

MY CASKET



#BOOK 1

LUCAS NM

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THE AUTHOR

Lucas NM was born in central Kenya. Currently, he resides in Kilifi, Kenya. Luka Nyabera Maleya, famously known as Lucas NM, has involved himself in several projects touching on human life and environmental conservation. He is a Philanthropist. He founded The Nyabera Foundation and is the Chief Executive Officer at the foundation; which educates the African Child by offering them academic scholarships. Over and above, Lucas NM is the author of **So Sweet A Poison**. Prior to becoming a writer, he engaged in jobs like painting, carpentry and teaching as a profession. About his family, little is known as he prefers keeping his life private.

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DEDICATION

To all the broken hearts.

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PROLOGUE

From far a distance, they seem to be curled. Bored in a way. They look unhealthy and out of life. They are all alone with no one to give them the company. Do they enjoy being alone or they are just pushed away by the surrounding circumstances? Branches can be wicked at times. They push them away in the name of hardening them. Even when they are so young and never ready for such a PUSH! But the question is, what do these leaves do? Do they just remain folded, curled, stunted and looking ugly? Do they allow the disease to set in, the animals and smallest insects to take advantage of them and devour them? Or do they take advantage of the little showers that fall on them to make the game change? Victor or victim: who are they?

CHAPTER ONE

I am about to write. I am about to write and the things I am about to write in this book, are things that have a true-life basis. They happened. They are happening and probably might happen in the future. These things are about a young man who is torn between family differences and is forced to live suffering the consequences of other people's doing. From the beginning till the end. A character so difficult to understand. A character shaped by both experiences, environment and other internal factors of similar conflict. A character that is so dynamic and malleable to change, one who is not easy to predict or influence. Or maybe he thinks so!

My name as of now is not as of importance as to what I want to share with you. I was sitting doing nothing but thinking. This is when I heard the surge to tell a tale of my life. The life of a young man. A man who, if it was giving up, he would have done that very long ago.

Life starts in a funny way. Willingly or unwillingly, it has to start and go on. However, few people have been known to interfere with the laws of the universe. They seem to play demigod's role. They think they can do as they please and walk away. Walk away laughing and making all the noise to signify their power and state of jubilation. Walk away showing how mighty and powerful they are. So powerful to eat from a poor man's hand and cut it off. To some, they feel like they can control

what goes on in them and around them. Some say, "I am really not ready to do this!" To do what exactly? To do the right thing or to do what is right. They sit, drink, and sleep while deciding what to do with what they have in their small, dark and shriveled minds hosted in their misshapen head. They bring forth and terminate at the same time. With the same rate. This is how life starts willingly and unwillingly. In a funny way, and it must continue.

These are the same gods that decide who to plough, who to plant, who to grow, and who is to be used to harvest for them. For their use and celebrations. They are still the same individuals who control everything we do. To us, they come laughing. Laughing at our problems. They shade tears. We think and most of the time, tend to believe that those tears are tears to mourn our calamities. Calamities that befall us as a form of punishment. Their punishment. They tell us that they are going to solve the issue and make things right. They convince us and we, as confused toddlers, believe them and fall into their traps. In their ensnares. Forever, we remain to be their prisoners!

They sat. Held a meeting and decided that it wasn't going to happen. How can a dove fall for a wild crow? One of them was questioning so sternly. By the looks on his face, he was so enraged that his eyes were threatening to pop out. His veins to bust and his anger and hate to contaminate all the innocent

and guilty as well. He felt it deep in him; the need to control and take over. To say and not to say what that is to begot out of someone else's life. It is a mistake that needs to be corrected soonest with no fail. The aftermath might not be so pleasing if the game is allowed to carry on. The dove needs to be locked away and separated for life from this stubborn crow. If necessary, the dove needs to be caged. Caged and protected 24/7. And if the dove proves to be stubborn, it can as well as be killed and stew made out of its carcass. They brought the small, vulnerable, and yet, lovely dove to council. The sense was spoken to the little angel and she was commanded not to interact with birds of alien origin. Seeds must be of pure breed and no one, absolutely no one, is allowed to drug the name along the mud. That was the least warning she would be given. If not, she might not live to see the next day when the sun comes up. I wonder why sometime, or just maybe all the time, people want to be controlling. To feel in charge!

You can, as much as possible, try to control a dog but you will never be successful. Even if you think that by rewarding and punishing the good and bad behavior in most dogs that you are finally going to control them, then is when you are going to face it rough and tough. Humans are like dogs. Some can be very loyal at one given time. Some can obey your orders and bark whenever you want them to. And when the day for them to attack comes, they won't even flinch before tearing you apart mercilessly. Those are the kind of dogs am talking about. Dogs so loyal at one time and ready to betray in the next. They

can never be trusted. These are the dogs. These were the dogs of those days. Doves and dogs.

Even after all the struggles to try and keep away the dove from the foreign birds, the dove messed up and she got herself ensnared by one of the old kinds. The originals as they would call him. She got her feathers plucked and her dignity swept away. Her sweet melodies were nothing as compared to the bitter and sorrowful cries of a caged parrot in a deep dungeon well-guarded by a fire breathing dragon. Maybe this was the reasons to why the crow was never needed near her in the first place. To keep him safe from her. Not to remind the owner of what had happened to the dove. But the deed was done. The mistake, there to remind her of her youthful desires and her defiance to the wise songs of dear mama. Everyday waking up in the morning to face herself in the mirror and to be reminded of her reward. The scar that she had to live with.

Well, with no time, Soul had his first chunk on the meat he had been chasing for too long. The chunk, juicy and delicious, never failed him. Never failing him made me the result of the bite. However, this news was never warmly received by the family at large. This was another act of defiance that she had portrayed. Their dove had finally broken free and with all the merry and defiance; she flew away singing a song of ridicule. My mother has always been great in some ways. On the other hand, my father has always been great but far from perfect. May his soul rest in peace.

The two started their family in a funny way. My mother having a son with a man whose identity has never been known to me or even my brother up to this day. She was young and beautiful by then. A lily in the ocean. A flake before it starts to snow and an oasis in the middle of the desert. I believe she still is. She was so attractive to make men fight for her attention in her village during those days. So innocent and dazzling to make all the other ladies in the village to envy her whole existence and question their worth in the eyes of all men. A figure of great musical importance and a figure to be narrated in everyday-evening folk tales by the old to the young after evening meals before going to bed. A dream of every man; young and old. A nightmare to the witches and a character to bring relief in the middle of your nightmares. On the other hand, my father was nothing to speak of. For starters, he had nothing about himself noble. He was from a peasant family with his father serving as a leader in a backyard traditional church and a strong believer in male empowerment. I never said he was a chauvinist.

As a young man, I should say as a boy, it is said that my father and his brother divorced school. Yes. As weird as it sounds, they would be given all the essentials by grandma and asked to head to school but, to their common belief, school was not for people like them. They were intelligent enough not to spend their valuable and priceless time at school learning how to read and write while they would be somewhere out there

working on some great stuff that would be of higher monetary value to them. They were the jacks of all trades at a very tender age. For money was everything to them by then. They resorted to doing odd jobs to satisfy their short-term desires and feed their egos. At teenagerhood, they had already started building castles and hunting for their beloved ones. For a kingdom is never complete without a queen. It's just a process that every man goes through in life. But they were yet to be men; they were boys. Big boys. And as being boys, they knew no responsibilities leave alone living up-to them. Owning them. This is the time when my father started pushing his was to my caged mother. The process of getting her took almost years but finally, he got his catch. Still uneducated, a man of no religion, values or morals. A hardworking man who believes in family and its power all together. One who hopes against hope.

Love is something that many people have tried to explain. Some are still trying very hard to understand it and come up with a better and rationale explanation about how it works. At the end of the day, we all have to agree that love works in so many different ways. Ways that are so unique to each and everyone of us. Whether once involved or not; it works in a spectacular manner. This is something that my mother's family failed to understand. This made me, and my little brother George, to be shunned away and perceived as evil; outcast and a people never wanted.

MY CASKET

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CHAPTER TWO

People find love, to others, love finds them. They share all the good tidings brought by this stranger. Together they live till when this stranger decides to walk away. Fed up and feeling disappointed. This is when they all say that the love they used to share, faded away. The end might be brought by its own genesis, for something to end, it must have begun; and it must also end for something else to begin. This might also be as a result of own greed and uncontrollable desires. Desires of the heart. The same desires that are always blinding the eye, filling the heart with hell-like hate, that which is envied by the devil himself. Together with his followers. These desires are like a curse with no spell to reverse it, for whoever that believes in it, rots to the core without even knowing that they are dying. They lose themselves earlier than later. Whether successful or not, there is one thing that these people must live and experience during these times; the repercussions of love.

The price that they have to pay for the love and for accommodating the lone stranger. From the very beginning, Sarah started paying for her sins. At a very early age. Though young, she might have been older to start paying off her dues. This was considered by those in charge. But still, she was young to be asked to pay in such a mean method; one through which the payment was supposed to be done. For defiling herself and going against the family wishes, she was denied

family love. People get denied love for choosing love. It happens sometimes; also, in Africa. And that is the beauty of love. My mother was denied the right to be associated with the family or even be entitled to the family name. All the rights stripped off and all the favors withdrawn. Everyone was commanded to turn their backs on her. The brother, the only family son, acting the most enraged. All this because of having found her peace of mind, freedom, solace and compassion in a stranger. A stranger so strange not even to look at twice. A stranger not decent to accommodate in any person's mind. A stranger by the name Soul.

The family was no longer in the position of recognizing Sarah as one of their own blood. All the communication channels were shut. She couldn't see them; only in her nightmares. Her sons, they were all unlucky save for the one born before she met Soul. For this one, he was even included in matters concerning family wealth and inheritance. His name was mentioned with great respect in every family meeting that was there to be conducted. That's how the originals are always treated. He was an icon of the family and one to be always epitomized. For the remaining two sons, that were fathered by Soul, they were treated exactly opposite and considered filthy creatures. Dogs and cats received better care than them. The beauty of life. However, she was lucky to be with a man as loyal and faithful as Soul. A man who owns responsibilities and strongly believes in the power and position of the family. A man who could go to great lengths to see them happy. Smiling

and laughing in the evening in their small apartment. The kids happy and the parents satisfied. Despite Soul not having attended classes, he was a man skilled by nature itself. He was remarkable. An icon that till today, I embrace.

My father was a hero, and still, we all as a family, believe he was. A great man always has something to bring him down. Something to dispute all the goodness and greatness of his name. Something to prove all the good things otherwise. A great man is not always blessed and showered with triumph. There must always be that one thing, that will taint his cloak. That one thing had never been known to Sarah, about Soul. If you were to ask me, I would say everything was perfect from the very beginning. But can things be so perfect and smooth to that extent? All the signs became visible with time. There was no need to hide from the fact that his youthful habits were still with him. Residing in him, walking with him. Helping him make every step and guarding him everywhere he went. Always dinning with him. Protecting him from his fears and following him always. Just like his shadow.

Those habits never departed from him. They were all there all along. Silent and waiting for the right moment to strike and show themselves to the world. Some things are better shown rather than suppressed. He once again, had started being cocky. A village rooster that knows how best to perform its God-given duties. How to best respond to social emergencies with no fail. How best to portray the religious principles of love and care for your neighbor. At first, it used to lay low, but as

things progressed, everything got out of hand. The one-time happy family started having fights. Spending the nights outside in the cold because of this and that.

There was this one day that I came from school to find the unexpected. Happy to finally get home after having a long day at school, I ran all the way to where the family used to rent. My school was like a distance of five kilometers from the place. Running would make it seem weird, keeping in mind that I was only seven. So, instead of running, we used to walk with my friends for continued company and chit chat. At one point we would happily hitch hack without the fear of something terrible happening to us. Those days, it was common for kids to be abducted and unimaginable things done to them.

There was once a kid not far from our neighborhood that was kidnapped and her tongue chopped off. Private parts ripped. The abductor then pour acid on her face, arms belly and other parts of her body in attempt to send the message that he intended to deliver. This incident made all the families to ask their kids not to hitch-hack or even talk to strangers on the road. My own family put strict rules on us. We were not even allowed to give directions to lost strangers due to the fear of them pretending to be lost only to pounce on you when you least expect it. It is believed that if you want to walk fast, walk alone, and if you want to go far walk with others(people). That is what we definitely used to do.

After saying goodbye to the friends, I dashed through the mass of the people surrounding the area and dived into the house with all energy and will. Both hungry and tired not to forget full of expectations to finally meet the family after missing them for hours while in school. However, what I saw left my knees weak. I slumped on the wall and slid all the way down to the floor. Gazing blankly at everything and seeing nothing. The room was absolutely empty. Void of existence. My heart stopped beating for a moment and started pumping faster. My stomach filled with water. Organs dancing in me. Overcoming the weight of my body. My hands started shaking uncontrollably. I was about to scream but I had no voice. I was just a void figure experiencing all this at the same time. After a period that would have lasted for five minutes, I recollected myself and made a mental reconciliation to what was and had happened.

It was later in the evening that I came to learn that my father was nowhere to be found. He had gone missing. That is when I connected the dots that seemed to be missing and came to the realization that my own father had relocated to some other place. To be all alone. Without us. What can push a man to doing such things? To flee from his own wife and kids. To abandon them and embrace solace. Do we call it manly or womanly? A man who used to fight for the same people, is now running away from them. Cowardly neglecting them. What could have led to the sudden change of events? Is it the fear of family, fear of love, social fear or what fear exactly? Is

it the need for freedom or what can really make a lion to run from a gazelle?

That made me to think hard. The ordeal was an eye-opener as many would call it. There were no questions allowed at that very moment to be asked. If you want, you can think that you are entitled to the truth, but on the other hand, you'll be ruthlessly told that it's not your business to indulge in family feuds. You should wait and watch. Be a spectator. The decisions are always made by the African parents and it's the duty of the kids to be obedient and respectful enough to follow without questioning. That is what obedience is, in Africa. Not questioning even when you are entitled to explanations. The spirit of curiosity is most a time killed in young children at an earlier age by their own parents. The same people who say that they want the best for their kids are in the forefront to take away what is best for them. This is beautiful.

After three months, the family reunited and my father was back to the same house he fled from. It was all relieving to me in particular. A man can sacrifice his own ego and forego all the social expectations for the people he loves. This is what he exactly did. He chose return instead of distance. He is a man of honor.

Society says this. Society says that. A man should be this and a woman should have this and that. Society has built and destroyed at the same time with equal measures. If a man

does that, he is praised and if the same man does another that, he must face it rough and be ready to walk the path of all ridicule. A path that is not easy to go through. A path so difficult and sweet. The truth is, society doesn't care. If you decide to care about society, remember that society doesn't care about you. Many have gone to the extent of concluding that it is you and only you, that matters.

In this matter, I really don't know what mattered to me. I was young and innocent. All the family issues getting in my way and affecting me in all spheres of life. The whole of me. The whole of me with no one to care. This can make you go nuts and ruin your social life as a kid at such young age.

MY CASKET

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CHAPTER THREE

Today is the most boring day. After every five, am finding myself nodding off. The body feels so weak. Am literally under the weather. I can feel it and I don't need you to convince me to put my pants on. This is a place far from home. This is place am not used to and I can't pretend that am getting all well. Not like I am complaining but sometimes I feel that I am not fit to the torments I go through in this place every day.

