me. She took everything that held her memory: birth certificate, education certificates, photos, diaries, everything. It was like she died, like it was her plan all along to leave. When the forty-eight-hour requirement by the law passed, I filled out a missing persons' report. I searched for her in hospitals and mortuaries. I never found her.

I did not know whom I was angry with more: her or me. What kind of woman abandoned her

week-old baby? Surely, she was not the woman who had given up everything for me, whom I had fallen in love with. What bothered me most was why I didn't see it coming. I was just beginning to know her the way most couples did in their second year of marriage.

I'm wounded beyond healing. But I've not lost faith in love. Over the years, I've been expecting to hear from her. If she appeared on my doorstep, she wouldn't be more of a stranger than before she left.

I now see her doppelganger. I feel she is somewhere on her way back to us. She should see what her daughter, Vivian, has grown to be. I've spent years staring at the front door wishing and praying she walked through it. I'd welcome her back because I never stopped loving her after all those years. But it might not be as I will it to be. Some things were just meant to be free. That's why I never went looking for her.

40 Years Away from the Church

MOST SUNDAYS, FOR 40 YEARS, I would wake in the arms of the woman I love, the mother of my two kids, debating whether to wake up or not. After no one won, we would make love and wake around noon, eat a power brunch and laze on the couch cuddling, dreading the inevitable coming of the blue Monday.

But last Sunday, I found myself in church, our daughter sandwiched between her mother and me for her wedding. Angel was right. She had managed to drag us to church. I loved her as much as it hurt to lose her to another man who would never treat her like the princess she was.

Nothing much had changed, though. It was

the same Catholic Church, antediluvian pews probably salvaged from the capsizing Noah's Ark; the same old hymns that never see time catch up with time.

It was Angel's big day. I had to be there for her, not for the service or worship of a God I doubted years ago.

It was awkward. Ave Maria started, and it was déjà vu again. But I couldn't get the lyrics. My wife seemed fine right. Did she sneak to go to church sometimes? I guess she will be gloating in heaven when I will be burning in hell.

Angel, the girl I had seen grow from a baby to a lady, my second best friend, opened the hymnal and moved it slightly so I could see the printed lyrics. I could feel the smile forming on her lips.

Well, when you go to Rome … I realised I didn't know the tunes anymore. Actually, I did not know the tunes for any hymns.

The choir began to sing in well-rehearsed falsetto, and everyone joined in. During *consecratio,* I found myself standing alone when everyone was on their knees. Well, I had to do what they were doing. For the rest of the service, I just joined in.

Dead Love

THE EPITAPH ON THE GRAVE she buried me goes like this: *Here lies the control freak, self-absorbed SOB, egoistical commitment-phobe, snob, sloth sleazebag and a worthless excuse of masculinity.*

Well, maybe I have exaggerated a bit, but the hyperbole is just the revised edition of what she actually did (not) say before she walked out on me for a barely legal, over-self-absorbed celebrity wannabe trapped and confused in the limbo of whether to be a man or forever a boy.

I guess now the only thing we share is lifespans in futility alone, history on (un)fair(l)y tale and big screen love written down tattered books of breakups' history.

However, I can't prefix whatever she used to be to me with 'ex'. She's still dear and close to me, and I hope she'd come back with tears in her eyes. I will gloat for old times' sake.

Prison Break

I AM A FORMER BEAUTY (and drama) queen, better known for throwing tantrums than runway prowess.

In my days as the reigning Miss You, I met and slept with men of all sizes, shapes and ages, the old ones coming first, then the young ones later when my body was withered. It was a prison where warders got hired and fired anytime without batting an eyelid or being issued with a sack letter.

The last warder who prompted me to break out of the prison was a mesomorphic ape with steroid muscles; a depressed, failed kickboxer, frighteningly quiet. When one day, as had been

the norm, his arm moved faster than my imagination supplied the abrupt motion during one of my tantrums where I had called him a 'worthless piece of …' (I never finished), I decided that I'd had enough. His forearm brought a backhand across my mouth. I went down faster than I blinked, not because I had seen the swift motion in time to dodge but because I was propelled by the force of the blow.

His arm continued to pendulum as it had been routine, like a cow twitching its tail to brush a tsetse fly away. I began to scream by default, but I stopped. I had seen in his eyes nothing but impassiveness. When he was done, I raised myself on one elbow, staring into nothing, nose and mouth squirting blood, eyes dry of tears. I lay there, unblinking, my mind blank like a hit-and-run victim.

I liked him more than the others. He had a kind of forthright simplicity, not after my m(h)oney like the others who were doomed as though by military obeisance to everything I ordered and commanded as if they were not people but my mirror. When my tantrums, accompanied by bad and ugly names, became too much for them, they exiled themselves from the republic. I would harangue them for everything they were, and should be, but they weren't.

It took the beating for me to break free. I am now a self-proclaimed bachelorette, and soon I'll be spinster of the millennium for the love of my skin.

The Best Beloved

MY BEST FRIEND FOREVER, SHARON, is mad about Jack dumping me for an obese, post-menopausal version of his granny. Jeez, isn't it disgusting for a twenty-something hunk, presumably with brains matching his looks, to oil the joints of a crone? The daemon of lucre has made him greedy and crazy.

I miss him so. Sharon says that no man in his right mind would leave me.

"I don't want him back," I retort. That's a lie. I miss him like a drug, and if he doesn't come back, I think I'd lose it.

Well, he left on his own accord. I am an obsessed, possessive, overprotective, nagging,

and over-demanding bitch. His words, the unedited version, not mine.

'Sad mistake' was the epitaph he put on the gravestone of what used to be us. Everything after that day tells me that the goodbye had no string of hope for him coming back.

I am now missing him while I know he's in another woman's arms, holding the granny's face in his hands, kissing lips that have been tasted, I bet, by my great-grandpa. I wonder what he sees in those eyes that have seen more than the world itself or how he feels crawling under the bridge that has been washed by several El Niños and Budalangi floods.

So, I have decided, 'I don't want him back'. I want someone who'd belong to me. Someone whom I would be his best beloved.

The Breakup

WHEN MY FIANCÉE OF THREE days, after seven years of dating, called and told me that she wanted us to talk, it did not occur to me that it was going to be so epic, let alone turn out to be what it did.

Some people mean it when they say they need some time to breathe. Others just use it as an excuse to wander off into greener pastured fields, but to those giving the air to be breathed, it seems like the end of the world, wondering when the hell the rain started beating them.

She took me out for a five-course meal at a grimy street restaurant, and over dessert, she narrated how she loved and cherished me and

had over the years. What was this? A celebration of love? Oh boy, hold your horses. More is coming.

When I had proposed, she had said, "OKaaaaaay", not the classical response expected when the black velvet box is exposed to light and the lid popped open to show the world's smallest cuffs, the ring.

So, my fiancée told me that she had thought about it over the three days (and nights) and resurrected with an answer (not) expected. She couldn't!

"What?" Not like, 'what are you talking about?' but 'what the fuck do you think you are saying? Are you outta ya' mind?'

Well, I had heard her loud and clear, and before I got worked up or jealous, "it's no one I should be worried about", her words, not mine.

Now, there we go. It was not another prince (un)charming who had been caught in the sandstorms of the Sahara on his journey across the desert to her and had arrived. It was a princess.

God, she was leaving me for another girl. Great, classic, actually.

I'm Gay

I LOOK AT MY SISTER on the couch opposite me. I walk over to where she is and hug her. I hold her close and tight, pressing her blessed bust to me: her breasts warm against my chest so that she can feel my heart breaking.

I then draw her close to me and kiss her on the lips, so she can taste my pain. I let my lips rest for a moment; the first woman I have ever kissed. She cringes and pushes me away. That's all I wanted. I can now go in peace.

I hear the heavy footsteps of death somewhere inside me. The spirit knows. It spirals low, and I pull away from my sister. My vision blurs as the angel of death smiles at me, and the trumpets

beat in my ears. I close my eyes and open them again, expecting to see St Peter waiting for me, but instead, I find myself staring into my sister's face.