The genesis of the anguish was initiated by the very day the mother tried to take her own life by conducting a self-initiated termination. Termination of whatever that she had gotten herself into. Her own pleasures now becoming something to be ashamed of. Something to get rid of. To abort. That day, being young and innocent, I wasn't aware of what was going on. All I knew was that my dear mother was sick and sleeping. Taking a rest, as she used to do most of the time when she was tired and didn't want to be bothered. Or when she was hiding from someone that she owed money. Telling us to say that she is not around if someone came by looking for her. Even though the resting was too much and consistent, I wasn't bothered that she might actually rest. Leaving all her troubles behind. It was three days later that I was made aware of the dreadful news. Your mother is very sick and hospitalized. You won't be able to see her any time soon. But one day, she will come back home, hopefully. For now, you have to go take refuge in your aunt's place as we all wait for her glorious return.

Don't get me wrong. That place was amazing and the family was welcoming. The kids were fun to play with but not for a sociopath like me. Every laughter made me think that they were laughing at me. The jokes were no longer jokes to me. They were all beauties till the day I found them gossiping about my family. This was the very day that I knew that my guts were all true to me. There is no way I could just trust an all-time-laughing person. No way. That tore me apart and made me to resent them with all the energy I got. I loathed them to the core of my small heart. I never wanted anything to do with them. A weak man under the shelter of his master has no option but to leak the floor, to scrub the floor, do the dishes and eat ass. All this, for protection from the cold wind of the night and the ugly torture of day's sun. The BIGGY bully. In this situation, I was the weak man who had no home to run to, or family to save him. I was the house dog to pet. The errand boy. Everything was to be done by me. Tasks are always yours to execute, remember. This brought some inner sense of peace after self-acceptance. Some things are better if they are left the way they are without us trying to control or change them. They can hurt but still make us not to feel the pain.

I had now found my new family. The first month went by and there was no sign of my mother. The little bond that I had for her became weak and the flame was soon extinguished, turning me cold. There were no more thoughts of her or desire to be with her. At this time, my father was in prison. He had been sent there for a little trip by his boss three months before

my mother took her own adventures. The case of my father never made sense to me. Later on, I had stories that the place he was guarding as a night guard had been attacked and assets worth a fortune stolen. Good thing about the attack is that my father had not been harmed in any way by the thugs and all the assets that he was put under charge were stolen. This made the owner very happy and that is why he gave him a trip to the prison. No father, no mother. This made me to have no any other choice but to freely give my services in exchange of food and shelter at the age of 7.

This new family was nothing compared to holy angels or filthy hell demons. Though they had their own bad side, they blended the sides perfectly. The demons because of all the bad things said and done. The angels for coming through to save a life and not letting the streets to consume me. For allowing me to attend the classes, even though I wasn't that perfect student who grasps what teachers say in class. The goodness for delegating duties to the spoilt brat that I used to be as a form of punishment and to teach me how best to be responsible. The goodness for forcing me to attend church services early Sunday mornings; which I used to hate the most-particularly the Sunday schools.

The most disgusting thing was, being asked questions that I had no answers to. Being put in a constant place of trial and questioning. I hated it when everyone could smile at me scarstically and ask me silly questions. Judging me and tormenting me with the devil eyes. Calling me names and

saying that I am the kid whose mother used to be the street escort. Making me pay for her own sins. I loathed this with all my heart. Church was a place of torment instead of redemption. A place of tribal stratification. This hasn't change even as I write this. The same disease has been eating into our church. I really hate the deeds of the place. That used to make me have second thoughts about going to church.

However, after a long debate whether to attend or not, I would vote for a yes just because of the food that I would be given after the session. There was always snacks to make kids come to church often. There were many good things to make them saints and a few things to make them devils.

While in there, I would fantasize and remember some of the happy moments that we used to have as a family when my father was still available for us. When my own mother had not been turned into a regular hooker. When she never gave her services for cheap pleasure. When she was still a saint, my father's doll and a mother to the sons. This particular day, all of us (the kids) were having high expectations about this particular day. This was Christmas. The time when the families used to see rare deliciousness once in a year. Every family would prepare in advance. Purchasing things like wheat flour and cooking fat. Ndovu and kimbo. Kimbo that used to be in special plastic cans that would uniquely distinguish them. The family would then wrap the commodities in a special wrapping; hiding them from the kids and keeping them safe for the big day. However, this particular year never happened

to our family. We never saw any Ndovu or Kimbo being brought home. Snoopy me even tried exploring all the hiding places with little success. I would later on report my findings to my siblings who would by then play as my commanders, assigning me missions to extremely red zones.

The days fizzled. There was no way of telling how fast they got erased. The awaited day came and my father gave us all, yet another surprise. One that none of us would ever forget. This was a day supposed to make us see and enjoy some of the things we've all been missing. This was the day that we were to roast huge meat chunks, take several liters of Pepsi and eat all other foods that we haven't had a chance to taste, let alone smell, since the last Christmas. This was the day that we were supposed to overfeed ourselves and apply soap on our bellies to ease the inside tension. This was the day to celebrate with our neighbors. Not because they wanted to, but because they wanted to stand out and prove how rich they are.

Every household was trying to outdo the other. With kids receiving invitations from their friends to go to their place and dine with them. However, my good father gave us a surprise by cooking the normal food of the day. As many would call it, he cooked ugali and matumbo. To him, that was such an amazing dish and he was pretty sure that everyone would enjoy. And in deed everyone enjoyed the meal by not bothering to even smell it. None bothered to eat that day. The mood changed and everyone was mad at everyone else with no apparent reason. There was no peace that day. This day,

my mother spent the rest of her day sleeping and talking to no one. My brother Joseph minded his own business with the company of the friends, and I being me, I had no where to go or friends to invite me to their houses for a piece of cake. My father had failed me and the rest of the family. Making himself an icon of the family and a figure never to be forgotten.

Christmas was a moment of family reunion. For those that were not in good terms with their families, this was the time for seeking forgiveness and granting one in same measurers. This was the time to slaughter and bathe in blood. This was the only time to heavily feed ourselves with all yearly delicacies. Consuming them in large sums and swallowing them in huge chunks. This was a memorable day that he chose to rudely ruin for the whole family. This was just wow!

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CHAPTER FOUR

Family is a good thing to have. A good family is the best thing that can ever happen to someone. Family is love. Family is care. Family is embrace and trust. Family is honesty and loyalty. Family is all the good things and the bad things. Family is strength and weakness. Family is support and neglect. Family is everything that is sweet and everything that is bitter. Family is sadness. Growing up, the dream for a great family seemed far-fetched. It was nothing more than a dream to me; one that I would wish not to awaken from. Whoever that has a good family should make it great in all ways possible. That is a no option for one to do. I never had family. I had a father, mother and two siblings. That was never good enough for me. It was never satisfying at all. Up to date, it has never been. This always left an empty space in my guts. It left me vulnerable and yearning for more and more. Days moved on and on and on, with the same feelings buried deep inside me. With a broad smile on my face and dancing eyes to hide my agony.

My family was no other to look up to, to run into or even to ever expect anything from them. There was a lot of chaos harbored by the little four walls and the tiny roof that leaked every time it poured. There was no enough food left for the kids to scamper on. Everyday was a new day of trying to survive. Survive or die was the rule of the streets. The streets is where we used to reside. It wasn't safe for the strangers but

it used to take care of us. It was cruel and forgiving to its kids. The people that I was related to had to figure it out on their own. To find their ways back and forth in those streets.

The man responsible for my birth used to be kind. He was generous most times and that is the reason why he had many mistresses to care for. He could not stand seeing other people suffer. Children of other men left to fend for themselves. He always came through for them neglecting his own for other men like him, to take care of. This was the root of it all, him being the seed and the farmer of his own mischief. This was the genesis of a family not united and widely separated by the thin curtains of life, if at all they exist.

Allow me to carry your bag, allow me to wipe the seat clean for you. Allow me to take your hand, allow me to carry your bottle. Allow me to shield you from the wind, for the wind can never harm my broad shoulders. Allow me to be your shade. Please allow me to pay your rent. Allow me to pay all of your bills. Allow me to do all your biddings. Allow me to make your dreams come true, for that is what I do best as a January Santa. The Santa who is never shared at all but truly remains yours and yours alone. That is how it all started and would still bring him to an end, still, asking for them to allow him; but he never allowed himself.

Such a man deserves no position in the society. Such a man deserves least title as a man. He deserves to be stripped off of all respect and dignity. A man who walks around seeking for

women's validation and recognition, is not fit to be a man. Not of that league. A true man shouldn't ask for a lady to allow him. However gentle he is, he should be wise enough to know his position as a demigod. He should take charge and stop shying away from reality. Shying away from the mother nature and the tables of life. From where, all humanity feeds. All this, has never been clear enough to him. He continued entertaining his pants and feeding his groins with all the social leftovers he bumped into.

Monday was Monicah, Tuesday visited the museums (where all the good old resides), Wednesday was Janet, Thursday June, Friday Fridah and the weekend spent home resting on the couch watching football and relaxing the bones after the busy week. Family nowhere near the mind. This had to go on for a while before she decided not to swallow it any more. She tried dialogue, but since a woman needs to needs to be respectful and humble; submissive to the husband, she was quickly shut down and brushed off. Him claiming that her mind was stupid, heart full of jealousy and eyes short of sight.

From short of sight to gaining sight. From envious to finding love. From insecurities to relationship full of trust and honesty. From sad to joyous. From lonely to accompanied. All this were the things she dreamt of. The things she desired to have as a family. She wanted truth, yet she had already one at her exposure. She wanted a man that could love her with equal measures. One who would embrace her, pamper her and shower her with love. Those are the things that her bucket

contained ever since she decided to commit to a marriage; life often seen as a torturous den and one that drains people to death. In marriage, there is care, there is love and there are all the good things that people talk of. And in deed, this one was a point to ascertain that illusion.

As a good and virtuous woman, a mother and a leader to her falling family, she felt that by indulging her desires would betray the pillar at which that family rested. For quite a long time, she kept on debating on whether to do the right thing or whether to do what is right. She was now no longer fighting her good-for-nothing husband, she was now fighting her own self. A terrible fight that would end up messy and if not careful, one that would make her forsake her sanity like her elder sister. All this was the battle that she had to endure all alone without the help of her better half. It had come to a point of you and not us. To a point of yours and not ours. It wasn't until it was.

Finally, the day came and she made the golden decision. She decided that for us to be, there must be me. For ours to exist, there must be mine. This is when all the sadness rules over happiness. She had to find herself a gigolo. This, though, came after a prolonged debate within self of right and wrong; of hell and Aden!

The game of thrones and territories had to go on and on. I could say over a very long period before the participants called it quit. Actually, as far and clearer as I can remember, none of

the teams decided to call it quits. They just got tired of hiding and decided to do it more-lively and publicly without hiding from each other. I rarely forget that night, even though I have this freaking behavior and tendencies of forgetting stuffs, the incidences of that night will never leave my nose. They were smelly and damn ugly. A husband being beaten up by the wife because of unfaithfulness. Her claiming that all was never well if the man continued seeing the mistresses. Her, arguing that it was necessary for her to go for the massages every Friday and the husband never to be seen with the Friday bee, Fridah. At least that is what the lazy dog gets for not barking when need be.

MY CASKET

LUCAS NM

CHAPTER FIVE

Growing up is the best thing that can ever happen to most people, if not all. That feeling of vulnerability and independence makes all things feel safe, even when they are not. You running to your mother or father for protection. Even when the mother or the father is far-fetched and sometimes, nowhere to be seen, it is of great certainty that there is always someone or something somewhere playing the role of both. What befalls those whom are short of luck of having both? Well, I'd say that it's so unfortunate of them. It's amongst the many blessings of mother nature to humanity. Here in Africa, we run to them seeking for vengeance against our enemies and protection from our adversaries, for pain relieving portions and for maternal care. For love and embrace. For the warm touches and soft kisses, even though their arms are full of scars, scales and lips of cracks on their lips. With great hope we do, only to end up as their prey to their own cannibalistic nature. These are our sweet sweet mothers and sisters that we truly adore, and fathers that become expert hunters in such a short period of time. Poachers I should say. They are always waiting patiently, for our arrival so as to pounce on us and make us weak; oh, strong they say.

However much we got bullied by the then life horrors. We bounced back and came out lively. That is the most entertaining part about life in the streets. To be honest, it

always felt good. Swimming in all the muddy trenches and never getting sick. Eating cheap foods along the road never to get bloaty tummies. You can even name some; *mutura, samosa, githeri, chafua* which used to be my favorite, *maini ya ng'ombe, usisahau na pale tulipo kuwa tukinywa supu, matumbo ya kuku* famously known as *maraa*. These were the delicacies of those days. Even though they were readily available. There was just a lot of things that we did as kids, oops, not to do but to eat as we do. Before doing, there must be eating, and after doing, there is also eating. The good part of it came when we, the boys, could get in a messy fight or rather, wrestle, so as to prove our manhood at age seven years. I mean, where do you think all the energy from the eating was going to?

On a particular Friday, actually, it was all the Fridays. John the Cena, was tasked with arranging for all the boxing matches for the various participants after classes. By then lessons would end at around noon for the junior classes, giving us all the time till evening for boxing. This was perfect and suiting for all. The lion must fall for the hare to merrily dance. All the other animals, I mean spectators, would gather around the match to give emotional support to their warrior of choice. This is usually necessary for morale. No physical support was allowed as such would lead to direct disqualification and immediate punishment.

The fighting arena would be prepared early enough even before noon. This was to be done by the losers of the previous

fight. This was an additional punishment to them for becoming losers at the square of warriors. None was allowed to utter any word to the none members of the circle as that would be seen as betrayal to the brotherhood. Not even their parents. When they went home bruised, they had to come up with a reason as to what caused the scars on them. Seems like we taught them how to lie at the very young age. A man must lie, for women love lies. Who never love lies? Hands up so that we can get to see them. You? And you? Well. Let me tell you one thing, or maybe two. Telling lies is not as bad as it is painted. Sometimes, it is those lies that shield us from the pain and life agony. Let alone the killing me with the truth but rather than comfort me with the lie's nonsense kind of a thing. Whatever I'm telling you, is what you need to hear. Listen to this! They had to lie. It was as simple as it was. After the preparation, Cena was to come and check if all the preparations had been done as per the norms. If at all the losers, the lazy ones had failed to do their work, they would be wrapped up like doughnuts. Rejects are sweet. Ask anyone who knows how to bake and they will agree. After then, the real battle would begin. Just like the great battle of Adowa. This would be carefully monitored by the self-appointed referee, Kamau, making sure that there is no cheating and that the maimed have been fed. First round gone, second round till the final round when the warrior of the day would be known. As a form of celebrations, the losers would jubilantly carry him to his home and heed to his commands. Dance to the tune of the piper as they say.

This was all great, it's something we would do over and over again without tiring. Afterwards, we would march to some coffee plantation to steal macadamia and other nuts. This was the best part of it all- being chased away by the guards for stealing something they were not even using. Filthy! Disgusting and absurd as it sounds! The distance was several kilometers. Along the way, we would make all kind of jokes, poking our dirty noses in other's family business in our group. To some, we mocked, and to the others, we cheered.

The losers were mostly mocked and made to feel the pain, so that they can fight next time with great enthusiasm. After arriving at the plantation, we would rest under the shadows of the massive green trees until when the hunger would strike.

Only then, is when we would hug the tall green trees tightly with embrace and worship. Begging them of their fruits. This would continue until we got tired of begging and all was left is to climb the trees and take what rightfully belonged to us! The fruits of the tree. Of the owner of the tree! Of course, we were all entitled to them. That is as per our perception. Why wouldn't we be entitled to them anyway. The anger was because of wishful thinking and begging. You know sometimes life is funny. We spend most of the times praying for oranges and desiring lemons when the apples are just there, besides us. It is so fortunate, at times, to a man who realizes later on that the apples were all along besides him, a realization that comes to a man who never knows of it at all. This at times, if not all times, hurts more than ever. For it is so peaceful to

wake up one day only to find out that your apples had been stolen or taken away from you, or perhaps they are still with you but are of no use since they are rotten.

Childhood life wasn't life without some beatings from our older siblings. They mostly acted as the parents and we even feared them the most, as compared to how we feared the real dinosaurs. Fire-breathing dragons never burn their kids with their own breath. They never allowed us to hang around them. They claimed to be big boys and girls and that kids should play with kids. They would be given duties and later on, delegate them to us, simply because we were the juniors and them the seniors!

It would be so unfortunate if you never had the chance to revenge. For the cycle always continued till it got to the last members of the family. If you never revenged, you are so damn weak! Stop saying that its not your fault that you never had younger siblings to revenge on. You could have used the neighbours'. You could have used then younger kids at school. You had the chance to be a bully! Come on, you can't be bullied both at home and even at school! Some of you are even being bullied at your work places and in your marriages. Such a pity! Its pathetic to see a loser like you suffering; disgusting! I hate remembering such! Damn, being the senior must have felt nice! I want to feel nice, do you?

Having cool siblings that could bite your fingers off would be a flex during my growing period. Lemme talk about Joseph, not

the one from Arimathea or that of Nazareth, whom begot Jesus. No. I'm talking about Joseph my elder sibling. I wouldn't necessarily taint him for he was a blend of both. According to me. At one point, a devil and at another, heavenly sent angel. He was good. But I never had to spend most time with him, till to date, because of the huge age gap that exist between us. This has always bothered me. Not in a bad way but in all the good ways. Him having bad friends that would later on turn to be sweet souls. Ones that know how to care and at the same time tear apart. These are the people of bad influence. Of good influence. These are the good bad boys that my brother was keeping company.

Save for the ups and downs, there was a vital aspect that can never leave my mind. The aspect of crime and protection. I'm a character so complicated for one to get close to. I'm all together influenced by both nature and intrinsic components of my whole being. Come on, everybody does, stop feeling so special! This I tell to myself. There is this experience that I just remembered when I was asking myself who really, I am. Or perhaps what I really, I'm. I came to ask myself again and it was astonishing to learn that my life was somehow tied to the life of my childhood mentor. My friend as I would call it. He is too old for me to call a friend. So disrespectful for me to consider us one in the first place.

These are some of the misguided African beliefs that one can never have a friend older than themselves. Older than their own siblings. They believe that such a friend is deemed to be

a bad influence. Why would anyone have such a friend in the first place? For what? But the truth is, it doesn't hurt at all. Some of you even have friends older than their own siblings, older than their own mothers and fathers. That doesn't matter. This was my friend. A very close buddy!

This guardian devil of mine, whenever I used to make mistakes at home, I used to run to him-for protection against all the home legal proceedings. This was the man to talk to. Whenever I used to commit a crime, I used to call for his help. Just a phone-call away. Even when the phones were so rare. He was the first person that came to my mind. Always. Just like a child, he would give me a cup of coffee, ask me to take a seat and I'd be made to explain exactly what I did. Just like a mother confessor. Or should I say the father confessor? For he was a man and never a woman. Let us go with the priest. For to my sins, I confessed and was forgiven. To be honest, this hurts my ego so much, for I don't believe in a man's capability to forgive sins of a fellow man, but they do if you believe.

Every time I walked in the threshold of his abiding, he always seemed to be occupied with some kind of reading. He would come to my aid whenever I needed his help. Whenever I was hungry, he was there to comfort my guts. Massaging my stomach with all kinds of desserts and delicacies. Childhood delicacies that are no longer amongst the delicacies of nowadays. Things that I consider the least when looking at my menu. They are actually absent in the menu. And someone will be busy claiming and arguing that humans never change at all.

We never had verbal communications most of the time we were together in exception of when I had presented a case to him. I know he used to like me very much and I him too. We never said this but we just knew it. There was this time I vanished from home for a week. I had been staying in the streets and surviving using most cruel ways.

At times, I'd scavenge from a dumpsite where Dot com, the famous shopkeeper of those days, used to throw his garbage. He never allowed children to scramble for the things he used to throw at the dumpsite. Things that were no longer useful at the shop. These rich people never stop to amaze me. They will sit down and call themselves to a meeting, and after the longest debate in history within themselves, they will decide that something is no longer useful to them. That it has gone bad, spoilt or expired. That it needs to be gotten rid of, and still, cling to the identity and ownership of the very same thing. Even after that which is no longer needed has been burnt down to ashes and has not helped those who still see the value of it. Us! At some point, I started collecting cigarette leftovers and smoked them for fun. Yes! For fun. That is where stress can lead a toddler living in the streets like an adult. Sometimes sniffing glue, sometimes taking alcohol. Sometimes chewing khat and sometimes being used in the most unimaginable ways. For the girl child, it was worse. Cruel and disastrous. A combination of both the boy child experience together with uncountable molestations and assault. Some, due to fear and desperation they opted to actively engage in sex business.

I had run away from home after breaking a flask while washing it. My mother was so furious and before she could reach my

wrist for the iron grip, I had saved my dear life from her hell-summoned anger. Whenever she was angry, she could pile up the anger and vent it on anyone who misbehaved amongst my siblings. This time I decided that I wasn't going to be the one to receive her joystick. No more punchbag use. So, what did I do? Even after knowing very well, that as my father's pet, if I went home later in the evening after the landing and settling of the great missile from his African woman, I stood no chance of being left Scott-free but be given a penalty of sleeping on an empty stomach. From that night, I was still uncomfortable to go back home. This made me the most wanted criminal. Making all of my friends to go to a hunting spree in search of the lost son, with a promise which up to date is a misery to me. A price was put on my head. A prize so great to make my friends to ditch loyalty and trust and go after one of their own. Brothers no longer to protect but to betray their own blood brother. I was being hunted down by both my family and closest friends. I felt alone and betrayed.

One day after my brother tried seizing me and taking me home for his reward, that is when I knew my life was in danger. I needed someone to protect me. A cop or law enforcement officer. I needed a lawyer! My most trusted Guardian devil. I went to him and fabricated the whole story. When the complainant was called before the judge, her tail went beneath her legs. She swallowed her voice. I was pleased to come out victorious again! I was happy to see her in pain. In distress. I loved to see the pain in her eyes and the agony in

her voice. I was pleased to see her tremble. Unable to explain what had happened, and in return, asking for forgiveness for the wrongs she had done and the pain she had inflicted on me. For the emotional distress. Yes!

This is my mother that I'm talking about. This is my own mother that I'm happy to describe and joyful to see her go through the torment. I was happy to gain leverage over her. I regret not having told my lawyer from the first day! I loved it when they coil and shudder with terror. I loved it when they all, apologized for the mistake that I committed. I loved it more when they all promised to take care of me and after some days, quickly forget and start harassing me. Only to threaten them and use that to my own leverage. Call it blackmail, I don't care. Call me all the sorts of names in your head, it's your head after all. Who cares! Or maybe that was meant to happen to smoothen things and help my mum cool down. It might have also been all along castrated by me so as to gain leverage on them and use it for my own benefits. As young as I was, I could manipulate all the family members and make them do favors for me. Do this and that for the king. What a good feeling to have. What a position to enjoy.

Fortunately, or unfortunately, we happened to share several a thing in common. The love for books and minimal interactions. The way he used to speak and behave. He knew that maybe someday, I would take up his position in the society. What makes me to believe that? What makes me to confide and trust the desires of my mind? The fantasies of my young and

stupid minds. Those are the desires of the human mind. For the human mind is wise on its own. It is stupid, skeptical and scrupulous. Human mind can never be trusted with anything, not even good or bad! For she who scales the line and landing of a man is evil. And so, does the man who eats from the woman's pot. But why didn't he talk about it? Why didn't anyone tell me that my passions for law were his? Why didn't anyone mention the influence to me? Were they so afraid that I would be like him? Like many other lawyers! I don't know and I fail to understand. But something tells me that him and I were a one thing. May his soul rest in peace.

MY CASKET

LUCAS NM

CHAPTER SIX

What would happen if you woke up legless. If you would try getting out of your bed only to find it difficult to raise your back. Making you so vulnerable and desperate. I hate being desperate. For vulnerability, it's something more disgusting. I can't stand myself feeling weak and belittled. However, as they said, we get what we hate the most. I wonder why that is the case. Maybe it's nature's way of disciplining us. Reminding us that we are not our own. This particular morning, I was woken up very early in the morning by my mother. I didn't know what the problem was! Or why I wasn't being left to sleep till the normal hours.

Looking at her closely, she seemed disturbed. With swollen eyes and drooping cheeks. With uncombed hair. What did you expect? She just woke up! But the pride of a woman lays in her hair. She wouldn't just abandon it like she did. Something was wrong. This is not the woman I knew. She was different. With dry voice, she was engaging very little. This wasn't her usual. When she first spoke to me, she said that she was tired. And then went mute for another ten or twenty minutes. Not speaking at all but making my little brother, George, to be ready. Don't ask me ready for what, for I really don't know. The second time when she spoke, it was a bitter insult directed to me. Reminding me of how my dead-bit father had failed us and how she regretted having us around. Now she has come

to the final decision. Decision that I would come to know later on during that day.

Without breakfast, we were made to leave the rentals that gloomy dawn. Her leading the way and us following behind. Poor innocent followers we were. No say but to follow what you are ordered to do without questioning. This is the kind of vulnerability that am talking about. Not being capable to feed my curiosity and speak my mind. Being silenced and my voice taken away. I really loathe it, together with anything or anyone who makes me feel that way.

We had to move, one, two, three and four kilometers on foot. The distance was huge. I cannot really recall but what I know is that it was so huge to make my legs swell and be in pain. This was a real torment to a 9-year-old. This was unjust and cruel. I think I should sue them for violating my rights and for putting me through such kind of emotional distress. These people should pay damages for what they caused. Yes! My own father and mother. My father for failing to provide for his kids and being busy with another woman pondering life and all the goodies that come with it, and my mother for aiding my father in committing such injustice deeds to us. She was truly and actively participating in making us go through the agony. Parents should protect and care for, not maim children, like the way mine were doing at that very moment.

Finally, we arrived. It was in the middle of a forested area. On one side, covered with coffee plantation, and on the other,

were so many bushes and trees. Just one dirt road heading to some place not known to me. This place makes one depressed. Makes me feel lonely. This is the place that was going to be my new home. Monkeys to form my immediate company and, replace the friends that I had left behind! This was pure torture. We came to a building that was still under construction. This is the place that my father had come to hide with his girlfriend. You mean he was incapable of paying his own rent? That was gross. The building was huge. With so many rooms. It even had a basement. But as I said, the construction was still on going. Though the owner seems to have made a pause due to reasons best known to him. Or he was just being kind enough to provide a boy with somewhere to reside and entertain the girlfriend.

All this time as I was making my own observations, the woman that had brought us to this place was busy banging the door and yelling. Calling her husband. Unfortunately, the husband was busy with the girlfriend and never heard the banging and the yelling. Finally, she got frustrated and out of exhaustion, went her way. Leaving us behind. Making it clear that we should remain at that very spot and never follow her again. The woman I knew and used to call my mother had now been turned to another crazy and wild woman that was not known to me. Not even closer to my recognition. Instead of clinging to her and begging her not to forsake us, we felt at peace and wished that she would disappear from us. And to hell, she went.

The waiting period was long, long enough to last for like thirty minutes or so. Just us standing there not talking at all. Am even surprised that my little brother felt safer being away from her. Standing there with me. Alone. He never cried. He never shouted. He was a soldier at the battle field. One who knew how to embrace silence. To treasure tranquility.

When he opened the door, he was petrified. Stomach gouching with fear and anger. The fun-days were over. This was another reason why he was hiding from town centers. So that he could enjoy in peace without the disturbances. Without the responsibilities of a father. For a moment, he stood still. Gaped and slowly lowered his breath. Firmly rooted to the ground, not moving but just staring. He had altered greatly. His skin had grown rough and darker. His eyes deep inside their sockets. Indeed, he was having gun of his lifetime. After a minute or two of silence and suspense, he managed to garner his energy and summon his voice from the deep chambers of his guts.

“Where is your mother?” Was the first thing he asked.

“*Ameenda.*” To mean that she is gone, was what I could say in response.

All along, the girlfriend was standing at the balcony, watching the boyfriend go to work after several morning rounds. I bet she was satisfied after all, fir the amount of energy that was being drawn from this man was enormous.

From where she was standing at, watching and listening closely, she said, "babe, where is their mother?" My father did not respond to this. He just stood mute. Was it because he was ashamed of the act? Or is it because he was busy thinking of a strategy to deal with the situation he was in at that very moment? I don't know, but I guess he was ashamed of the girlfriend, for he never did a proper introduction of us to each other.

I had had enough of their bullshit. This particular day, I had decided that I was going to confront them no matter the outcome. I was not going to just sit and wait for the angels from above to intervene. I was going to be my own type of an angel. I was going to save my ass no matter what! It was not right at all for a man, to walk around dicking like a wild donkey while the wife at home, brings so many and different uncles every day. Asking the son to go play or wait outside. Making him listen to their nonsense and how loud she can scream. How good she is at saying oh my God and or other shit they say when the god that is being worshiped, is coming down from their throne. Showing how good she can pray and worship. How best she can chant! I was done with this kind of shit! It had to come to an end. It is either, I leave them or they, leave me. After all, someone had to be left to take care of the broken glasses in the house. What if they were the ones to leave? Who would pay the bills for a poor kid like me? For that, I didn't care at all. Yes, I was inconsiderate if that is what you

are thinking. But right or wrong, something needed to be done!

I was not so sure what needed to be done but I knew, for the sake of my sanity, I needed to act. These were giants. I was so weak and friable. I wouldn't just plunge myself into them and expect to come out of that alive. There was no way I that was ever going to happen. A mountain needs to be climbed with strategy. Just like hiking. I was going for a war, for an adventure. I for sure needed the right equipment. For when the rain is heavy, you need not to use your umbrella, but be left to soak in it. What if the soaking is hurtful and unpleasant? What if the rain water is never gentle on your skin? And instead of caressing you? Tickling you to bring you joy, the same water burns your skin so badly. Scorching you and tarnishing your whole existence. The holes, so huge and deep. Bones broken and muscles wasted. What's going to happen if that is the case?

It was on a very early Monday morning, on this day, I had made up my mind. I was no longer going to involve my man. I was going to involve the children's rights department. Don't ask me how I knew this, for I didn't know I was going to children's offices. I just left home and went to town in search of a place with uniformed gun totting men. That is where I was going to take refuge and make my case. Sue my mother and father. Though I didn't directly go after my father. I wanted to deal with the immediate pain at first, then spread my wings to the accomplices. As I approached, slowly and innocently, two men

started looking at me with concerned eyes. They expected me to flee but I didn't. Instead, I insisted on going forward. These people had to listen to me and what I had to say. I was never going to swallow my voice anymore. Arriving at the reception, I told them that I was there to report my mother. They all looked at each other and went dumb for a minute. One of them then turned back to me and asked me what had happened. After explaining everything, they called some nun from one of the offices. She was gentle and lovely. Damn, if I was to meet her today, I would wed her immediately! This lady took me by the arm and took me to her car. She asked me if I had eaten and after confirming her fears, she gave me some snacks. We always denied having eaten even if we had eaten. Even if it meant overrating.