I have to go. I look at my sister once again. She's staring at me like she wants me to kiss her again. Her eyes have so many questions, but I can't answer them. She is a memory to carry.

"All the best, Miranda," I tell her, and I move upstairs to my room.

In my room, I open my mountaineering rucksack and take the rope. I tie the noose around my neck first. Then I balance on a step stool and climb onto the ceiling. I fix the other end of the rope to the rafter. *Wait for me, my love,* and jump after Byron through the ceiling opening.

The hardest part of dying is when the body is fighting the soul. To die, the body has to let go of the spirit. I know I have to command it to. Even after I have decided to kill myself, I still feel the fear of death stalking me. I will always miss this life.

We have so much money. It could take me anywhere in the world. Buy me whatever I want in this life. But not love, the reason I am killing myself.

It's devastating, Dad will tell Mom when he holds her in his arms to comfort her. *Who would*

take their own life because of a woman? I wonder if, in private, he loves her as he lies to the world.

Nothing can take my love away from me. To do that, I would have to agree to let go. But I can't. I have to go. If I stay, I will spend forever wondering if my father killed my love to protect me or his name. Maybe one day, he will explain: *I only did it because I loved you, and you were lost. I wanted to help you find your way.*

It hurts more than I thought, the heaviness of my body pulling me down along the gravity. My lungs reach the bursting point; the world begins to go black.

The door bursts open, then, and the devil calls my name. Is Lucifer a woman? *No*, I scream in my head, trying to claw at the rope to pull it away from the rafter. *I can't die.* I kick, dangling from the ceiling opening, at anything. I scratch, but only to reach my chest, then my stomach. My arms can't make it any higher.

***

EVERYTHING is white. The ceiling, the light. I have a stiff neck, courtesy of the neck bandage, as though I have to be reminded I am alive despite it all.

Miranda then sits down on the edge of the bed

and stares at me. “I’m sorry,” I manage.

“Yes, you are,” she says. Despite her brutal words, the realisation hits me: she doesn’t know. That’s all I need to know that perhaps I found my way.

Kafir

A MUSLIM GIRL DOESN'T FALL in love. She sort of glances down and realises she is mired in it. She knows she loves a man when her family tells her who he is, and she looks ten years into the future and sees the same man standing beside her with three other wives.

"Where have you been?" my mother asked. "Your father has been looking for you."

Going AWOL was the least of my crimes and sins if she knew where I had been. For the first time in my life, I made my own decisions, and as the cliché goes, choices have consequences.

There was no doubt that my family would shun me, even kill me. I was walking a tight rope.

Well, I did not expect anything short of *Kafir*. Except I was turning my back on a family that 'loved' me. The strange life, the unpronounceable name of heathens, my relation with a *kafir*—they could not take it.

I knew that the moment I said it was the very minute I was going to die in the eyes of my adamant, unforgiving father: 'And give not (your daughters) in marriage to *Al-Mushrikun* till they believe (in Allah alone) …' the Quran tells him in Al-Baqarah 221.

I hoped that he would not rally his sons and make me undergo their version of the Spanish Inquisition before killing me like that Pakistani girl, Farzana Parveen, who was attacked and killed by her father and brothers for marrying the man she loved. The man was Muslim; what about me, who had run into the arms of the heathens of the Quran?

When I saw Quincy Riverdale, the world spun from beneath my feet. I saw in his soul the things I was missing in mine. Love came slow and sure.

That's what I was going to tell my father. Automatic ex-communication and disowning.

Well, thank God for the constitution of Kenya. I would not be jailed for denouncing Islam like it is in Sudan. Though Kenya maintains diplomatic ties with Sudan, what happens in Khartoum

stays in Darfur. However, *Kafir* is *Kafir* whether it's in Sudan or Eastleigh. The problem is that Islamic fanatics and extremists like my father have reduced Prophet Mohammed's (PBUH) simple talk to a babble of personal convictions and extremism.

I stood before my male-dominated family, five brothers and my father, and felt like Jesus before Pontius Pilate. Surprisingly, the tight knot in my stomach loosened. I stopped trembling, and lips formed words I had never dared address my father and brothers with before.

"I do everything you say. Actually, I squirm when you cough." I shook my head. "I don't have to say it. I'm sure you believe in your belief, but not like most of the free world. If I repeat that I love a Christian man, I won't utter another word. But I am. It doesn't matter if I am dead to you; I already know the consequences. I am *kafir*, and I will marry my *kafir* man—"

If I took off my clothes now, I knew they wouldn't be surprised. But that's what I did.

The burqa peeled off me layer by layer until I stood in front of my father 'naked'—taut hipster pants and a tank top that barely covered my stomach.

A Hole in My Heart

I HAVE A HOLE IN my heart, a condition that has consigned me to love on the sidelines. No grapevine in the 'hood about it, where a specialist listening to some radio evening jam can hear and offer to check the severity of the defect. So, I have to play safe.

Don't love; that's what I always tell myself. *Don't break your heart.* It is punctured, though; a red cupid's valentine.

When I was six, I saw a girl, and my heart whooped. When I was 18 or 19, I met the one I thought was meant for me. *I love you with all my heart,* I told her. When she got the letter, she told me never ever to contact her again. I took a sink-

ing low, like the *Titanic.*

My suicide note would have read, *love killed me*, but I was not planning to leave any. Not that something as good as love is murderous, but at the very worst of times, it is an emotion of immense joy but great sorrow that when one cracked under the bereavement and oozed strength, love would still be able to kill them. And in the heart, the kingdom where love rules, what would overcome love?

But the real reason I still risked love again had less to do with the fear of not being loved than with myself. I just couldn't *not* do it again. When I pictured it, it wasn't love bleeding my heart. I saw love slow-dancing with me, rousing my body from aeons of slumber like Rip Van Winkle, opening for me like flower sepals, and I moving inside with a vivid sense of wonder. This, to me, was love, the one I wanted to spend my life with.

I never would have had a hole in my heart if there weren't many cupid's arrows thrown at me with the sole intent of maiming me. The first rebound led to another, a series of a progression of women who were out to milk my heart dry of any emotion akin to joy, kindness, and peace. I gave myself an ultimatum in my mind: *one more time, and if it happens, I will never love again.* I tried not to be the one leaving; I imagined it instead as

saving my heart.

At 45 and one of the most eligible bachelors around, when I met a 24-year-old model whose heart whooped and somersaulted lasciviously to land on my lap, all those memories resurrected instead of the fantasies that her idol body could bring me.

I convince myself that I am incapable of love. I remember when she declared her undying love for me, I took a sabbatical to the Vatican to meet with the pope. I am that demented. Only the Pope can pray for my heart but do nothing for the soul.

No wonder! I now realise. I see the extent of the damage: all the love I had gathered for and from other people drains out, an unstoppable sieve.

Queen of My Broken Heart

Diary of a Bachelor

RINGS COME JUST AS EASILY as they go, I thought as I inventoried the list of things my wedding planner gave Chrissy and me earlier in the day. My track record with women is as long as the litany of saints.

I don't know what's wrong with me, but she bolts first if it is not me.

I was 23 when my parents divorced. A year later, my childhood sweetheart and fiancée, Sally, died. It was one hell of a blow to lose the one you love so young to the cruel hand of death. I have never overcome the shock. I will forever live in denial. It's like she isn't there, but she is there at the same time.

Over the years, I have had women in my life, after seven years since Sally's burial, but none is like my first love.

Occasionally, the relationships blossomed, seeming to promise no end, but when they started using four-letter words— 'baby', 'ring', 'home'—I bolted and took to the wild. I would imagine them trying to trace me, even to the point of hiring PIs for those who were rich dad's girls, to no avail.

The grapevine has it that I am the senior-most bachelor around, with no cares in the world.

It's funny how some women who've come close to me these days think they are Mrs Right for me!

Well, what do I say?

I turned 50 yesterday and proposed to Chrissy, the thirty-something queen of my broken heart. I didn't expect it. It was just a joke, so I'd tell Mom she said no, but guess she said yes!