At her office, she asked me a few questions which I gladly and joyfully responded to. For I was there to be helped and even if it meant betraying my own family, I wouldn't think twice, because they had betrayed me more than enough. After our session, I was given more snacks and using her personal car, I was taken back to hell. This time with a note to the devil to be gentle with me. That was the end of the shit that for a long time, had been going on back at home. Men coming in and going out as if it were some form of a restaurant or a bar. That was also the beginning of all the troubles that I faced in the next 6 years to come. That is when my sweet mama became a wild demon that was difficult to tame. To control.

It never lasted for long. The stress, the pain, agony, shame and

judgement from within. Human conscience is a powerful thing. It is best when it is fully functional and nagging. For many, they prefer it silent. Who loves being bothered by some nasty thing every now and then? It reminds you what to do and what not to. As if you are a small kid that's needs to take directives from their elders. She gave up, raised the white flag and said she can't do it anymore. That's why she decided that off you go, to your Father! Go try living with your father's mistress and see if you'll make it through. This was tough and just to me. To leave behind all the friends and everything. Not that I was much of a person of the people, even though I was naughty and stubborn, there are few people who used to enjoy my company. My fellow countrymen I should say. Or should I call them my tribe's men? And which tribe did I belong to since I was an outcast from the very beginning? Anyway, never mind. The thing is, some people would miss me and I some. That is what mattered.

The welcome at my father's residence wasn't so bad, it was just. Not so jubilant or memorable, and not so cold and traumatizing. She had to take her time before showing who she really was. Releasing her inner demons. At first, she had no identity. I mean, it's just a lady who happens to share a bed with my father. Not a cousin or a mother. Not an aunt or an uncle. And even if she were to be, she would, be it sharing a bed with someone else's husband. Ooooh, I seem to be forgetting, that someone else's husband is a boyfriend to her. Correct! Now we had to talk to her even without referring to

her by any name. After all, there had been no formal and proper introductions made before. After like a week, it is when the introductions were done. That one evening we were seated at the kitchen area waiting for dinner to be ready. We did that all the time since the house was so huge and not finished. This made us, particularly the kids to be lonely and have the urge to always stay near the Kitchen area.

"Baba?" (That used to be my childhood nickname)

"Yes dad."

"How do you normally refer to her? (pointing at his girlfriend). When you need something and am not around this place."

"I just tell her what I need. I never call her any name."

"From today, you will be referring to her as aunty, sawa?" (To mean, is that okay?)

"Sawa." (Ok)

It lasted for a while. It lasted for months. It wasn't until when her sister came around to visit. When she heard us calling her aunty, she thought that we deserved to call her mum. My father's girlfriend that is. Her sister thought that aunty is a name given to a house help, a maid, and that since she was not one, we deserved to call her with a proper and more respectable name: MUM. Afterwards, the girlfriend complained to my father and made her grievances heard. She said that since she is the one cooking all the meals and doing

everything that a mother does to her kids, that we should drop the name and start calling her with a more proper name. That is, mother. She deserved to be called MUM! That's wasn't a big deal, we quickly adapted to the changes and gave her what she wanted. The name.

MY CASKET

LUCAS NM

CHAPTER SEVEN

If spirits could fuck, I bet my father's could be. Sounds crazy, right? Yes. As I thought so. Growing up wasn't always as good and pleasant as people could envision. The environment was another thing. As spoilt and broken as I am, this has to be said. This has to be expressed. How do I start this? From where specifically? My family was screwed from the very moment my mother met with my father. As I had told you earlier on, it was the greatest mistake. A historical mishap. It led to a disaster, and that disaster, is me. Yes, ME! The family was screwed because it meant my mum losing her family's love. Her sisters became the greatest adversaries. Her mother, the demon's incarnate. As to her father, he had no say as he had been long ditched. He was living a miserable life in some shanty as a widower. A widower whose wife was still alive, healthy and gracefully laying at the family's comfort. Why couldn't any of his children fight for him? Wait, before we even think of fighting for him, what had he done for us to come to his rescue? What had made his wife to detest him with such passion and enthusiasm. Till to date, I have never understood why; even though he is long gone and probably forgotten.

His name was, or rather is, Soul. He could go to great lengths for a cunt. He could sing and dance for your wetness. Like his name, he got attracted to any soul. This brought frequent skirmishes in the old and newly found families. He was not easy to forget. He was a man of contact. At times, he could

keep his word, but I'd rather not advice anyone to trust him to keep his. He was a coin. He could be trusted with some. He was of both sides. Of good and evil. It's just that you couldn't be so sure to know which of the two was the most used.

Time has passed. We are still at this old and uncompleted building. The palace where my father reigns. I have not been taken to school yet. My father is not a believer in the schooling system, I still don't know why. To me, he seems competent and intellectual, particularly when it comes to handling women matters and resolving their drama. One year gone to waste. Having not stepped to school but walking around with my father and his queen doing manual jobs. He thinks this is the best way to kill my boredom. Whenever I ask about my little wages that they promise to give out of my hard work, they always remind me of how I get free food, shelter among many other essentials from their home. To them, this is the only way to keep me working. In case I rebel and start questioning, they also remind me of how am supposed to join school. And your money is the one to be used to pay your fee! They always back to me with the assertion.

This continued till when my father did something to his boss; the owner of that building. I have never known what it was exactly, but the owner was threatening to jail him. In response, the family had to flee to some other part to avoid this misfortune. From not paying rent, to paying more bills every month. He had gotten comfortable. He had laid at that comfort and forgotten some bills for a very long time. The

fleeing was a blessing to me. Even though it was painful to the others, it was a blessing in disguise to me. This new slum allowed me to be taken to school. This was a must if he didn't want trouble with the local chief. Finally, I had to go back to school.

The place was noisy. The place was calm. I had to get used to this place. This was not a request, it was a must do thing from mother nature. The boys, the boys were rude. The boys were tough and cold. If you find yourself surrounded by bullies, make sure that you match their bullying levels. Even if you aren't a bully, make sure to behave like one. Talk and walk like one. Be smooth rough. Be soft tough. Be whatever it requires; to fit in. This is what I required to survive. New neighbors, hungrier streets

Days passed by, my stepmother brought her son Brian, to stay with us. He has to come, if I take tea, he also does the same, and if it's beef, he has to also share the same with me, with the others. He is also a child who needs to receive care from his mother and father (even when we all knew that my father was not his father). She could be heard passionately arguing and trying to convince my father. My father had no place to hold onto, no one to fight for and no one to fight with. He was a boy who could do all that was said to his dear wife. Wife that was always submissive to him. He had no say in this, he had to say yes, no matter the outcome. Finally, the day came for the grand arrival of Brian, his eminent. This was such a bid day to

both him and his mother; the D Day. However, this was just but the beginning.

His arrival meant a cut down on so many things. So many cut downs that by the end of the day, made everyone suffer. I was the one. To all of his mistakes, I was the one to be accountable. I had to explain and explain anything and everything on his behalf. Something that I hate up to date. If it meant being punished, I was the one to be punished for his mistakes. For all the problems and chaos he caused. I was also the same to defend him in the streets. A naughty boy has to insult the others, and then I, being the big brother to him, have to rush in to protect him from being knocked down by the other boys. At times, I would come in so late. Just to make sure that he learnt a lesson or two from the others. How to be a big boy and not a cry baby. One day, I arranged with my other bullies of how we would punish Brian. We had gone to the river to do the mud fun and later on swim in the river. After the mud fun, we made sure that as we swum, we were at least naked. This day, he decided to dive with his boxers. I dived in with him and told my big boys to hide his clothes. So nicely that he could not get hold of them, neither by touch nor by sight. Something had to be done. This way, I could make myself happy and sooth my soul from all the pain that I have been receiving on his behalf. As if this was not enough, we decided to do something better. When he insisted on swimming more and more, we added rogue arrow roots to the river. This had a special effect when it came to contact with your skin. As we sat on the rocks drying

our bodies, he was busy swimming and entertaining his crush. It was normal at younger age to have girl crush by then. The streets made us try things at a younger age. Things that you don't want to know of.

Finally, the thing started to work. The arrow root effect. Slowly, he started scratching his skin. The skin became itchy and he came out of the water to dry. He was not aware of what we had done. After all he was still inept to these things. It became terrible and he decided to go home. When it came to him finding his clothes, they were nowhere to be found. This struck him hard. He asked me where his clothes were but I acted confused.

"Dickson, umeona nguo zangu?"

"Zii, ulikuwa umeweka wapi?"

"Nilikuwa nimeweka karibu na zako tukienda kuduf."

"Nguo zangu umeziona?"

"Eee, ziko hapa lakini zangu haziko..."

"Tafuta tu utazipata!"

He was complaining to me that he left his clothes to the same and exact place where mine were but now he couldn't find his clothes yet mine were there. I told him to keep looking and that he would find his clothes. After looking with zero success, I offered to help him look for his clothes and encouraged the

others to help in finding where his clothes were. We searched the area for close to thirty minutes without finding anything. When he was about to give up, when he actually started crying for his clothes, that is when one of my crime buddies came out with his shirt from the bushes. We now know had to find his shorts. This made he to stop crying and rejuvenated him to keep on with the mission. But his shorts were nowhere to be found. That was a sure thing! How can you find something that is already kilometers away? Being swept by the river waters. Or probably socked and deeply trapped between rocks.

"I think we've searched for long enough and there are no possibilities of us finding your shirts. You'll have to go back home without them." I told him.

"You'll have to give me yours."

"Mine are big and wouldn't fit you, no matter how hard you try."

"I'll try them anyway."

"But you know I have to carry water from the river, how am I going to do that without no pants on?"

"Let's then exchange shirts so that I can walk a little bit comfortably. Your shirt is bigger and therefore will cover me to knee-high."

"It's okay, you have my shirt."

I offering him my shirt made him think that I was so caring and sympathetic to what had befallen him. This was also something that would make him to defend me when we got home. This means that I once again played my role as the good brother. To both of us, the day had ended in a great way.

Harming him was the greatest experience that I ever had. The incident brought me more peace than pain. Him suffering sent my spirits high. Higher than you can imagine. Him crying, washed away all my tears that I had swallowed for his sake for many years. Him in pain, made my butt relax, bubbling from the laughter that I was now finding it difficult to conceal. If you looked at my eyes, you could see them dancing. My lips trembling with merry. Singing a song to the warrior of the day. This really made me feel differently, in the best way possible.

I couldn't share his pain. Not me! That was known even by his own mother- my father's queen. When we arrived at home, his mother tried tainting me claiming that am the one who had did the harm to my very own blood. Asserting that even if I was not the one, there are high chances that I knew who did that. Good thing is that I had Brian to defend me. To come to my rescue. The victim had to defend his oppressor without his knowing. Sometimes it happens even to you. You go ahead defending people and doing good to them without knowing that these people, are the same demons that caused you pain. They are the same people that planned for your downfall. These are the very same people that celebrated behind your back and comforted you with lies. The very same people who

stab your back are the ones that come running to offer you the first aid. They hug you and tell you that everything is going to be okay. Don't blame them, it is human nature. All you have to do is notice them as earlier as possible and be cautious around them. This is what happened that day, Brian came to my defense without knowing that am the one who had instigated the whole ordeal. Trust me, this left me with no regrets as to what I had done. Not even today as I write this.

Sarah was and still remains the most dramatic person that I know. She had all the freedom that she wanted. Having abandoned her kids, I mean leaving them with their father, she could now do anything and everything as she wished. Free of all the mama noise and all the other challenges. After all, she no longer had any responsibilities. For the first year, she seemed to enjoy her freedom, but for the second year, she seems to have gotten tired of watching others happy from a distance when she was drowning in cheap ecstasy. She switched hobbies and acquired a new one. Her hobby was to disrupt peace. Her first and last place was at my fathers. She had to make it known to everyone, who seemed to have forgotten her by now and peacefully moving on with their lives, that she was still there and full of love. The love to disrupt and if necessary, kill. She was fully coming in the name of her children.

What could have gotten her to this point? Is it the love for her once united family, for her kids or for what exactly? I was too young to know by then. But one thing that I knew for sure, it

that I was tired of this game. Of being taken back and forth. This time I had to do something. I remember it was on a Sunday afternoon. I was coming from church. Entering, I found her seated on the couch. When she saw me, she smiled. I didn't smile back, but rather, walked direct behind the curtains to change. I couldn't stand soiling my Sunday best. I was so irritated by her sight. My father was seated next to her. This was some months before Brian had been brought to stay with us; the other kids

I have my own mother! I don't know who you are. Get out of that house! One two stones followed, hitting so hard. I was throwing soil clods from the kitchen garden. Directing my canons towards the house where she was being sheltered. After a minute or so, the three of them came out of the house. My mother, father and her friend. They thought that the second attempt would bear fruits since the co-wife was away to some other place working. That day, I was disgusted. How do you bring your ex-wife to your home when your wife is away? The wife that is working her ass day in and day out to feed your own kids yet all you do is dick around! The kids that doesn't even belong to her. The thought of this made me insane and brought the urge to throw more stones until they were all gone from this place. After a while, my father came back silent and sat beside me. Saying nothing and talking nothing. Just calm and breathing as if nothing had happened.

"You know that is your mother that you just a chased away?"

"She is not my mother! I don't know her."

"Why?"

"She is a stranger to me. She abandoned us when we really needed her."

"Is that the case?"

"Yes! She told us not to follow her. Why is she now following us?"

"She is following you because she misses you. She wants to be with you because she loves you a great deal and want to be with you..."

"So, does that mean you are leaving your wife?"

"I didn't say that. But are you not going to be with us?"

"I will."

"How are you going to be with us and be with her without being with your wife?"

"Son, this is different. Let's talk about you and your mother."

"I told you she is not my mother!"

"And who is she? How do you call her?"

I don't know and don't want to know either!

“Okay.”

He said this and went inside. He was a man of few words but of many women. I wonder how he convinced them anyway. How could a reserved person have attracted all that loot under his pants? What was so magical with his silence? Although he loved eating from every plates, he was still my best, and I his favorite.

After few days, his wife came back home from where she was working. I don't know how word got to her, considering that by then technology was not so much evolved. But she knew it anyway. I think this was also another reason for her to bring her son with her. To have a reason as to why she isn't going to walk away from the family anymore.

MY CASKET

LUCAS NM

CHAPTER EIGHT

You need to get out of this place. Your continued disregard to the social norms is all together disgusting! You are increasingly becoming a moron every day! Soon to be a good. Your company is questionable. Your whole existence is a disaster to everyone!" These are some of the words I can remember from my father that day. He was harsh and punishing with his choice of words. Truly, the last bit got me really off. It hit me hard as per say. I wasn't expecting something of the sort to happen. Not particularly from him. This was a hot stab at the chest, close to my heart. Why was he so angry at me? Why was he bitter? Is it something that I had done? Or perhaps, is something that he had been told. As to the answers of these numerous questions that were constantly streaming in my head, screaming so loud and giving me no peace or comfort at this threatening home, the only person who knew how best to answer them was only him.