Well, Mama insisted. She said nothing would break me, or lead me astray, this time.

I hope this time she's right.

Tusker

IT WAS LONG AFTER MIDNIGHT when I woke up and realised Charlie had not returned home, again. I didn't want to think he was with someone else. I never did.

Over the lavender scent of AirWick, I could smell the pungent stench. That's how I knew he was somewhere in the house with an exorbitant amount down the drain or because I was attuned to the fumes by the memory of my father. The reek hit me like a tornado and pushed me against the wall of back in time. On the contrary, I did not take a walk down memory lane even though the past is the blueprint of the present.

In the toilet—that's where he was—propped

against the toilet seat, his legs splayed out awkwardly. A bottle of Tusker lay on its side, dripping into a puddle that ran to where he sat. He held a second bottle by the neck. His eyes rolled back in their sockets, their whites an obscene gob popping out. He breathed in slow, shallow gasps, and he had vomited and peed on himself.

For a moment, I couldn't move a muscle, even my mouth, to call him. A knot tightened around my chest, making it harder and harder for me to breathe. A cold curl of fear unravelled at the pit of my stomach before the thought—*he is dead*—crossed my mind.

Then he stirred. He began to waken. Without thinking, I took the bottle from him and emptied it into the toilet. The next thing was to help him up, but he was twice as big and drunk.

You're doing what a wife should, a voice whispered. It was my mother's. She did it religiously till it killed her. Some other woman does it today.

I know, I told the ghost of my mother. *It runs in the family.*

But I knew it was the last time I was doing it, not for me but for my daughter.

Crimes and Grimes

There is not a crime, there is not a dodge, there is not a trick, there is not a swindle, there is not a vice which does not live by secrecy.

Joseph Pulitzer



Abortion is *Not* a Crime

No, a real criminal mastermind is known by another name: politician.

Jarod Kintz

"LOOK AT THE STREETS; THEY are full of them, kids with nowhere to go, forever suffering. Apprehension is what those lucky to have had a home accord them because they associate delinquency and crime with them …."

"Those children are not there because somebody did not want them. There are many reasons they end up there; some are orphans, others HIV/Aids victims."

Josephine felt her brain snapping with the challenge of defending pro-choice, not because she was trying to convince her boyfriend, the Senator who led the committee to approve the bill she had presented to the parliament, but because she knew deep inside her that many

people thought that she was whacky.

"All I am saying is there is a chance we can reduce the number of unwanted families. Many of those who abort do not want the kid for one reason or another. They should be allowed to choose instead of being denied that right and dumping the baby in Dandora. Do you know how many babies are dumped daily by mothers who don't want them?"

"But how logical is killing innocent unborn babies because the stupid, insensitive mother does not want them," Anthony continued, "to setting up children's homes to take care of those kids their mothers don't want?"

Josephine thought for a moment. "Well, setting up children's homes is good and humane, but for how long? How many would be there in the long run? That is where you are categorically wrong. In the end, society ends up indebted to caring for those children. The cost of living is high. You can't preach morality to an already immoral and rotting society."

"Not yet," he qualified. "But once you figure out that preservation of life is much more important than self-gratification, that killing just takes the problem away but doesn't solve anything—"

"There is a difference between problem-solving and eliminating the problem. Second, we

offer an avenue to professional medical abortion for those who can't live with the mistakes they make, free or relatively cheap, as opposed to those quacks they go to. Do you have an idea how many mothers die because of that?"

"Since 2010, the government has been offering free maternity health care. How free is free in those hospitals? And here you are talking of free abortion."

"You can't criticise me until you talk to a woman who has been raped or a girl who has been defiled, and they want to die because they can't bring themselves to bring up the by-product of the ordeal. It would be a constant reminder …" Josephine shook her head. "I have seen smart, bright girls who have been disrupted by that one single incidence. Their lives are never the same. They end up distraught, suffering for the rest of their lives."

"You want the government to kill its sun? If I was aborted, who would you be talking to today?"

"You were not aborted because your mother wanted you."

"I don't think this is going through … or it's going to be OK with the people whom we ought to—"

"Why don't you do your part and leave the

rest to the accidental mother?"

"But there are many accidental mothers out there who would not want to get rid of their babies …"

Josephine raised her face to interject, "… they are not babies at the time, just a clot of cells. As for the mothers, it is their decision, their choice to make."

"Seriously, Jo? The point is, this thing is mucky—"

"With or without the bill, abortion will go on. Once you listen to that woman or young girl who does not want to have that thing inside her, you will see that abortion is not a crime as you make it sound."

"You can't tell me that's what you tell those who look up to you."

"No," she admitted. "But it does happen. And it is exactly why abortion is *not* a crime. Is it right for you to collect dumped kids at dumpsters?"

"Where would humanity go if we mutilate our morals?"

"Humanity has nothing to do with the burden of bringing up children who are not wanted and needed in the first place."

"But why not provide another avenue instead of killing …"

For a moment, Josephine did not respond.

Then she asked, "Haven't you ever wondered why I don't talk about my family or past?"

Anthony fell silent, looking at her, wondering about the answer he would give. Of course, he wanted to ask so many times, but he wanted it to come from her. At that moment, he knew that there was a story behind the sad eyes staring at him.

"I have, but—" he said.

"I am a by-product of rape. I was dumped by my mother, I grew up on the streets being despised by everybody, daily living the trauma of life's pains, I have been raped repeatedly—do I need to go on?—Well, no, I guess you now know. Abortion is *not* a crime."

Family Reunion

I SAW THE CREEP WHO had been following me the past week again. My stomach muscles went taut.

There was a serial killer on the loose. The media had christened him 'The FGM Killer'. He abducted teenage girls and mutilated their genitals before killing them. At school, we had been warned not to speak to strangers or advised to report anyone suspicious.

I had to call this in. He had been following me. That was suspicious enough.

I turned to go, but towards him.

Then I stopped in my tracks. He didn't seem to be dangerous. Even a behavioural scientist

would confirm that.

Just one look at him and I knew he was the one—the man I had been looking for, the man I knew was dead.

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MY psychiatrist described more drugs for me. Was I ever going to get better? Well, I was really trying, for love.

Love was the reason my life was fake and painful.

The love of my life is Celine. My daughter. She doesn't know that my name is not Jennifer. Jennifer Gathoni.

Twenty years ago, I died. Well, I faked my death. It was the only way I could live. I was married to a vicious criminal, a bank robber and a murderer. I loved him more than life itself.

When the skeletons crawled out of his closet, they put a bullet in my heart. I had to get away from him forever, pregnant with our first child.

I died. It was an accident. I still have the newspaper cutting about the fire that ravaged the whole of Mathare slums.

But my husband's gang went underground a year later. Twenty years and nothing is known of what became of it.

I had a simultaneous psychological and heart breakdown. I gave birth to Celine at Mathare Mental Hospital. I left the sanatorium three years later, but I've never recovered. I live on drugs.

With my professional culinary skills, I secured a job at Merica Hotel in Nakuru. Today, I'm the head chef. But no one knows that my real name is Grace Njeri, from Nyeri.

I heard Celine enter our two-bedroom house in Section 58.

School's out early today?

Then she stormed into my room without even caring to knock.

"You lied to me, Mom. You lied," she screamed. She was getting hysterical. "How could you, Mom? How could you?"

She sobbed. Then she released the grenade she was holding,

"I met Dad today, and your name's not Jennifer."

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"YOU told me Dad died in a fire," I screamed at my mother. "I've always wanted to know him. Why do you hate me so much?"

"Celine, listen," she said. "It's not what you think. It's—"

"It's what? What, Mom? What else is fake about you? This …?" I had not planned the conniption, but I couldn't help.

"Don't!" I snapped at my mother when she reached to touch me. "… why don't you come to meet him?"

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"WHAT?" I said to Celine's back.

I followed her, more to confront her about her outrageous accusations than to follow her lead. Then my heart leapt out of my chest like a caged animal, took a nosedive to the pit of my stomach and stayed there.

My eyes pushed out of their sockets, wide and bulging.

In the sitting room, on my favourite couch, sat the man I had told Celine was dead, her father, the bank robber-turned-serial killer the media had christened 'The FGM Killer'. He had tracked and found me.

Murder on the Karen Boulevard

I WAS GOING TO KILL somebody. After so many years of planning, and not that I am a terrorist, I was a terrorised man.

I went to the spot where I was going to kill the man I hated with a passion. Days and nights of rehearsals had imprinted the route in my mind like a stamp.

I knelt behind the 12.7mm gun on the tripod and looked through the powerful night scope. I could make out the silver studs on the ear of some guy kissing his girl in the dark about two kilometres away.

I scanned the road ahead, the traffic at this hour of the night, and the exact killing zone I had

selected. Directly above it was a billboard astride the road. It was the standard height. If it were to fall, it would take exactly five seconds after the chains that held it were released. I needed to fire four quick shots.

The man I would kill had contracted my company to put up the billboard. It was done to my specifications. He was a multibillionaire oil magnate without whom the current president would be nothing and the economy on the verge of recession.

After hours of waiting in the dark, something at last happened: I saw his motorcade.

***

SENATOR Willice Omamo was running behind schedule. He was late for the campaign party at his house. His wife had called him for the past hour incessantly. He had ignored her calls.

"Call the organiser at Amani Children's Home and tell him I couldn't make it to the fundraiser," Senator Omamo said to his campaign secretary sitting across him in the limo.

"But sir, it won't be advisable to …."

Rachel was good at what she did, young and promising but too opinionated.

"I'll take what you say under advisement,

Rachel, for what it's worth, but it's my call in the end," the senator said. "Now, I want you to cancel that fundraiser."

"Yes, sir," Rachel said.

The Internal Security Steering Committee he headed was on the threshold of being disbanded. With the recent spate of terror attacks, murders, robberies, and other crimes going off the rocker, his race for State House was on the line.

He had to take control and show the country he had what it took to lead it to Vision2050, launched by the incumbent president, his rival in the forthcoming general elections. That's why he was late getting to his campaign party. Meetings, crisis talks, and damage control had been taking place to build public confidence in him. So far, it had been dour, and he was almost losing it.

According to InfoTrak, he was the favoured candidate. The campaign party was equally important to him, and so were the fundraisers aimed at garnering masses behind him. They won't forget his kindness.

As Rachel busied herself with what she had been told, Senator Omamo took out his phone and called his wife to let her know he was on his way. Better late than never.

"Hey, Babe. It's me. I should be there any time from …" he didn't finish what he was about to

say.

Senator Omamo felt hands grab him and push him onto the floor of the limo. "Sir, you need to stay down," it was his security head. "We are under attack …."

At that instant, something hit the limo from above. It seemed to fold in half from the middle. Searing pains tore through the senator's body as he felt several ribs crunch and puncture his lungs.

Senator Omamo drew in air. None filled his lungs. *I'm being killed*, he thought. *So, this is what it has come to?*

***

THERE was no word on the victim yet. Still, the sight of the mangled limousine on TV was all I needed to know that it was finally over. Multibillionaire oil magnate Oliver Were-Tanui, the man who took what rightfully belonged to me, was dead.

It was a stunning mete of natural justice and retribution. He had my parents' blood on his hands. The ground from where their blood soaked, all his handiwork, was still wet, and it watered TaOil Company. OPEC, the Middle East oil giants, and BP and Shell started wooing him.

The oil discovered in Turkana some time ago, in Uganda, Tanzania and Somalia, was drilled by his company. That could be mine, my parent's legacy. Did he think he was going to get away with it?

My sister, Janelle, came into the room and stood behind me.

"Anything yet about the scum?"

Something else answered instead: *"We are coming to you live from Karen roundabout where a possible assassination attempt was made on the life of Senator Willice Omamo several minutes before midnight last night …"* it was the TV.

"What?" I screamed. "That motorcade …"

"… Senator Omamo is the opposition and popular presidential candidate in the forthcoming general elections. So far, opposition leaders are accusing the incumbent government of attempting to assassinate their candidate …."

"What have I done? What have I done?"

***

"SENATOR Willice Omamo's car was hit by a billboard," the news anchor said. *"That is according to the preliminary investigations conducted by the police. 'No one was trying, and wants, to kill the senator' is the message from State House …."*

All news channels were filled with the news of the failed assassination attempt on the senator's life. He was recuperating at Karen Hospital, where he had been rushed after the incident.

No one knew the truth, and probably ever will.

For me, it was a glaring mistake. I was back to square one.

Missing

THERE WAS ONLY ONE PLACE to go, definitely not home—I was going to go missing.

*

I felt like a writer with a story and the end, and nothing in between, to write.

I tried to focus on what the Rubenesque doctor was telling me. She was like a shadow dancing so far away, out of reach.

I was just beginning to live, I thought. *How did this happen?*

I was a junkie coming out of rehab. Meth had taken most of my enamel, and some other com-

bination gave me heart palpitations. But rehab, thanks to Dad's money, put me in order.

Superintended by the beautiful Dr Liza, behavioural therapy was the real deal. I loved visiting her, watching her as she counselled me, fantasising. Now I was cursing.

The Dr Liza of my dreams had ordered a slew of tests on me before she let me off the hook with a recommendation to live in the society. The results were now out, and Dr Liza was talking that talk again. You know, the kind of talk they talk of positive living.

"Your CD4 count is not that bad," she was saying. "You have the whole life ahead of you …."

No, I did not have any life. I had an end.

Dr Liza did not see that; she couldn't.

***

I love missing. It was the only place no one would judge me; see me as a burden, just another walking dead.

Mugged

THE FIRST THING MARK MAKORI Omakori thought when he came to at Lang'ata cemetery was that he was dead and someone had forgotten to bury his body. He lay on a hard surface that automatically disqualified as a bed, his arms at his sides. His eyes slit open, and the first blinding ray of light burned at the back of his eyes.

He looked into the sky, took a deep breath and roused himself. He surveyed his milieu. He used the nearest gravestone to pull himself up. Everything blurred before his eyes. He decided to get the hell out of the godforsaken place. The inborn human fear of such places was beginning to get the better of him.

He put a hand to his forehead and felt it slip on something slick—his blood. *I was mugged,* he said to himself. His heart started to palpitate, actually began to attack him. He was too young for myocardial infarction. He reached for his cell phone in his jacket pocket. It was not there. The wallet too.

His head began to pound, his legs grew weak, and he sank to the ground and lay back against the gravestone he had used to haul himself up.

Mark felt the world crumbling around him and darkness closing in on him. The early morning sun slid behind a cloud as if it were embarrassed, and with it flashes and flashbulbs of what he could make of his failing memory: him driving his new wheels to Daystar University and picking three girls, the latest of his catch, and going to Carnivore and the revelry that followed; he drank a little too many, leaving the club astonished that the friends he thought he had were not friends—they let him drink and drive—he driving along Lang'ata Road towards 7th Battalion of the Kenya Rifles (7 KR) barracks where he worked and then …

At that moment, three truths struck him: he had not been mugged. He had been robbed: the car—he had taken a loan immediately after the army announced they were giving them a pay

rise and upgraded from his noisy second-hand Subaru to an even noisier one, Ksh.1.8M gone like a wisp of smoke—a laptop, the latest Samsung Galaxy tablet, iPhone, and money (both cash and plastic). And it was the girls who did this to him.

Of Truth and Secrets

I NEEDED A SHOT OF vodka, straight, not shaken. If I didn't get it in the next three minutes, I'd be teetotal for the rest of my life.

Talk of family secrets, and truths, crawling out of the woodwork at the worst of times: my mother had just told me the truth, and the most guarded secret, about my father.

What kind of a parent does that to their children? I was not only on overdrive but was also going bonkers.

I had always berated God for plonking me in the middle of humanity as the only child with no brother or sister to boss around.