Listening to Soul, I had no doubts that it was the work of this devil in the name of a step mother that was now on play. No one would dare convince me otherwise. Her name was Peris. From the beginning, she was immune to my disregard. She thought that I was the one who was a stranger to her home, thus I should be the one to dance to her tune. Evidently, we were struggling to impress a man that would never be impressed by a little naughty boy and a woman who knows not how to dress for her man. Women, you should really learn

how to impress your men. Dress well, have a clean shower and smell good. Try not to tame your man, for he is like a horny street dog, one that can never be tamed during the mating season. It feeds from all homesteads and from every plate. Making the owners of the homesteads full and their expectations fully met. Be the queen of his life. Pamper him well and shower him with lots of love. Never shout at your man. Make his stomach full and his balls empty—always drained! This is a concept that Peris never knew. Just like the many village girls that my father had a taste for, she was no different.

Honestly, I still believe that her defects gave me an upper hand in this. It made me to struggle less. To have very less pain while fighting for his attention. Anyway, how could I struggle for his attention when clearly, I was a bully to many. I didn't require Spiderman's webs to be noticed at all. It came naturally. This are some of the many reasons why I couldn't do something terrible and walk scot free.

"I will make arrangements for your departure," Said he.

"But dad..."

"No buts! You have to give us the peace that we deserve. You've become unruly. You have to go."

"Where am I supposed to go to?"

"You'll have to leave for your grandma's."

"Not like I have ever been there. You know that, dad."

"And that is why am saying, I will make arrangements for you. Or do you have anywhere else to go?"

"No."

"Then you should be a good boy and listen to what am saying."

"You or her?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean her," I said this pointing at my step mother. "I know she has been telling you things."

"Which things?"

"Many things, you know what I mean. I know she has been telling you what to do and what not to do. She has been controlling you like a toy. You are simply her pawn. Something to play with!"

"And that is why I think you should leave. You seem to know everything that goes on around my own house. Now you want to teach me how to run my marriage. When should we start the classes, Mr. marriage and lifestyle coach?"

"I didn't say I want to teach you anything. I was just saying..."

"When?"

"Dad, when what!?"

"When do we start the lessons?"

Him having said this made me to shy away and brushing off the topic. He was quiet, cool and decent. At times. That was the last time for quite some time when we had a verbal discussion with him. From. Then going on, things started changing. He acted weird and impulsive. I remember there was a day I purchased a skateboard from a schoolmate. The skateboard was going for only 50 shillings. That was when the economy was economy. Having purchased the thing, I got occupied most of the time. When I was supposed to be at home doing the chores for this lazy, overfed lizard in the name of a wife, I was entertaining myself. I remember this particular evening when I came back home after having a busy day. My father grabbed my skating board and chopped it to tinny pieces. As if that was not enough, he then took the pieces and threw them in a pit latrine. That was my worst day. He never spoke of it at all. He just acted. This man was now being told what to do by this bitch! I hated him. I loathed them more and more.

My woes didn't end instantly. I had to go through a lot more hell before my savior came through. Sleeping on a hungry stomach, being chased out of the house to spend the night in the side-walks like a night queen in the streets of Nairobi. Not like this was my first time sleeping hangry. I had slept hungry most of the times. This was also not my first time sleeping out in the cold. I had done that for quite sometimes now. I think I was getting used to it. I was becoming an expert in such

matters. But laying on that cold and dusty floor that night wasn't something that I could be proud of. I couldn't compare that with the last time. That one time I spent the night outside in some ramshackle fruit parlor. That night, it was so cold. The most unfortunate thing also happened. In the middle of the night, it started raining. Heavily. I had to be rained on. Rained on in an empty stomach and a shaking body due to the cold wind that was gnawing at my bones. This night was different. The experience was different. For this night, I was not hungry. I was full. Belching like a cow.

It was on a Saturday. Just like any other days. It was around 10 am. I had gone to the house to take some tea. As a Maragoli kin, I really value tea. The main door of the house was slightly closed. Upon coming in, there was no one on site. This was a single room located in the slums of Nairobi. I did not bother to look the other side of the curtain. I mean why would I? But instead, I went straight to the corner of the house that used to serve as the kitchen area, picked up a thermos and poured myself a cup of black tea. Immediately after this, what followed is something that I will never forget till the day I'll be put to rest.

"Rudisha hio chai!"

"Mbona?"

"Acha kuniuliza maswali mengi yasiokuwa na kichwa Wala miguu. Nimesema urudishe hio chai!"

"I'm not going to do that. After all this has been bought by my father, not you. Wewe huendangi kazi."

What followed after this is that she picked up the cup of tea that I had served myself and washed me with it. Luckily, the tea was not that hot to burn off my young skin. I immediately responded to her attack with another attack. All along, she was around 6 months pregnant. I gave her a nasty push. Those that pray rugby and American football, would better call it a spear. In return, she got hold of the tortillas rolling stick and hit me hard at the head. This was the beginning of action. I had to think fast. To think fast to save my dear self from this monster. The monster whose intentions didn't mean well with my whole existence as a healthy and cheerful being. The monster that was always pretending to be a mother to the fruits of another tree; those that she never bore. I had to do something. The hitting made my mind now think clearly. The hitting made my eyes pop out for a minute, rotate rapidly in their sockets. Scanning around. The hitting made my arms grow stronger. Iron. I switched around immediately, pushing her to the further corner. Her waist slapping the floor so hard and her face kissing the whole. I took to my heels and reached out for the door that had been closed by my assailant. Truly, she didn't mean well. Why would she close the door in the first place? If at all she never meant to do me harm. Luckily, I opened the door and pushed myself outside.

While out there, the neighbors were surrounding the place. Entertaining themselves from our fight. I walked out hurriedly,

my arm on the forehead. Talking to no one. For I felt like they were all liars. Betrayers! Even those that used to call themselves my friends. Why couldn't they come to my rescue when I dearly needed a savior. To disentangle me from the demon's grips. I had no time to talk to such a people.

With what happened, I couldn't go back to the place I believed to be home. My father was a pawn to this devil. He would not listen to anything that I had to say. At times, he would be made to cook and do the dishes. That is totally unacceptable in our African culture! That is an abomination and disrespect of the highest orders. Even when you look at the hierarchy of social being, God comes first, followed by gods, then man. From man, follows the woman and lastly, at the bottom of the ranking, children come last. That is as it should be. God giving orders and commands to gods, man taking orders from gods and woman taking directions from man. Then, Children taking orders directly from their mothers. This wasn't the case here. It was woman first, then man followed by children. I hated this. I felt it disrespectful and dearly disregarded it. Sometimes, I would even question the manhood of my father.

I had to think fast. Then, is when I decided to go to the streets and re-strategize. I helped ferry some goods for the town business women and men at a fee. Later on, in the day, I would then end the day at another woman's selling place. This was a groceries store that was doing well then. I promised to provide free labour to her, but in return, she would offer me the left-over fries and sweet potatoes. Sometimes two huge mangoes

if the fries and sweet potatoes had all been bought earlier on during the day. This is what I would eat for supper and spend the night out like an orphan. This brought some peace and tranquility in me. Living all alone, unbothered. All free of the daily drama and daily beatings. As always, this is what I had taken the previous day before I found my own place of residence. I was no longer spending the nights out in the cold. I had found an abandoned rental place that the owner had not yet found another person to rent out to, after the previous tenant left. This is where I was spending the night. On cold dusty floor. This was better than staying out in the streets where there was no security but with full of mosquitoes and terror. At least I could lock the door at night with the weak and friable latch and sleep knowing that I was safe.

During the day, I would go to the streets as usual. For schooling, I had taken an indefinite break. I couldn't go to school without uniform and other essentials that I had left home after the little skirmish. I used to tip toe from my abode so that neighbors couldn't realize that that is where I was spending the nights. The place was not far from my home. It was just a walking distance. This happen for quite some time till the day when the house got a new tenant. It was so coincidental, because at the very same time, my father's conscience had started working again and he was now breaking free from his mental imprisonment. That is when he decided to come looking for me. I think he had done some asking around. Realization dawned on me that on this

particular night, I had once again been displaced from my original habitat, I left slowly crest fallen looking for where to hide my shame. Head down and heart bleeding. Mind racing so hard. Thinking where next to. I had gotten comfortable at laying on the cold floor and feeding my little tummy from whatever little I could get from the streets.

While I was still contemplating, I was rudely brought back to reality by the hard grip that landed on me from my behind. I fought back trying to free myself. "Sina kitu walai! Sina anything!" I retorted trying to convince the person attacking me from behind. Such things happened more often when the street bullies wanted stuffs from you. The statement was that of self-defense. However, the one grabbing me from behind said no word. He just kept mute. It was then that I knew that this could be someone who meant no harm to me. Judging by how strong he was, this was someone more mature. Way too older. But who could this be? Was I being abducted? What was happening to me? It had become unsafe in the street. People were disappearing more often. To the lucky ones, their lifeless bodies would be found dumped in rivers or bushes. The local police and area chief did nothing. They kept on promising people that they were working on the rapidly developing cases and they would soon be resolved.

The most recent one involved Gitonga. Gitonga was the wealthiest man known around. He owned a petrol station, few apartments that he rented out and few transport vehicles. He was rumored to have connections to the various local

authorities. He had hands on in every dirty thing that happened in the area. You want a man gone? Just contact Henry and things would be made even. You want a child abducted for some ransom? Just get in touch with Henry. You want some bank robbed? The man to go to is Henry. He was untouchable and stinking rich. However, he had been recently 'taken' and his body found dumped in some bushes around his mansion. His tongue had been chopped off and his face washed carefully with acid. He was beyond recognition. His nasty queen and manager of his filthy businesses is the one who helped the local authorities to identify him. Later in, the DNA test proved it right.

The tension was growing around the area. This made me think that I was soon going to be another victim of such occurrences. Immediately, I did the final act of self-freedom. I dug my teeth deep inside the arms of the person trying to abduct me. He immediately let me free and that is when he first spoke—introducing himself as my father and begging me not to run. Promising me not to harm me and telling me that he needs me home. This was the beginning of my graceful return and the genesis of now what is happening. Why can't men be trusted? Why can't they be honorable to what they say? You begged me to come back, and now you want to send me away. You say that you are tired of me. You are tired of your own son and available to some other strangers in the name of mistresses? That is truly loving. You deserve an award for such kind of loyalty!

MY CASKET

LUCAS NM

CHAPTER NINE

This wasn't the end. I believe this was a new beginning. A new chapter to all the good and bad things. This was the moment to pay and repay. To repay all the hurt that was done to me with kindness. But how could a young boy with no fixed origin do that? A young man who roams the village, and everywhere he passes, makes people to abruptly stop with whatever they were doing just to stare at him. And with low creepy voices, talk about the new museve that came from Nairobi. Terming him as *'muana wa Saoro nende mukhana museve khutura Kiambu.'* This is how messed up it was.

As from the beginning, my mother, Sarah, had never visited this place. As a matter of fact, it was only my grandmother, Katarina, that had visited us couple of times at the city. She would come and stay at our house for a month or two and then disappear back to the village. That is where she loved it most. Occasionally, during her stay at the city, she would be heard complaining of how life was unfair to her. She wanted a farm to dig and flowers to tend. She wanted cows to feed and a river where she would draw water from. She wanted her food cooked using firewood and her tea made tikini, as she would often call it. This was her way and no one would convince her otherwise. By then I was little but I could remember her numerous grumbles and her unending cries for justice. Even something that was already just for her well-

being. Something and everything that was made to welcome her and make sure that she had such a peaceful stay at her son's place.

After a month, Katarina could not take it anymore. Staying at home with my pregnant mother and her little grandson, who happened to be her favorite, playing around her feet like a lost puppy. This is what I used to love doing most, since my mother was expecting and not in the mood for my silly games and questions. I even remember one day asking her why her tummy was stretching like a bladder. Growing bigger day by day. I was young and innocent by then; something that seemed to offend many. Therefore, she (Katarina) opted to finding a job for the sake of her own peace of mind. When my father, her son in law, asked her not to labor, but to enjoy life away from the village (for she had come for a lifetime vacation), she refused to heed to that and insisted on her going to work.

"She is a grown up! There is nothing I can do to stop her. She needs to work? Then let her work. After all it's going to help us pay some bills." My father could be heard arguing.

"I hear you my husband. I really do. But don't you think that it would be good if we allowed her to stay over for a while without working? You know what our neighbors are going to talk about this." My mother could recount.

"And what are they going to say?"

"People are evil. They will trash talk the family."

"Let them talk. I'm fed up of what the people will say thing! I don't want to hear it anymore! Do you hear me!?"

"Yes, my husband."

"Let them say what they want to say. After all, they don't know how I pay the rent, how the kids go to school, what they feed on and how I keep them warm from the morning cold."

That was the discussion that led my grandma Katarina to start working in a coffee plantation. Even at her age, she could pluck more coffee berries than most youth. She could carry the sacks containing the berries on her back strongly like a thirty-year-old lad and put everything on its place. This made her to be so prominent with the people around the area. She was called the iron lady by most people while others used to call her '*mlugha kutoka baluhya*.'

Grandma Katarina worked there for like a month and when she had made enough money for herself, she booked a bus and started her journey back home. With her, she had purchased several goodies for her husband and other people back at the village so as to act like a gift from Nairobi. She was genuine and generous lady. By the time she was traveling back home, this is the same time when my mother had given birth to Najori, my little brother. She made sure that she had performed her culturally obligated duties by shaving the baby before disappearing back to the village life. The initiation by

shaving of the new born babies is usually a cultural practice common among the Abaluhya community. This is usually done by the child's grandma from the father's side and if she is deceased, the aunt proceeds and does the baby shaving. This is usually important cultural factor as it allows the child to connect with its ancestors and be fully recognized as one of their own.

This time, Katarina was invited to shave another child. One that had been born of her son Soul and a woman that she was now meeting for the second time. This woman must be special to Katarina and all the other hobs at the village. I say this because she seems known and accepted. As for my mother, I believe she had never gone to visit my father's family. This is the same case to my father who has never stepped his foot to my mother's family compound. They had stolen love and they lived it to their fullest. For this woman, her visiting was so weird. My father had to borrow 10,000 shillings from a local bank to facilitate that. He never even paid back the loan but instead, he made the guarantors pay for the loan. He just changed his phone number and moved on with life as if nothing of the sort had happened. He betrayed his close friend because of a woman. Using the borrowed money, he visited both families with bags full of goodies and made a name for himself. A generous man full of love. One who cares for his family and one who always protects them. Quite a name!

With this woman, he had begotten a daughter. Katarina was now here to do the usual. She was here to bless and make her

belong. Make her feel welcome and reaffirm her identity, aligning it with that of the other ancestors. She had to come. The girl was even named after her. Her visit however, was not just to bless, it was also meant to curse and torture. Frustrate a soul that is one of her best. This will pain the soul but will make her merry with mirth. Whether painful or joyful, I had no choice but to salute the orders from my custodians.

If at all I could have known this is how it was supposed to be, I would have celebrated all along. This was an escape route from all of my troubles. Something that I had not seen from the beginning. This was a chance for redemption and glorification. This was just grace. Yes! Grace is what I would call it. Even with all the talking and the naming in this little and retrogressed village, the feeling was right. No one of good sound mind, after going through what I had gone through while on the streets would dare forsake such tranquility in attempt of going back to their roots. These were my true roots (as I had been told). This is where you will grow as a man and see change happen in your life. This is what you need for now. You will come to thank me later.