The truth—and the secret—was that I was

a staid erratum and a product of paedophilia extended beyond consanguinity bounds over a protracted period. No wonder Mom hated me so much—I was her childhood's living nightmare.

Grandpa's Dad and Mom's my sister.

Secret's out—Mom gave birth to her brother.

Project Detention

Every society has the criminals it deserves.
Emma Goldman,
Red Emma Speaks

7:30 a.m., Monday 13th February 2012
State House, Nairobi, Kenya
President's Advisory Committee meeting

"MR PRESIDENT, THIS IS NOT good for the presidency. The people expect you to do something. What the TVs are saying portrays weak, teetering, and wobbling governance. Project Prevention may look as though it was mandated to do what they are doing by your office, sir." Chief of Staff, tough lady.

"It is a violation of the constitution. It should be your office's main agenda to see that the constitution is followed." Senior Political Advisor,

no ass kisser.

"The Constitution of Kenya (CoK) 2010 states in Article 43 1(a) 'Every person has the right to the highest attainable standards of health, which include the right to health care services, including reproductive health care'. Article 29 (d) states 'Every person has a right ... not to be subjected to torture in any manner, whether physical or psychological'." Senior Constitutional and Legislative advisor, the mouth that keeps things in check.

"Project Prevention was not to go to that level. It has outlived its stay here. It has to go otherwise your opponents, sir, will come on you guns blazing claiming imperialism by the West in your government …" Senior Political Advisor.

"Rumours have been spread about Project Prevention in Kenya. It was spectacular how the government responded, but now it's getting out of hand. It's just a matter of time before those women start talking." Director of Public Communications, the fox.

"Actually, they have talked. I had to call in a few favours for CTN TV not to air the exposé to buy us some time. We need to do damage control because that investigative piece is still out there." Director of Press, the Director of Bullshit in the corridors of power.

"NGOs, human rights activists, psycho-social support groups and the whole horde of the human watch are waking from their slumber. They will be gearing for the jugular. It is the government's responsibility to protect its citizens. Well, you know that, but the implication is that your government is not protecting its citizens …" Director of Public Health and *national wellbeing*.

"Ahem …" the president cleared his throat. "Is that all you had today?"

"No, Mr President," the Chief of Staff said.

"Then go to the next item on the agenda!"

"But Mr President …"

"No buts, Meisha. I have heard you. I know what it means. I have a country to run; may we move on?"

"I don't understand, Sir …."

Silence descended on the room like a ghost. Looks were exchanged. No one, *no one*, dared to challenge the president like that. The Chief of Staff was really testing the waters.

The President riveted his stare on his Chief of Staff, but she was not relenting.

"Well, I get it," the President said. "You are afraid for me. The elections are in the offing. I am not going to run for another term. So, stop being Mother Theresa and let's move on."

That stung. A knife sliced somewhere. The

President came short of using the 'B' word. The Chief of Staff took her time before she looked at her Samsung Galaxy tablet. When she opened her mouth to speak, it was not her words that came out but the President's.

"OK, I know you want to know. Let's cut to the chase. I sanctioned Project Prevention. I don't care what you think, but my decision is final.

"To take this country where it should be. To realize Vision2030 that everybody talks about. To rid the country of the scourge of HIV/Aids. To reduce taxes. To stop dependence on donor funding to keep more than 200,000 people on antiretroviral (ARV) treatment. To help alleviate misery and suffering. To do what Mother Nature would do under natural conditions, but more humanely. Sterilisation of Women Living with HIV (WLHIV) is not a punitive measure. It is strictly protective.

"I don't like those eyebrows I see rising, so suck it up," the President said when what he was saying homed in on his advisors. "I am the one who authorised Project Prevention to work in Kenya. WLHIV are an expense to the state and counties both in their lifetime and death because they leave behind sick mouths to feed, clothe and take care of on the taxpayers' dime.

"Those are just 200,000 people. I have over 40

million to think of. The rights of an individual cannot be fully safeguarded when he is being compelled to support, physically and emotionally, amid his community, the sick, the dying, and the burdensome.

"This is the first step in dealing with the scourge of HIV/Aids in this country. Sterilisation, legislation, laws preventing the fertile HIV/Aids infected from marrying—do I need to go on?—would be the way to go …."

The President of the Republic of Kenya took his legendary pause as though to let what he had said sink in before hammering the first nail in. "I have instructed the Cabinet Secretary for Medical Services to ensure that all male and female HIV-positive patients are detained …."

The President's advisors did a double take. Was the president high on something, or had he gone crazy? That was before all hell broke loose. Everybody was shouting at the president that they were quitting.

Runaway Priest

"I'M LEAVING THE CHURCH, Bishop," Fr Nicholas said.

"You want it out there, Father, but winter is coming."

"I'd rather live with sin than in sin," Nicholas said.

"You knew what you were getting yourself into when you joined the priesthood."

"Yes, I knew I was joining the priestly order of Melchizedek but not a spousal swapping club."

"And what are you insinuating, Father?"

"It was inevitable that, with time, priests would openly take church revenues for their (once secret) families to decorate their wives and

girlfriends and turn the offertory to their hedonism and worldly pomp."

"Such outrageous allegations are a mortal sin, Father. You need to confess—"

"No, I need to walk the hell out of this hypocritical nest of nincompoops," Father Nicholas retorted. "Sacerdotal order has deteriorated into an amorphous shape, and I am not ready to be ensnared by the evil in the church."

"What have you been eating and drinking, Father? You really need some serious prayers."

"I wanted to be a Vicar of Christ, celibate and living piously, not a family man in the making. Why lie to the masses, tell them to confess their sins, yet we do the opposite?"

"Father, Christ came to save us from evil. Something must be dirty for it to be cleansed."

"The clergy I admired and wanted to be like are solicitous and obstinate, as though on dispensation by higher prelates. They commit 'reserved sins'—witchcraft, convents turned bordellos and disrobing themselves for carnal pleasure, oral sex isn't sex, and buggery is—"

"Stop this madness and spare me the damn lectures, you apostate," the bishop said.

"It's better I live with sin than in sin."

"Where wouldn't you find sin?"

"The depravity that has scourged the world

today is a much welcome companion than the hypocrisy and the sin brewing in the church, the only place where such shouldn't be found."

Silence ruled the bishop's small office before he said, "And where would you be going?"

Father Nicholas' crowning moment presented itself. "The Moonies or the Reformed Catholic Church …"

The bishop afforded a smirk. "And what makes you think you're any different from us?"

"Where I am going, sin may be forgiven for its guise of piety," Father Nicholas said, "but not piety clothed in the raiment of sin."

The President's Daughters

THE PRESIDENT'S DAUGHTER FLEW PAST me, sprinting to the car. She didn't even have the kindness to say hello, let alone notice me.

I hated them. The world beat a path to their door. All they needed to do was just sneeze.

But not anymore.

***

MELISA'S iPhone vibrated with the arrival of a new SMS. *Em, a quick tête-à-tête b4 going home, plz. Usual rendezvous. Ditch Myra.* It was from her sister, Macy.

Macy was the first to follow the teacher when

the lesson was over. Melisa disapproved of her, but what the heck? They were the First Daughters. Macy was the Queen (she-devil) of the Braeburn Queens, a close-knit sisterhood of spoilt rich girls that controlled the whole of the Braeburn students' fraternity.

Myra watched her sisters from her silent corner. She was used to living under the microscope and public eye. She kept her life under wraps.

Melisa and Macy wanted to fit in. They were more of Muhoho Kenyatta than any other First Kids the country had seen.

Melisa made a beeline to Myra's desk.

"Can you come with me for a sec?" Melisa asked Myra. "A quick word with Macy, sister-to-sister."

"Like I haven't heard that before. I am sick of your—"

"Come on, Myra. Loosen up a bit. A little banter with your sisters shouldn't come that hard. No offence."

"None taken." Myra glanced down at her art book. They were her sisters, only minutes apart. "Okay," she said. "But make it quick. I want to get home and relax—"

"Who doesn't?" Melisa snorted as she led the way to the auditorium.

Macy was surprised to see Melisa with Myra

in tow. What part of 'Ditch Myra' didn't Melisa understand? But Melisa winked, and Macy toned down a bit.

"We're all about a smooch right now," Macy said. "Myra, you have to …"

Myra looked at the door. She was sick of her sisters sharing a boyfriend. "That's gross," Myra said. "And if Mom and Dad hear about this, let alone the principal—"

"Don't worry. The President and the First Lady are not going to hear about this, ever," a baritone voice said.

Melisa rushed to their boyfriend and gave him the kiss she was dying for. Macy did the same then they looked at Myra.

"I can't do that," Myra said.

"Yes, you can, and you will," Macy said. "We are only minutes apart; we shared a womb, uterus, umbilical cord, and food, everything before we were even born. In life, we should continue with that."

"What if I don't—"

"Then you leave us no choice," Macy said. She then winked at their boyfriend, who reached for Myra roughly as Melissa moved to hold Myra for their boyfriend to kiss her.

Myra fought like a demon. It was futile. She surrendered, and the boy's lips devoured hers,

his tongue trying to find a way through her clenched teeth.

When the ordeal was over, Myra rushed from the auditorium and ran to the waiting Benz that was to take them home. She did not even see the bodyguard open the door for her.

***

THE news was about the triplets and the stolen president's escort car. The president's daughters were missing. *Somebody has already lost their job*, I thought.

The man had gumption. Even with his sweet Macy, Melisa, and Myra missing, he was stoic on national television, talking politics.

Well, he was not going to pamper them again, never again, on taxpayer's money, *my* money.

He thought he was infallible, untouchable, with the legions of police and GSU protecting him. He signed Draconian bills into law and ruled with an iron fist beneath the façade of democracy.

Let's wait and see how strong he would be when his puppies fail to get his precious girls for him after a week, month, and years, if he doesn't change.

***

THE mood in the State House was sombre. It had been since Macy, Melisa, and Myra were taken. There was no communication from the kidnappers yet.

The president was trying to be strong for the country. He loved them more than life itself. He had been told that Myra was smart, intelligent, and focused. She could even be the first female president of Kenya. But deep inside him, he knew Macy was the one with a future in politics.

The First Lady could not help crying on national television. She begged whoever had kidnapped her children to return them for anything in the world, even her life.

Then the kidnappers made their first contact in three weeks. It was a WhatsApp text on the President's phone:

> You are killing this country, the way I am going to kill your sweet daughters if you don't do as I say ...
>
> You won the elections fraudulently, rigged, and bribed and had sex with the Lady Justice to rule in your favour. Your 1,000

days in office are over.

You will resign because your missing daughters are causing you such emotional stress that you are not fit to lead. Then you will have sex again with the Lady Justice to renege her ruling and make me the president on a technicality. Otherwise, you'll never see your daughters again.

Walking Tall Among the Dead

THE MAN WHO RAPED WOMEN now rapes the dead: He goes through all the corpses inserting fingers. He loves their tightness so. He is the last to taste them, he boasts, even those who seemed untouchable in their life.

The man debuted in his career after his home ostracised him. Kith and kin slaughtered bulls and chickens for his getting a job at the morgue. With the dead, he couldn't hurt anyone, they said. He had raped and sodomised way too many.

He was in primary school when he raped his seatmate, an autistic girl he found himself smitten with. He was barely circumcised when he raped the village's oldest woman. The granny

died of heart palpitations.

The man now challenges all those who have evidence to bring it forward. The people want him dead and gone. Perhaps, as a cadaver himself, he won't hurt anyone.

"I will wash your defiled corpse and gurney it to court to testify," he boldly says. "And if I get acquitted, leave town."

He walks tall, free, in the streets.

Other Stories

First published online by Storymoja Africa and shortlisted for different competitions

Miss Dependent

FOR THE FIRST TIME IN five years, Florence bumped into Brenda and regaled her with stories of her marvellous, happily ever after life in great detail.

"It's so wonderful—so—so liberating," Florence said.

Brenda had attempted it five years before but just a trial for three months. The results of her experiment had been cataclysmic, prompting her to flee the town, leaving no forwarding address.

She gave Florence her trademark contemptuous smile. Brenda was a self-proclaimed bachelorette of the century, a celebrated Miss Independent who is the bane of the modern woman

and a free bird flying to wherever her needs and desires took her. It took her by surprise with Florence's support for the much-talked-about marital bliss. She had always felt Florence was a free spirit, like her, always on the move, with no time for delusions of marriage conventions and restrictions.

Indeed, Florence had been a staunch supporter of the 'Single Ladies' club, and at salons and their local joint, she would drip-feed her friends with tales of broken hearts to her credit. How ironic, then, to hear the self-same serial heartbreaker extol the virtues of matrimony.

It was true. Florence had been liberated from the anxieties that plagued her bachelorette days. She had fallen, deeply and irrevocably, head over heels for him. When he smiled, her heart whooped for joy, and her whole body swirled, somersaulted in space and landed, fluttering like a butterfly, in his arms. John had stood by her through the wedding ordeal, his arm around her teeny-weeny waist, smiling protectively into her adorable eyes, anticipating her every whim.

John had told her she had a home in him, and he welcomed her to his heart. He cherished her to distraction and refused to let her do anything by herself. He told her she was the most wonderful thing since plasma screen TV, football, beer, and

sports magazines. He cooked, cleaned, ironed, and went to and fro work on time. He loved her in equal measure.

"I promised never to take someone for granted again," John told Florence, "and I'd not have you become a little skivvy. I did it once, but never again."

However, as Florence narrated to Brenda her fairy tale marriage, Brenda couldn't help the need to order a shot of brandy to exorcise the demon of her ex-fiancé.

In their three-month come-we-stay trial marriage, Brenda had performed every function—and did it so cheerfully and with obvious pleasure—from the most menial tasks to hard labour (with no strokes of the cane) as if by magic. She adored him, cared for him, loved him and wanted their marriage to work.

Her fiancé took her weekends with the girls, all the more reason she had to run away for no friend, even Florence, wanted to take her back when the bomb that was her booby-trapped bed of roses detonated. When all bridges that connected her to friends and family were incinerated to smithereens, she became mousy, drab in her conversations and sexually inexperienced in her lover's eyes.

Well, her husband-to-be could be forgiven

for that, but not her for smiling and courting the idea; not until one day when she decided that she was of much more use to mankind in a far-off, under-developed third-world country as a volunteer worker in an NGO or rehab centre than in Nairobi. A single SMS with only two words, 'I'm gone', was goodbye enough.

"Tell me more about this fairy godmother husband of yours," Brenda told Florence. "Isn't everybody else, when they are not screwing around, whining about how no good men, if not yet taken, are left to marry?"

Florence giggled. She had never believed in marriage. She had aggrandised fun in the relationships she got into and, luckily, got men who were the same. They were always on the move after adding her to their female conquest lists, and no one blamed the other when it ended. It was in the name of a free spirit.

Nonetheless, John, grieving his runaway fiancée, who had disappeared off the face of the earth, offered something new. He liked independent women, those with talents, and he no longer wanted a glorified, sweet and subservient housekeeper. He embellished mutual responsibility in the relationship, even if it meant him being the fairy godmother. But Florence could be dependent on him, he told her.

"That runaway fiancée he told you about," Brenda said when Florence was done, "is me."

Slum Dog's Slam Dunk

THE BELL KNELLED AT LAST. Jimmy heaved a sigh of relief. The last fifteen minutes had felt like an hour. He desperately needed the loo.

Although the teacher was the first out of the door, Jimmy flew past her, running to the toilets. He got to the toilets in time to see his brother. The latter was in class seven, handing over money to Waweru, the oldest pupil in Olympics Primary School, Nairobi, a revered pickpocket and 'businessman'. Waweru then gave his brother a small packet that Jimmy doubtlessly knew what was inside. His heart took a sinking low.