"Mama, I think you will go with your grandson at the village to show him how to care for the cows and tend to your flowers."

" Ooh, really! I will be happy to do so."

"You will leave tomorrow in the morning."

This sounded like something that was already planned from

all along. They were just having this mere conversation, not to inform my grandma, but to let me know that my days of roaming their palace were over. They couldn't have had this conversation during the day. They knew I would run away. They made sure that the thing was arranged before and spoken of while we were all at the table having our supper. This really got me off the lane. I nearly choked with the huge Ugali ball that was in between my oesophagus. I was periled. I started shaking with anger. How could this be possible? Why didn't they allow me to have time to see my friends for the last time? My good good friends. This was evil! That is when I recollected my racing toddler minds and spoke for the first time.

"Tunaenda na kina Brian?"

"Watakuja wiki moja baada ya wewe kufika," said my father.

"Why?" I retorted.

"It's not in your position to negotiate anything. Finish eating, go pack your bags and be ready to leave tomorrow in the morning!"

That is how the fruitful negotiation ended. Having really helped.

That was how the whole thing was planned and executed. At first, making me feel like a victim of a world that cared less about me. A world full of war, hate and love. All at equal

measures. Leaving me weak to the core. A feeling of vulnerability and power. Feeling me protected and betrayed. Protected by my own father from the pain I went through in the hands of his mistress. Betrayed by my own mother for causing all the pain I'm the first place. I thought mothers should always protect their fruit of the womb at all cost? I have seen it happening in the animal kingdom. What happened to humanity? For even dogs are now better than them. This is beautiful!

This made me feel enraged. Weak. Powerful. Strong. All this, with very little that I could do. When you cannot fight them, join them until when you will be able to fight for your own ass. I had to stay. I had to obey. I had to tolerate these new surroundings. And the ugly names they gave me. This was not going to be easy mountain to climb, but I had to do it anyway. Or should I just go around it until when I will reach the top? That was up to me to decide. Whichever method to be used, I still had to climb it and go down the hill. Screaming loud and stretching my arms open. Embracing the breeze. Celebrating the freedom. But when at the top, to curl and hold my arms around my chest. To protect me from the freezing cold. I hope I would do this sooner before I got old.

MY CASKET

LUCAS NM

CHAPTER TEN

The love is what keeps the world moving. Even when we feel ta our lowest. When we feel broken and like a deserted house the love is the one that gives us a reason to stand up, from the floor and push ourselves harder. Achieving the best that there could be, to achieve. Sometimes, this love is lost and found. At other times, the love is never found. Making people to live in pain, anger and unmatched bitterness. Making all the other lot to ask questions of what might have befallen such a soul. Moving in with Katarina was a lot whole of differences. I had found love that had been lost. I had lost love that had never been found.

To be finally accepted by the family was one thing. To be fully loved, was another thing. This happened quite well. The welcome, the numerous introductions and the royal treatment proved that the duo had been achieved; for the mean time. The stay was comfortable, at the beginning, until when it all got rough. At the beginning, we could enjoy the availability of resources at the place my old Katarina was working as a house manager. The owners of the home had moved to the city to work and live closer to their other family members. They didn't want to stay in the village to toil like the uneducated village people. To them, they were better off at the city trying to live comfortably, just like all other city boys and girls. This served them well, so did it, to the family I had found. To the love I had found and to the love that I had lost.

Staying with Katarina was live that I had found. Moving away from Sarah was love that I had lost and never in need to ever find. Katarina showed me care and love. She took care of me as one of her own. I was actually one of her own, for all the time, she would call me husband. This wasn't so easy for her to do. This was not also taken for granted by me. It meant the whole world. To Sarah, she had lost a great deal. Out of greed and earthly desires, I no longer recognized her as my mother, or so I told myself. Could it be true that I no longer knew her? That I no longer needed her? I don't think so. Or maybe it's true. Only time would tell.

She had been blessed with four children, as to my knowledge. Four boys and one girl. As to the name of the girl, up to now, it remains a mystery to me. The girl used to be the last born. She died when she was still little. The cause of death, just like her name, has never been known to me. The third born used to be called Aineah. It was so unfortunate that he died as a young youth. His death was closely linked to the love and huge desire that he had for women. He could move from one village to the other. Swimming from one river to the other. The river in between! Hahaha!!! The love of swimming is the one that caused him his life. If at all he could stick to one river, he could still be alive as I write. Maybe he could even be encouraging me, as my sweet and honorable uncle.

The first born, the one and only one, was given the name Yosiah. Tall, dark and slightly baled. He was a mixture of many things. He was a hard to dig figure. Muscular and full of

temper. One that was into drugs more than women. But he could blend the two perfectly well. Locally, he could be called Nzoka mwamu—The black panther. He is a man who loved it home. Having visited the city only once or twice. He was totally different from his two other brothers; who loved it in the city. He could, once in a blue moon, be heard saying that Nairobi women are not good. That they are not to be trusted and that they cannot be tamed. Something he dislike with everything of his. He was a controlling freak. Although he is not dead, I use the word was since it's been long since I saw him. He could work so hard the whole day, as a local power saw operator, dealing with the timber industry and later on come home at night having used all his money on alcohol and mariwana. Having entertained women while his wife and children are suffering at home. This made the wife to work in a local tea plantation as a regular worker so that she could get some money to feed her family. Her main job was to reproduce and feed them after recovering. For Yosiah.

Coming from wherever he was having fun from, he could be heard singing from the other side it the village. He used to live it the other side at a local mama pima's place. The two sides had been separated by a river and a very kind and thin bridge. Always swaying and cricking. I wonder how he was able to cross the river at night when very drunk. He could be heard singing songs of self-praise and worship. Saying how happy he was. Ten times richer than his brother that was living in the city. The brother that had failed to take care of his son and

now was being helped by their mother to feed the son. Although boastful, the statement had some shades of truth in it. Drunk men always say the truth! He could go one and say how good he was to feed his mother and the family of his brother who lives like a beggar in the city. At this point, he could stop for a while, as if talking to the person next to him, look sideways, stagger a bit and say in a slow voice, " no wonder I don't love the cities or any kind of town life! Look at me right now, happy, enjoying to my fullest and having a stable, happy marriage. A wife that has given me five beautiful daughters as per now. The problem is, she never gives me a son of my own. So that I can be happy and boastful; just like my little brother!"

Yosiah would complain about this and that. Praise himself and worship his power. After that, he would come home and knock the door of his thatched hut so loudly, making everyone to wake up. This was his way of letting people know that Nzoka Mwamu was home! This was his way of living. To be in control and not to be controlled.

Katarina, despite having two sons, all grown up and working, was still having troubles of her own. She was aging and always complaining of numerous headaches. Her health was at risk. She had to work though. None of her son's provided her with support or care. After coming to the village with my grandmother, my little brother Najori, followed afterwards. Two months later. He was to stay for a week but a week became months. Until when he was nearly dying. Katarina had

two grandsons to take care of. Their father having nothing to worry about and not picking her calls. Whenever she called, he knew that she needed money and therefore opted not to pick calls from the stubborn she. Yes. People shouldn't be bothered when enjoying life. Even if it means that they are being reminded to perform their responsibilities. This was tough for her.

"Why would he do such a thing!?"

"We are not sure if it's true."

"But the kid says that he tried touching her!"

"Mum, it's not the kid that said that, it was the mother to the kid," said Yosiah.

"I am his wife, why would he do that to a little girl of such an age? He could have come to me."

"Mum, this is not the time, he is being taken away. You might not see him again."

"I don't care! Let him rot in prison!"

That was the last time Katarina had heard of her husband, let alone see him. He had been accused of sexually assaulting a small girl on his way to church on one the fine Sunday mornings. Muyechi was a respected church leader of a local denomination back then. As a leader, he had to go to the

church earlier so as to help prepare for the main service. He was quiet and quite observant. He wasn't man of many words but it could be very nasty if he lost his temper at times. He was patient enough to know when to lose his shit and when to collect it all together. He had very few friends that even after his arrest, they never came to see him or stand by him. The church that he was so faithful to, only ended up cursing him and saying how embarrassed they were. They had nothing to do with him. No one tried coming forth to listen to his side of the story. For Katarina, just like everybody else, her husband was long gone. The man arrested was no longer hers and she had nothing to do with him. She kissed her family and wedding goodbye.

This tore her apart. She was living in hell while walking on earth. She had to do something. She had to figure things out. She joined hands with friends. Working to feed herself. To feed the seven kids that belonged to her two sons that knew nothing other than dancing around, with women. Drunk. She did this and that. Not for her own sake but for the sake of those that she loved. As time went by, she stopped talking about her husband and the high hopes she had, that maybe one day he will be released from prison and come home walking a free man. She only spoke to him in her mind and dreams. Once in a while, I could hear her talk to herself. No wonder she used to call me husband. My name reminded her of him. But she had little to do about this. She had little to do other than take care of those that she had at the very moment.

Katarina never gave troubles a chance. This is the most powerful woman that I have ever had. Beautiful as ever. Strong always. She walked straight. She guarded her faith and what she believed in. Although she wasn't educated herself, she made sure that she sent all her grandchildren to school. Making them know things that she never knew. I was lucky to have such a granny. She made sure that as her favorite, I had all that I desired. All this at the expense of her poor backbone. She did all she could to make me smile. All she could to make me cry. Just to make sure that I wasn't messing up with life.

Speaking of life, I kinda found it fun hanging around with the neighbours. Particularly this one by the name Juma. He was a good guy that showed me around. Within a few months, I was roaming the village like a natural born. Walking and talking like them. Fully assimilated, eating dressing and behaving like them. All this changed from a foreigner to one of their own. Juma made me feel fully wanted and loved by those that called me names. He became nice and played the role of a big brother.

All things were working out perfectly fine. There was no single reason to doubt each other. Juma could spend time at our place and I, could feel at home at their place. There was no need for suspicion of any kind. However, all this changed so suddenly. Like a rolling stone, my mind was confused tragically. I was torn between love and doubt. How could someone so dear to me do that? Why couldn't they be frank

with me to tell me that they no longer wanted my company? Maybe these were some the games that put in action by bitter relatives to separate the inseparable. I had to go and ask Juma what I had heard. The desire to ask Juma continued consuming my curiosity. Setting my mind on fire. But just before I left, I was called by the wife of my uncle, Khalenya.

"Dickson unaenda wapi?" She started.

"To see my friend, Juma," I added.

"You are going nowhere. You should be helping your sisters do some work."

"Which work?"

"Any work."

"Mamkubwa mbona hutaki niende kwa kina Juma?"

"There are some things that you don't know about these people that you call your friends."

"Which things?"

"Unaona hapo karibu na huyo ng'ombe?" She said pointing at where she had one of her cows tethered.

"Yes," I replied back. This time confused.

"That is the grave of your great grandfather."

"What about the grave of my great grandfather?" I asked with

obvious contempt written all over my face.

"These people that you think are your family, your friends, they are the people that killed him. They use black magic. They run at night. Naked with Ingoi"

"Why are you telling me this?"

"To save you, dummy!"

"I don't need to be saved. Thank you anyways," saying that, off I went.

That was the last time I saw Juma. The enmity had been created. Family rivalry running deep to the veins of the innocent. Those that knew nothing that ever existed in the past. Feuds that are carried from generations to generations. This was unfair. This was cruelty. This was a crime committed against friendship. Just because their family went to a different Church. Just because they believed and practiced different kind of faith. Just because the family had an introverted grandmother, one that no longer entertained company of people hanging around. Having nothing of substance to do other than chat, eat and play. Just because she was socially disadvantaged, they called her a witch.

They might have had all the right to do what they did. To feel overprotective and controlling. But they had no right to do the ownership; my ownership. I was not an object to be toyed with. To be manipulated. Yes, you might argue that they did it

out of love, but how good are you at knowing my own family? How dare you make me sound insane, confused and stupid? What makes you think you are right? Oooh yes! Just because you are entitled to your own thinking. Is that what you think? Sorry to disapprove you. What was done to our friendship was unjust. But as children like we were, we had no power over that. We got drawn apart by the family and made to think, believe and act like them.

MY CASKET

LUCAS NM

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Troubles come, troubles go. Life is a game of change. This was the moment so critical in my life. I had so many things to expect and very little to be fulfilled. The things that were happening to me were beyond my power. I failed to understand what happened till to date. Why was the world so cruel? Why was everyone a traitor? Why was there no life? It's only life that knew on which tide it was swimming.

Katarina's health was deteriorating pretty fast and furious! She had even been admitted to the hospital for a whole week. Myself, I had turned into a weakling by myself. There was no week that could go by without my visitation to the hospital. This thing was really eating me up. It's just that I was a child. An innocent child that was incapable of some things. Otherwise, doctors could have jumped to their wrongly premeditated assumptions. Having a good health history also gave me an upper hand on this. The house was collapsing. The walls, falling to the ground.

I remembered that night. This was me. This is me. I had come from the river earlier that evening. Being the only one that was staying with my grandma, I had to do all the house chores as she worked so hard to provide for us. I did all this wholeheartedly with zero complaints. She was at the fire place cooking something. The fire was blazing strongly eating up the sides of the pot that was on it. Greedily grazing and

kissing in its buttocks. Outside, the wind was strong and howling like a witch's disaster. One sent with all its minions to deliver greetings from hell. This was absurd. This was painful. This was entertaining. To everyone, they had to be at the corners of their rooms curled up like little kittens. Shaking terribly.

"This is not going to end well." I heard my grandmother say. I didn't bother to ask her what she was saying. She had a habit of talking to herself time to time. She also didn't seem like one in the mood to engage in a conversation. Quickly, I found somewhere near the dark corner of the room to hide myself. I loved it alone and in the dark. Solitude was my other half. After an hour or two, it started raining. The clouds were huge, dark, and heavy as I observed from the small window next to where I was seated. Immediately, I knew this was no good news at all. This was terrible to all of us. To Katarina, her house, that had been passed on to her jailed husband from his father, was full of holes on the roof. No one had bothered to do the repairs before. This meant that we were both going to have a very very long night.

Things happened so fast. I didn't notice. This was a narrow escape for me. The house wasn't that big. Yes, this was not a mansion. But at least it was better off than that of my uncle's. My father never had one actually. So, this was better off. It was a two-room-house with rusty roof, dilapidated floor and sulking walls. Depressing. But this was still home. This is where I spent my whole night laying on the floor on top of a

two-inch-thick mattress. And in the morning, I would roll it and push it down Katarina's bed in the other room. One room was being used as my bedroom at night, and during the day, it would be used as a sitting room. With only one huge table at the center of the room and two arm chars. At one corner of the room, I had built a little house for my birds-doves, in a more of vertical spiral manner. This was it for the room. The other room was Katarina's bedroom, serves as a store and as a kitchen. With one corner having three huge stones to serve as a fire place. The other corner served as a store.

Together with the screaming wind, the rain had brought down the mad wall of the room that I was using as a bedroom. This was so bad. This was so good. This was good that the wall had not fallen on anyone or caused any damaged. This was so bad that the house had been ruined. Something interesting is, that according to the taboos, this wall could not be repaired. Why was that? Why couldn't we do the repair yet we were the ones using the house? Your house is falling apart, and what society can offer best is to tell you to keep away from it. Wow. This must be fun. I have no place to sleep, you won't give me a place to rest my tired bones, yet, you don't want me to be happy. To be safe.

"Culture dictates that no repairs are supposed to be done," said my aunty one day when I asked about the house repairs.