"Ken, Dad warned about …" Jimmy's brother crossed the space between them faster than Jim-

my's imagination supplied the motion, drew his hand back and punched Jimmy hard, sending him sprawling on the urine-puddled stinking floor.

Jimmy picked himself up and stared at his brother. "I'll tell—"

"You say a word of this, and you are dead," Waweru warned.

Ken's veins stood out on his face and neck as he glowered at his younger brother. He pocketed his precious packet and said, "Tell anyone, and I mean anyone, and I'll tell everyone you cheat in your exams."

"You know I don't do that. I study—"

"Yes, you do. That's why you are always number one."

"Everybody knows I am bright. And you are stupid. That's why Mom and Dad hate you …"

Ken, eyes wide, bulging and glinting murder, jumped at his brother, but Jimmy sidestepped him smartly. Mr Kamau's voice, the teacher on duty chasing the older boys to class, saved Jimmy from his brother's attack.

Jimmy sighed in relief as he pee-peed the last drop of piss. He had to do something; tell the First Lady what had been happening. Everybody else was afraid of Waweru. But he was not. Not when Waweru, a celebrated dunder-

head-turned-drug-peddler, was the cause of his brother's ceaseless beating at home.

Ken had been repeatedly warned to keep off Waweru's company to no avail. Waweru and his gang of delinquents were a menace in the whole of Kibera.

The thought of snitching on Waweru stirred real fear in Jimmy. How could he fight drug barons, or lords, or whatever they were, on his own, and as a kid?

Dithered, Jimmy decided to go to class.

"James Onyango," he heard the big booming voice of the First Lady as he was about to enter his class. "Did you find your brother buying drugs, by any chance?"

Jimmy stopped in his tracks and turned to face his headteacher. He handed her his lines, everyone neatly done, but she was not mentally handicapped. He knew she knew he was lying to her. God, the First Lady was God. She saw and heard everything. Her ears and eyes were everywhere.

She resorted to threats when asking 'nicely' was not effective enough. And trust the First Lady's threats were worse than Waweru's, or his brother's, no matter how subtle they seemed. She had no idea what would happen to him if, and when, Waweru got wind of his talking to the authorities, Jimmy thought.

As he stood there trying not to bite his tongue, his peripheral vision caught the resemblance of Waweru making the universal gangster 'I'll kill you' sign. Just then, Jimmy knew that he had to do something, the right thing; the only thing he was sure of would be a step forward to ending the sale of drugs that was going on in the school.

Young as he was, in class five, he was the brightest and every teacher's beloved pupil in Olympics Primary School. Ten but going 20. He knew what drugs did to those who got hooked on them. He wanted to be a footballer, and his fantasy was to play for Harambee Stars; drugs would put a sharp end to that.

The First Lady did not have to go all third-degree on him. He told her everything he knew, including all the secret spots in the school where aspiring addicts bought Dextrosol sachets that made you see ghosts when you ate their contents.

Jimmy lurked behind long enough to allow everyone to go when the classes were over. He had an alternative route home where Waweru and his gang won't waylay him.

Hardly had he walked out the door when Waweru stood at the door and demanded to know what he had told the headmistress. Jimmy shook-danced for an instant but decided pronto that fear was what empowered bullies like

Waweru.

"That you sell drugs—" he began.

"You what?" Waweru almost jumped on him. "You're dead, dog."

Jimmy was all water inside; the next thing was to water himself.

Jimmy looked around. The school was deserted. Where the hell was anyone when he needed help, even the all-seeing First Lady? He was yanked to reality when Waweru grabbed his tie, his intent all too obvious.

Jimmy struggled to grasp for breath. There was no way he was going to let this bully kill him. Not without a fight.

He kicked aimlessly until he caught Waweru's leg square. The bully yelled in pain and let go of the tie. Jimmy turned too late to run when Waweru grabbed him again. His heart plummeted to the pit of his stomach. He was well dead now.

Everything turned fuzzy. The sun eclipsed and night besieged day. He saw a million stars twinkle in his eyes, his heart pounding like a mill and his life slowly crawling away from him. However, everything suddenly stopped just as he was about to give up fighting his imminent death.

From a distance, he heard a booming voice

say, "What are you doing?"

Thank you, God. Jimmy went weak in the knees with relief. He had never dreamt of a day when the First Lady's voice would sound so sweet.

"Waweru, you well know that bullying is a crime in this school, don't you?"

Waweru stared at the First Lady, not the kind of teacher you ever forgot. She was the only authority in Olympics Primary School bowed to; even teachers thought twice before dreaming of crossing her.

"Jimmy, you are supposed to be on your way home," she spoke as if he was her favourite daughter.

"Yes, Madam Principal."

Jimmy needed no further bidding. The last thing he heard as he turned the corner of his class was Waweru being ordered to the First Lady's office.

Jimmy could only imagine what would happen to Waweru.

My Sister's Killer

Leila:

I AWAKE WITH MY MOUTH full of coir, or is it the doormat? Again! I spit a chunk into the fine satin of my palm before I trust myself to breathe without choking. I try to swing my legs over the side of the bed and wipe the cobwebs of sleep from my eyes. I can't command any of my limbs to do anything. Do commanders shoot dead all soldiers who disobey orders? That's how I know I am still a danger to my family.

My mother sweeps into the room that very instant.

"Why did you give me doormats for break-

fast?" I yell at her in a language I sure as hell know she will understand. I have been speaking to them in 'wonder speak'.

"Leila, no one did that to you."

"Ametoka kuzimu nini?" the voice belongs to none other than grandma, the hater.

"Mom, please …" my mother turns to her mother.

Well, for as long as I can remember, I have had one foot in hades. I try to struggle free of the chains that keep me from attacking my family. The others mill into the room slowly, one by one, until the one who shouldn't creeps in like a ghost.

Zuleka says the word that I hate, and I release one deadening scream that cramps me into a heap, like a ventriloquist's dummy, harmless without some spirit in me.

***

IN my first memory, I am six years, six months and six days old; the dreaded number 666. I am killing my sister, Zuleka. Sometimes, the recollection is so clear I can feel her body fighting the inevitable, her muscles slackening, she wanting everything but death and then wanting nothing. My mother walked in to check on her, the

family's princess, and saved her. The next time I used a pillow. She was asleep. She didn't stand a chance. Mom and Dad were going to their bedroom that evening when they decided to pop into our room and see how their lovely daughter was doing after the earlier incident.

They saved Zuleka, again.

"This never happened," my father said. "This should never be known outside these walls …"

From then on, I didn't seem to exist, except in being kept away from her, until it didn't matter.

In the end, I know I have to kill my sister. That's why I was born, or so I have been told.

I now know why I have to kill my sister: she is the slayer of the *jinnees*. She doesn't know this. It will be revealed to her on her seventeenth birthday. She has two years before the epiphany.

The *jinnees* are scared. They can't leave the ocean. That's where they have lived all along, their home. Where would they go? I am the one to stop her.

On Friday, 13th June 2014, I should kill Zuleka. If I fail, the next time is when I am twenty-one: Friday, 13th August 2021. By then, she would have freed Mombasa of the *jinnees*.

***

I hear the creak of every joint in my spine as I fall into the segue of conscious unconsciousness. I am a ghost—I hear everything they say, see them hug Zuleka and each other in solidarity, yet I can't do anything.

"Uliambiwa huyu mtoto usimzae hukusikia," grandma says.

"We wouldn't have known she would be like this, Mom," my mother responds.

"Now what? She is a threat to all of us. She wants to kill her sister; who knows who else is next?"

"I love them both, Mom. You are a mother—"

"Mtoto wa kuzimu huyu. Lazima afe!"

Strange things have been happening. All of a sudden, temperatures in Mombasa have dropped. It's like we are in Mount Kenya or Limuru, where it's forever foggy and ice-cold. There have been whistles in the night, but you can't see who is whistling. People have woken up to coconut trees growing in their sitting rooms. Others have swallowed stones. Me, I have feasted on coconut shells and now coir.

"You can't fight this hard," I say, but no one hears, "without fighting for something worthy."

****

Zuleka:

MY sister tried to kill me when she was six. As we grew older, it didn't matter. She counted ways to accomplish her mission—poison sprinkled on my food or laced in my drink; a shove down the cliff we liked to go to; electrocution.

I am a psychic, but I failed to see this. Grandma calls her the 'Devil's Child', and says she should be killed. My psychic powers haven't worked.

In the end, my sister will not kill me. I will kill her.

At least, this is what I tell myself.

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Flashes of Vice: Vol II was enjoyable?

You won't want to miss…

Flashes of Vice: Vol III

(Excerpt)

Have a sneak preview of what you will get …



Don't Die a Virgin

My Anti-Terrorism Journal

DON'T DIE A VIRGIN; TERRORISTS are waiting for you in heaven.

I am every terrorist's wet-dream girl. I have big, wide, and beautiful/lovely/lustrous eyes, like pearls, just the way the Quran says in *Surat Al-Wāqi`ah* 56:22–23. I am tall; baby-faced (what the Hadith calls eternally young); and a complexion like that of Samantha Lewthwaite, the terroristess; voluptuous; and full-breasted. My boobs are large, round, and not inclined to hang. I am everything that the Quran and *Hadith* promise terrorists would get when they die for Allah, including an appetising vagina (I think mine is), except I am not a *houri* (virgin), chaste, pure, and

non-menstruating.

I escaped the terrorist's bullet by a whisker on 21st September 2013. I was part of the cooking competition on the rooftop of Westgate Mall in Westlands, Nairobi, when al-Shabaab terrorists besieged it. At the moment, it did not occur to me that I could make love to the same terrorist in heaven as his reward for killing other innocents and me for Allah's cause. Perhaps they did not know that I was a virgin, or it was just sheer luck that they did not send me to wait for them in heaven.

When those who survived the Westgate Mall attack rush to shrinks to empty their traumatised minds to deal with the ordeal, I have sex. I am a student and strong believer in the Kama Sutra, and for me, sex is a ritual of union with the gods.

I decided to break my virginity immediately after that day, just in case I died, I did not end up with a terrorist whom I would have to spread my legs for forever. Or where does their eternal supply of virgins come from in heaven? I imagine that they are girls who were virgins on earth, and when they die, they go to heaven and get premium membership in a harem for terrorists. I wonder what happens to women mujahideen. Do they, too, get seventy-two virgin men to screw them forever?

I am still an under eighteen, but I have had more sex than my mother has had her entire lifetime. More even after the Garissa University College terror attack on 2nd April 2015. And no, I will not reveal the identities of the men with whom I have sex. I would not like them to be dragged to court by moral police and sexual offenses campaigners for defilement. My life, my choice, right?

The terrorists claim that each time they sleep with a *houri,* they find her a virgin. Besides, the penis of the terrorist never goes limp. The erection is eternal; the sensation that they feel each time they screw their dark-eyed virgins is utterly delicious and out of this world, and were anyone to experience it in this world, they would faint. Each terrorist will marry seventy-two *(sic) houris* besides the women he married on earth, and all will have appetising vaginas. That's according to one very old sex maniacal geezer who is said to have died sometime in the Middle Ages, around 1500 CE.

The thought of having sex, for eternity, with a mass murderer is disgusting, and repulsive. I can't even imagine. Being good in this life won't help. Be a bad girl—the *baddest* even. Heaven doesn't exist, especially for virgins. It is hell up there if you don't tear up your clothes for MTV,

indulge in orgies, and sell your three/foursome sex tapes to YouPorn while on earth.

From the look of things, Muslim heaven will have a short supply of virgins very soon. Al-Shabaab has had a field day massacring Kenyans, and now they want to go to Alaska; Boko Haram has already snatched 200 virgins to have their paradise on earth; ISIS wants to establish an Islamic world; al-Qaeda has become WWW (World Wide Web); and Islamic radicalisation is at an alarming rate because of the promise of an eternal supply of virgins.

It is seductive, being a terrorist, I mean. The numbers are unprecedented. Woe unto you, dear girlfriend, if you die a virgin.

The Bootylicious Spy

ACCORDING TO THE NAIROBI URBAN dictionary, I am a socialite: a beautiful young woman with tantalising titties (anterior), a big ass (posterior), and no brains. Thanks to the (up-and-coming wannabe) celeb gossip columnists and paparazzi, I am the newest invention of the woman in town. I call it sexpreneurship.

According to men's dictionary, I am the definition of beauty: booty and boobs. Who could blame me for my blessed butt and bust, my greatest assets? I am a goddess: venerated by the women for my prowess, worshipped by men in private and public.

I have had my share of vitriol: I have a bright

future behind (my forever twerking ass), and my twins (boobs) are cosmetic; I am the epitome of slothfulness for young girls, and I symbolise women as sex objects. Do I give a darn? Hell, no!

Wherever I go, heads turn. Men and women can't get their eyes off me. The women envy me. Men can't wait to be all over me. I am the new breed of a daughter of Eve. Sexpreneurial pays my bills.

Blue Chip Company honchos. Politicians. Musicians. They all have a share of me. They pay, just for my face, bust, and rear. Diplomats too. I lend my body to them. I love it—the attention, I mean.

But I am not as conceited as you may think. I have morals. I have a boyfriend—one at a time. I'm faithful to him. He knows what I do. He's supportive.

My current boyfie is a diplomat—the High Commissioner of Uganda to Kenya. My ex was a Cabinet Secretary—CS for Defence. My first love was a minister. Minister of State for Internal Security. That is long before the dawn of the new constitution. I have also had my time with bad boys, from Nigerian drug lords to criminal masterminds and gangster wannabe musicians who earned me what I am famous for— Video Vixen.

You see the men I sleep with? That's why I

am a spy. And how old am I? You won't believe it. But a woman never reveals her age. I haven't seen better days yet. And before you start doing the math, I have only slept with three men, as all women do—my current boyfriend, my ex, and my first love.

The National Intelligence Service guys picked me up on the day the minister for internal security dumped me. The fool had come to his senses and decided to go back to his family, a postmenopausal old hag and a bunch of intellectually challenged excuses of human beings he called children.

I was drowning in my sorrow when *he* (the spy) approached me. He was TDH. Typical rebound guy. But he was not interested.

He recruited me. And trained me. Then I was sent out. That's how I ended up falling for the CS. And when the idiot got tired of me in a record two months, the High Commissioner offered a shoulder on which to cry. He bought me the alcohol with which I nursed the wounds in my heart.

The High Commissioner passes on sensitive info to me, and I pass it on to NIS. He promised to take me to UG when his tour of duty expires. Take me as a second wife. Or I might even make him divorce his wife. He is going to join politics.

That's what NIS is banking on.

So far, I have raised questions with the Uganda intelligence services. Their antennas are up. The Direction Finders have zeroed in on me. Triangulating. I am a girl to watch. Twice, I have been picked and grilled by the Internal Security Organisation (ISO) while in Uganda with my beloved.

Theirs will always be conjecture. Isn't that what intel guys do? They will never get me, my records are clean, and thanks to the media for publicising my booty and boobs, I am a socialite, preferably sexpreneur, who sees business opportunities from dimwits who can't zip it up for the sake of their boring wives.

I am just a girl in love (with life), unlucky to fall for the diplomatic corps, dignitaries, and policymakers. Love knows no boundaries, right?

And do I love my beau? God, yes. Very much. He brings out this girl in me that I barely know.

About the Author



VINCENT DE PAUL is the author of the award-winning collection of poems, *First Words*, and the sensational collection of love poems: *Holy Emotions* and *Holy Crimes*. His other works are *Flights of Poetic Fancy* and *Flashes of Vice: Vol I*. He has a Diploma in Comprehensive Creative Writing from the Writers Bureau, UK.

Vincent has been published online on different websites: Storymoja Africa, Africa Creates, the African Street Writer, The Africa We Know About (TAWKA) Diaries and NaijaStories.

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