"But why?" I prodded.

"Because your grandma isn't supposed to do that."

"What about we call someone to do it for her?"

"What I mean is, she is not supposed to do major repairs of that house, whether it's her or someone else paid by her."

"Really?"

"Yes."

"You people are weird at times."

"It's not us, it's the culture..."

"Which you all embrace and hold onto!"

"You really want to know why the wall cannot be repaired?"

"Yes!"

"Because your grandma lives in her father's-in-law house. That is why none of us is supposed to make nay repairs. This is also because the owner of that house is dead."

That was painful. It was harsh. That was the truth. There was nothing to be done to help Katarina. Her family had failed her. Her husband had greatly let her down in so many ways. Her sons had abandoned her in all times. Not just in times when she was celebrating, but also in time of great need. Like this time. Where were they? The answer is simple, nowhere. They were busy doing service to humanity. For that is what the nation requires. The same society that she was part of, had now cut one of its fabric loose. Discoloring it and making it

distinct from all other fabrics that made its cloak. This was cruel. This was right.

City life had taken a toll on Soul and his dove, Peris. This was not working. He had to come back home Sooner. That day, I was not informed that he was coming home. The whole thing was arranged in a rush. At the evening, finally there he was. Weak and frail. Darker than before. His face, looking like that of a child. His skin, rough. Something must for sure must have happened to him. This used to be a darling of all women. Both ugly and beautiful. Those that hid behind make up and those that fully embraces they naturally disgusting looks. Those that had curves and those that were loyal soldiers. Those that never needed the curves. Claiming slim is sweet. Such a pity and lame statement if self-consolation. They want what they don't have and since they don't have it, they deceive themselves and others that they are content with what they have. Settling for lesser them! This man that I was seeing in front of me had turned into some other creature that I could not fully and gracefully explain what it was. He looked like a dehydrated chameleon.

"What are you looking at? Don't you want to greet your father?" This is what brought me back to reality. I stretched my hand and gave it to me. His grip was weak. His palms softer. Peris had destroyed my good good father! Or so I thought.

"What happened to him?" I asked, my eyes glued on him.

"This is neither the place nor the time to ask such questions. Your father is sick. Let us get him home so that he can rest." Said Katarina.

His stay was making me uncomfortable. I had not been used to seeing him around. His wife brought bad memories. These people were home. Home where they made everyone else feel like a stranger. Feel bothered and never at ease. Why did they come? I want them gone. I want them go e to where they used to be and make me feel free again. Not like a slave that I used to be. But this was my family. Even though they had done bad things before, they were still good. They had some good in them. For instance, if at all Peris never meant well with me, she had all the power to destroy me before. She could have poisoned my tea or morning porridge. And like that, I could have been wiped off the face of the earth. But wait minute, she had actually tried but do harm before, she had tried to make me go mad. Hitting me on the head with a roller wasn't something that meant well at all. Turning my father against his own son wasn't something to be proud of as a matter of fact. I had been good to her. At times stopping the fight between her and Soul over cheating issues. Acting like a mediator between them and encouraging her to stay. Even if it meant that her stay would soon sting in the ass.

There was this day, it was on a Sunday. She had decided to bring a man that I had never seen before into our house. The stranger seemed comfortable. It's like they knew that my father would not come around burning the whole thing to the

ground. I made sure that I didn't give them the chance. Like other times when we the kids, would be told to go play outside and leave grown-ups have their own talk. This was not going to happen this time. Never. I am going to stay rooted to the ground. Never to blink and never to get my eyes off them. I was going to see and know everything that was happening between these two.

They just sat there and talked. Nothing much happened. There were no touches, just glances. From a far, I heard heavy footsteps approaching. That must have been my father. This was around 7 p.m. This was the time for visitors to start going home. I mean, doesn't he know that we needed to start preparing family dinner? My father came into the room and was introduced to the man by the love of his life. It seems they had talked about this before. They cleared the table and locked the door. From the bag that the man was carrying, came out large pieces of red candles. Thick in diameter. They were around eighteen of them.

The stranger took six candles and made a huge circle using them. He took another six and made a smaller circle inside the bigger circle. To the other six, they were given to Peris, to be used at some other time. During emergency and when the power reduced. I wondered what power he was talking about. He also said that the existence of those candles would always hold the family together and strengthen the bond. To me, that was noble of him to think so. I mean, how can that even happen? Stupid belief. They were just being blinded by

whatever they thought they were doing with this evil man. A messenger from the devil who said things that none of us understood. Chanting in a foreign language and doing weird signs. Once in a while, touching my head and saying something things. This went on for like two hours.

Finally, the man got tired, left some sticks that they were to burn at night for things to work as planned and keep the candles safe. He also gave them some red sheet to be using only when it's necessary. To me, all this was unnecessary drama.

One month, two months, three months and now he was regaining his physique. His eyes, that had been deeply withdrawn to the skull sockets, were now returning to position. He was now becoming the person I knew. On the other hand, Katarina's health was deteriorating. She was giving up. Her speaking had now gone on another pitch. She could more often cry and lament of how her sons were not helping her. How she had been left to die in poverty. Most times, she would cry and call her dead mother. Her only living brother, who was a pastor to some other local denomination called African Divine Church, the same church that she and her husband was attending to before he was arrested, had forsaken her. He was busy with church development and other family issues. This was the only person she could run to and talk to. Her one and only living family.

Katarina had always been a strong woman. She had everything

under control. A lot was happening at that moment, but she held on tightly to what she believed. The church refused to help her on the matter concerning her husband, one of their leaders. The church said that there was nothing else they could do other than praying for him while he served his sentence. When it was time for inmate visitation, they never gave her any support. This really drained her and made her to miss some of the visits. This might have had a great impact in my grandfather. I wonder what he thought. His sons never visited him at all. My father, by the time his dad was being arrested, was in the city squandering life. For my uncle, he only heard of his arrest. Even when he was a few kilometers away to where his dad was being held captive, he never showed his face with a bag of fruits or a bottle of water. He kept himself occupied with drugs and women.

Katarina could not take it anymore. Slowly, she started drifting away, not attending church services, sleeping all day and always talking to herself. Her dear friends never saw her visiting their place anymore. And just like her, they never visited her at all. Not even to check what was up with their friends. This made me to have troubles at the school. My fee was no longer being paid. Katarina was not working anymore. When I was sent home one day, to bring some maize and beans for the feeding program that was going on in school, I was devastated. I was torn apart. Most of the time, I was not taking lunch because I had not contributed to the school program. As the others would queue for a plate of githeri, I would go to the field and lay down to the ground. Comforting

myself. It seems someone had told the teacher in charge about this. I was now required to go home and bring the whole package, or else, I was not to return to that school again. This happens in most local schools.

There and then, I knew that my school days were over. I picked myself slowly and went home. But before I could leave the school gate, I knew that I wasn't going to fumble around. Why go home to an ailing grandmother that has nothing to even feed her own self? What about your father? Go to your father. I thought to myself. I knew my father could not help. His recent health had caused us more than we could say to anyone. There was no need. Instead, I walked to the staffroom, where the teacher was seated.

Knocking on the door, "come in" one of the teachers said while his gaze was still glued to the books he was marking.

I went in and stood in front of Mr. Obege. Slowly opening my mind, arms shaking as I tried to control myself, "good morning sir?"

"Just go home and bring what I have told you! You are wasting your time. This is not the time to talk. You could have done that so long ago."

Trying to balance myself and control the tears that were now forming in my eyes, "sir, I can't go home."

"Why can't you go home?" He asked. Dropping his pen down

and looking up at me. Confusion spread all over his face and his voice with genuine concern.

"I cannot go home because there is no one to help me there." I said this and immediately, I started crying.

He looked at me for like a minute without saying a word. When he realized that I was not strong enough to talk, he gave me time and allowed me to calm down. After three minutes of crying, that is when we continued talking.

"What do you mean when you say there is no one to help you at home?"

"My grandmother, who pays my school fee is very sick. She can't help."

"What about your father?"

"My father stopped paying for my fees long time ago."

"Is your father alive?"

"Yes sir."

"What does your father do for a living?"

"He just stays at home. He is also very sick."

"Where?"

"I don't know sir."

"Okay. You will go back to class. When you go home in the

evening, you will come tomorrow with your father so that I can talk to him. Is that okay with you?"

"Yes sir, thank you very much sir."

"Is alright, now ho back to class."

That was how I escaped trouble from school that day. Although Mr. Obege had been known to be fierce and ruthless, he was just like any other human. He had his own soft spot. I immediately rubbed my tears and went to class, hoping that things would go well soon.

MY CASKET

LUCAS NM

CHAPTER TWELVE

Today, just like any other day, the day seems beautiful as ever. The pain that we suffer is still nagging and the ugly truth about the family wellbeing makes us to walk around with dropping heads and with sullen faces. Where did we go wrong? What happened to the gods that used to favor their beloved sons and daughters? Just the other day, I had been told to come to school with my parent for a brief discussion. The discussion that would never bore any fruits. This was a total waste of time—if someone would ask me.

My father's sickness was still unknown to me. At one point he would get better and even start engaging in roughly physical work. At another point, he would get sickly and unable to even carry his own weight. This was worrying me. I was worried that I would soon lose him. I was now giving more attention to him and forgetting my own Katarina. This was cruel. I would have asked why this was as happening to him but I dared not to. Everybody seemed to be hiding the truth from me. From us who knew nothing about such sleekness. From the innocent and pure in mind. From those nice to such matters. This was really beautiful.

Katarina isn't going to get well soon. She has been complaining of numerous headaches of late. She hasn't been eating adequately. Yet, she has been working so hard for me. My good school results have been making everyone else my

enemy. However, Katarina has been extremely happy for the small wins I have been achieving. She keeps on praising me and telling everyone else to be like Dickson. She has been criticizing the other grandchildren due to my school performance. This has made my uncle's wife to be the greatest enemy of all. Making sure that am suffering psychologically. Food had been scares, but since I have been the cream of the family, they had to make a way of making the cream to be forgotten. This has to come with a few conditions. She knows that her husband, the black panther is working tirelessly to fulfill the needs of other women. She knows that her mother-in-law is now sick and out of energy. She knows that the best way to torture me is by being selfish. She has to make delicious dishes and only eat with her children while I watch. While Katarina sleeps in the house hungry. After all, she is feeding her children and not those that belong to strangers.

Time was soon. This was just like any other usual mornings. I had gone to school early morning. As usual, on an empty stomach. Hoping to come back at around noon time to make porridge for myself. This day, Katarina had to push herself to the wall so that my evening, we could get something to comfort our guts. However, this was no longer any days like before. Before anyone could predict, she stood and fell on the door way at the same time. It was the neighbors that came to save her life. The same neighbors that they used to see as evil and vile, they were now the first to run to her rescue. On arriving to the local dispensary, her case was confirmed severe

and she was referred to the county referral hospital. This had a lot of impact to me than it did to everyone else. I felt like the world was becoming narrower and quizzing me so hard. The one and only love that I used to have was now being snatched away from me. To this, I had to blame my father for it. I had to blame everyone else that I could have helped and failed to do so. This was their fault!

"Have you heard what has happened?" Asked my father when I got home at lunch time hoping to prepare some porridge for myself.

"What is there for lunch?" I asked him as I moved towards the kitchen.

"Your grandma is sick."

"And?"

"She has been bed-ridden at the hospital."

"Why has she? What did the doctors say?"

"It hasn't been confirmed yet, but there are some rumors."

"What rumors?"

"She might have had high blood pressure."

"Just that?"

"It is also believed that she had low sugar levels in her blood. She was not having enough and proper diet for a while." He

said this dropping his face. Seems like he was embarrassed to say what he said.

"That might be the truth, after all you guys have failed her as sons. You've made her to be the village beggar. Working for food. Now you see what you've made her to go through?" I asked him, not expecting to get an answer to my question.

Katarina's sudden sickness meant me moving in to my father's. This was not possible but it had to be made possible. Me living in the same place with the woman that once wanted to break my skull? Never! However, this time there was a solution to that, I had to stay at my grandma's and take food from my father's place. That sounded like a good deal. This went on for like two weeks, during which, the two women had to switch role play in the hospital where Katarina was being tended. My uncle wife had to stay at the hospital to feed Katarina. My step mother, on the other hand, had to take main essentials and all the dishes to the hospital from home. This now looked like a fully united family!

After two weeks, one of the usual evenings, as I was coming from school, I decided to pass by my father's residence since it was on a Friday. Spend the night and then walk to grandma's house the following day. Upon reaching the compound, I noticed the energy setting low. Everyone seemed to be in a state of mourning. Or perhaps, in deep thinking. I never bothered what the issue was. I was too hungry to bother. But before I asked what had been prepared for lunch,

I was greeted with the bad news. Katarina had died in the hospital that day in the afternoon. To this, I just smiled. I didn't know what to do. Was I to cry or laugh? I didn't know. After all, I had suffered enough loss to know how to deal with this.

The loss had an impact to many in the family and outside the family confines. Up to date, it has never been known if it was stroke or heart attack that had killed Katarina. The amount of money you have dictates the kind of services you receive in most of our government hospitals. Something she and her family did not have. Preparations had to be made quickly to make the deceased rest in peace. So many people attended her burial. People both known and unknown to me. This was a moment of mixed reactions. With many crying and mourning the loss of their close friend and family and others celebrating the life of Katarina.

"Katarina had been with us for so many years. She was a good mother to my kids when they were growing up. She has been like a sister and a mother to me. Apart from being a passionate worker, she has always been there to offer the family with any kind of support that we needed from her. I remember when my grandfather died, may his soul rest in peace, Katarina was the only person who stayed long nights and most of the day giving me the utmost support that I needed. If at all it were not for this woman (pointing towards the casket) I would be dead by now. I would be amongst those that are now only remembered and never heard of. Never spoken of. I hope this

won't be the case to her." Mama Henry was heard saying during the burial day.

After saying this, she paused for a minute. Wiped her tears with a clean, white and expensive piece of cloth and went on. "This is why we, as a family, felt the need to come and join hands with everyone else to see that she enjoys her last days on earth. That she is laid peacefully and everyone else enjoys the day. That all her pain is wiped away and that the faces of family and neighbors frown no more. We are here to put a smile on your faces." She said this looking around with a smiling face. Making others smile. This to me, it was a fake smile. Just to impress the one that has money. For in a poverty-stricken village, if you control the money you control everyone else. You become the god to be worshiped. And this is what she had become.

When time came for the family members to give their speech, Yosiah had to be asked to give away the microphone and sit down. With the crowd sneering and jeering. To him, he was absolutely right to tell the truth and make people understand some few family matters. What he failed to understand is that some things are better off left unsaid. He spoke of how his own mother was selfish and greedy. How she had left their dear father rote in jail. How she had discriminated against her own grandchildren—focusing more on the boys of his little brother and abandoning his own daughters. Simply because he had not been blessed enough to have a son. Yosiah, on the day of his mother's burial, accused his own mother of many

things. Others that can never be written or said. This angered the crowd who forcefully made to sit down in respect of the occasion and of his dead mother.

The rest of the day went on well with so many praising Katarina and everything good she has ever done for them. The speeches ended and now the body was put to rest. People sung, ate and drunk to their fill. At around 5 pm, the crowd had cleared from the compound. The quiet was returning. The loneliness was setting in. All this time, I was seated on top of a tree stump that had been cut years ago watching. Listening to what was being said and what was being done.

Talking to no one but just observing. This way, I felt better.

Days have passed after Katarina's burial. This was slowly hitting me that she is no longer there. These are the stages of dealing with pain and loss. This is what happens to all of us when we lose something or someone dear to us. At first, we go into a deep state of denial. We laugh and pretend nothing has happened, just like I did. We give ourselves reasons as to why we don't even mind the loss. That we have lost many things before and we don't care losing more. That we are less. This is a state all of us has to deal with when in pain or suffering. I had been in the state of denial for quite some time without my knowing. Even as the burial was happening, I mourned not. I just sat there and listened as people talked. As people quarreled and fought. All I did was sit, and observe.

The second phase came. This is called pain. Here, we normally

feel and experience the pain of the loss. We move from denial to agony. From comforting ourselves with lies to know convincing us that the loss is really painful. When the stage came, I didn't cry, I was worried. I was worried about my schooling. I was worried about my life entirely. All this long, I was petrified. What was going to happen to dear me? Where was I going to stay? Was my father going to continue supporting me—even with his now state and the frequent home journeys that his mistress was making? I had all the reasons to worry. This made me sick and lonely. Dull.

Even as I am in this kind of state, there seems to be someone doing the observation from a far. The wife to Henry, Edith. She had been told that I was solely depending on Katarina for many things including for the fee payment to the local day school that I was attending. Knowing this, she made it her role to see how I was holding up.

Meanwhile, I decided to deal with my loss by finally coming to terms with the loss. This is the third stage of dealing with pain and loss. Acceptance. I moved from denial, dealt with the pain and now I was embracing the loss. Learning how to live without her. I had now stopped giving myself statements of self-comfort and now I was finding a way out of the pain. I was ready for any opportunity that would present itself. As I was dealing with this, I fell asleep to the ground. No. To the thin mattress that had been laid to the ground for my personal use. That day, I was in my brown dirty shorts. The only pair that I used to wear when doing odd jobs around home.

After all, father was weak. Sick. It was my obligation to help him with the job around home.

As I slept in this mud-walled house with cow dung smeared floor, I heard approaching steps. Whatever followed after this, was a life changing incident. She knocked the door and before I could tell her to come in, she pushed herself inside. She touched me nicely on my shoulders and spoke softly.

"Sasa?" she asked.

"Poa"

"How are you feeling?"

"I am okay. I guess," I responded while trying to open my eyes to see who I am talking to.

"I have been told about your grandmother. Was she the one that used to take care of you?"

"Yes."

"Sorry for what happened to her."

She seemed genuine when she said this to me. She went ahead and reached out to her purse. From within, she ditched out a new fifty shillings note and handed it to me. By then that used to be a lot of money especially to a village boy like me.

"My name is Edith. I am the wife to Henry," she said after handing me the note and smiled to me. In a very long time,

someone was now being nice to me in a motherly way. I instantly fell at peace and loved again. I felt like I had regained something I had lost long ago—motherly love. She looked at me and smiled even more. She seemed to see through me.

"You'll buy some candy and share with the other kids," she said.

"I will do that."

"I was thinking of transferring you to a school near my home. You can be attending the school from my home where you will be living with my mother. She is all alone at home and wouldn't mind your company. I will pay all your school expenses as you stay at our home with my mother. That is if your father will agree and if you would like to do so."

"I want to!"

"I have been told that you do well in school. I wouldn't want to see you not going to school because of what has happened to your grandma."

"I appreciate your gesture."

"You are welcome. You will talk to your father and tell me if he agrees to what I have told you."

"I will talk to him and let you know."

That night, as we were all having dinner, I broached the subject to my father and told him every detail of the

conversation that we had had with Edith. He listened carefully and told me that he had no problem with it. That if I want to, I should just do what I want to. This was a changing moment. The hope that I had lost was now coming back. Like a flickering match stick and now blazing like a huge fire. I was thrilled. Finally, I was not going to die, just like everyone else!

MY CASKET

LUCAS NM

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

This is unjust. This is just. Just do it. After all you have been through, you deserve this. This is another chance to free yourself from the ensnares of your good family. This is not right. It is not right to leave your family and live amongst strangers. It is not right to run away, particularly, in such a crucial moment. When everyone is suffering from the loss. This is socially unacceptable. If you ask any other person, they will tell you to go for it, to grab the opportunity and walk away. Give them your back. It won't be long before they forget. They actually won't remember. Just walk!

You have to go. I don't say this because I want you gone, but I say this because I want you to stay. I want you to grow and continue from where I am stopping at. I want you to look after the family I will leave behind. I want you to win. I want...I want...I want so many things for you! You must make sure that wherever you are going you remain disciplined. I know you can do that. I want you not to get comfortable over there and think that those people are now part of your family. I want you to live knowing that you left your family thriving in poverty. I want you to remain focused, just as you are right now, and do the best. When you are asked about your family, talk about us in a loving tone. Praise us and make sure every tiny word that comes out of your mouth about us is full of praise. With all that, I wish you well.

The month is of June when I took the bold step. Decided that up to today, when I look back at what I did, I feel no regrets. All I do is smile at myself and say to I, "Boy, you did a beautiful thing." The new surrounding wasn't all together bizarre. It was awkwardly beautiful. Stupidly incredible. The people, the people were something else. Good thing that Katarina had taught me a few words in luhya language. I could eves drop them gossiping about me once in a while. They were all together amazing demons.

The house was huge, not as compared to where I had been used to. I was given my own room! What a moment! To have my own room was never even in my dreams. I had been used to sharing rooms, sharing food, sharing clothes. Everything was meant to be shared. Here, I was even given my own towel. Something I never used before. Something that I could be reminded to use every time I went to the bathroom. You know it becomes a little bit difficult to adopt to the new changes sanasana when you are not used to such abrupt happenings. The good was great. Everything that a toddler would love to have, was generously provided. The first few months were my best. This was simply life in paradise. I even minimized communications with my father. I mean, I don't have a phone to call him and he probably doesn't have the number of this granny. Or so I thought. They were also not as close as it may seem with Edith, making things more complicated. This was simply the opposite of what they were enjoying.

Samuel, the gate man, was delighted to see me. To have my

company. With my arrival, he knew that most of the load on his shoulders would be reduced. He knew that we would work together and come to a state of balance. Seems like my celebrating days would be soon cut short. It's work and school. School and work. For the neighbors' kids that would stream in and out wanting to play with me, they soon started disappearing, one by one. Cutting themselves off.

The time for harvesting came. This was also another reason to make everyone smile. A young boy who seems to know how to do things right. One who knows how to handle locals perfectly. The home owner was impressed. A dog must never bite the one who feeds it. It must always be loyal to the owner and do his/her bids. This is what I did. Going left when it's time to go left and right when it's time to go right. Samuel was an altogether quite man. A family man who has enough stress to deal with. A man who had longed for a friend to talk to. A man that was happier for my arrival than anyone else.

Just like I said, everything was perfect. The rain started beating when one day, I walked into Samuel's cabin and found it open. It was at the night and the door was widely open. I called his name for a few times hoping that he was around the cabin. That maybe he had gone to the loo and forgot to lock the door. After calling and waiting for like three minutes, something hit my mind. "Check out his box." That was it! The box is empty. Looking at me with a scornful smile. Samuel is no more. He is gone.

His disappearance meant a lot of changes. There was need for someone to step in for him. Play his roles and execute his duties. Who was going to do that? Guess whom, yes, your guess is correct. Having had a little bit of cattle herding experience back at the Katarina's, I was the one only suitor to replace Samuel. Earlier on, Samuel had already started complaining of the late payment of his wages, food not being enough and other mistreatments. He believed that this was being done to send him a message. A few neighbors, nosy busybodies, had in several accounts, made him to stop by their little huts for a word or two. They are the village sages. The ancient carriers of wisdom. That which destroys instead of building.

The replacement was only meant to be for some few days before they got someone else to do the work. Mine was just to help around the main house with a few cleanings and providing the old woman with company. The few days, became weeks, and weeks now into months. At the end of the day, I was still satisfied with what I was getting in exchange with my labour. Being allowed to go to school and work, considering I was only fifteen, was a huge privilege.

Time went by and my school performance kept on shooting. With all the tasks that I was subjected to, I was still doing well. This made me the village pop star. This made me to be admired by everyone. I became the darling to the many. At the school level, teachers loved me and students adored me. From being a previously stubborn nerd, I became the most

obedient and highly performing student. However, this didn't sit well with most of the people. There are those that wanted to be the ones receiving the favors and attention I was getting. Those that I came to displaced from the top position became bitter. Even at the family level, I was deemed unworthy of all that. How can a stranger, who is a mere new comer and start performing better than our own? We have provided all the resources to our own but they seem not even closer to this pauper boy. Something needs to be done!

The stay became lukewarm. With adoration, still fighting with strangers that give smiley looks.

Just like chameleons, ready to change the color of their skin whenever it fits them. Always shading skin like panthers to look more appealing. Even as this is happening, the stay back home hasn't been smooth. My father is still sick. Innocently, the last days I was with him, I had tried looking for some herbs in attempt to heal him. He could tell me that he was having malaria. I could go over and above looking, digging for herbs to give him since I could not carry him alone to the hospital. He had also mentioned that there was no need of going to the hospital. His skin was growing thicker and scaly. His skull was shrinking. He had lost too much weight. He was now looking like a child. He was generally weak with eyes sinking deeper into their sockets. With all this, I was determined to heal him and save his health.

It hurt me to leave him sick. There was something that he was

not telling me though, he confided in me to go and make him proud. He told me that he will go to the hospital, that he will take the meds and he will be better. He told me that he will see me soon and that u should worry less about him. He was going to be alright!

This gave me another reason to hold on and be more committed and disciplined. I was doing this for him. I wanted to make it and save his life. I was afraid of losing this opportunity. Every now and then, they would remind me that there was a boy who used to stay at the same room that I now used to call mine. They would intentionally bring him up telling me how weak he was, every time comparing me with him. Telling me of how naughty he was and all the bad things. Telling me of how they had to send him home at the end of the day and how he had transformed over the months. Losing weight and skin growing darker for he had lost all the privileges. Was this meant to threaten me or to just inform me? I didn't know for sure.

The game went on. The hate grew. The love thrived. Some of the bad things, dine to me with a smiling face and false sorry that followed with a belittling laughter. The good deeds, rarely seen. It wasn't until when the day finally came. The day when my heart was shuttered by the news that I received that evening. It is said that when bad things are going to happen to us, the nature has its own way of communicating to us. Some call it the gut feeling. Some call it the intuition. But to me, I didn't have any of the aforementioned. All I remember was,

that day I was supper fluent. Speaking in English like no any other day. Not just fluent but jovial. Talkative. Caring and loving. Qualities that were never mine. Or maybe, those that I always repressed.

I came straight from school and went to take a shower. It was late so I didn't go to the shamba that day to cut Napier grass for the next day's use. While I was at the shower, I overheard granny speaking on the phone call. Something that I never paid much attention to. The only thing that made me stop and think for a minute is what she said. "*Yuko*," To mean that the person they were talking of was present. Then a "*yuko kwa bafu anaoga*" followed. This made me know that for real, they were talking about me. Whatever they were speaking of, didn't sound strange to me, but in some way, it got me curious.

Nothing happened after that. Everything seemed cool and normal. She went ahead with the evening cooking as I did the homework at the dining table. When it was around 7pm, she asked me to prepare the table for us. Dinner was ready. It was after that that I was hit with the bombshell.

"Do you remember the phone call that I received while you were at the bathroom?" she started. In the middle of our eating.

"Yes," was the answer I managed to give. Curiosity clearly showing all over my face.

She kept quiet and continued to eat. Slowly as if nothing had happened. I was now burning to know what she meant. What she was talking about. What she wanted to tell. I couldn't keep my calm anymore.

"What about the phone call that you received? Who was it?"

"I was speaking to Kadamba." That is the name she used when referring to her daughter, Edith.

"What did she say?"

"She told me some terrible news from home."

"What were the news?"

"She told me that your father died today in the afternoon."

There and then, the world seemed to have stopped. Everything gone dark. Time moved slowly. I looked around and nothing was moving. The food that I was eating, got stuck at my food pipe. I couldn't chew anymore. The television that was on, dimmed slowly and went mute. My eyes became watery. Then strong rivers broke loose. Those that run from my eyes down to my cheek and on to my small chest. I cried softly and slowly. This was the end. To my worries. To my efforts to find him the cure. To the caring. To the love. To the discipline. The coiling. Just like a viper, this was the time to remove my old scales.

Viewing his body under the blankets brought relief. He was dead. More than I could imagine. He was gone. He was not here. This was just but a carcass that I was seeing. Smiling, I walked towards his small hut remembering the last thing he had told me before we lively departed.

"We are going to put him to rest as soon as possible. We won't take much time as we are trying to cut down on the cost for his burial. As you all know, the deceased had no stable job thus no cent was left under his name. He had no house of his own, that is why we have built that little hut to represent his abode. As a man, he must rest in his own house before heading to his final resting place. Having died on 14th of October 2015, we will allow him to be seen by friends and family and lay his body to his final abode on 17th of October 2015." Those are the words from his elder brother, Yosiah, as he directed everything on behalf of the family.

The crowd was minute. The talks were low. The people were extremely sad. This was not like any other burial. This was different. Very few women from the church came to help.

Some said that the sad was sad after the departure of the mother. That they were finally going to reunite. Some said that being that last born (Their last born died earlier on), he was the most affected by the death of his mother. Thus, necessitating his own, even if he was still sick with that deadly disease that he got from the city.

The morning of that day was dull. The clouds were heavy.

Birds were nowhere to be seen. The crowd that had come to escort him to his rest sat quietly in the tent. Others were sitting on tree stumps while the kids sat flatly to the ground. The proceedings went on and usual with songs, speeches, and everything else that goes on in a funeral. However, this could have the death of me. Being the elder son of the deceased, the son whose mother was absent and was not known to these people, I had to be put under some traditional DNA test. I didn't know what they were asking me to do not until five years later when I asked my friend who is deeply rooted to tradition. With people carrying his cheaply made box in the name of a casket, I was made to lead the way and instructed by the church elders to go around his grave three times before he was finally laid to rest. It is believed that, if I were not the biological son of the deceased, his spirit could strike me down and kill me there and then. When none of this happened, I could see several smiles from the crowd in front and at the back of me. Even those that were carrying the box seemed to be relieved. Now confident and happy.

According to culture, Peris was not to stand by the graveside and watch the body of her late husband being buried to the end. She was supposed to only see the covering up till the grave was half-filled. She was then supposed to walk away from the main homestead. To a distance of approximately 200-300m away. After that, the filling would go on. When this was all done and behind us, I was given some money to use for my shaving since I never stayed for the night to shave at

the graveyard of the deceased. The culture dictated that all the family members should stay for the night performing some rituals around the fire the whole night, and in the following morning, they would use a newly bought razor to shave their head clean and leave the hair on the deceased grave. This was to make sure that the gone took away with him all that belonged to him. The memories. This was also a sign of love, respect and mourning. But I wasn't ready to be involved in such. Not me! I had already been through a lot of rituals. Rituals to determine if I am an original heir of the deceased. Heir of the air, for there is nothing he left under his name. His money was for women, beer and all luxuries. What a man!

The wife, was expected to stay at home for the next one month with minimal indulgent. She was not to travel at all. She was to stay and grieve. She was to stay and do the countless. For Peris, that was never in her plans. She was going to do the opposite. She is going to stay at her parents' house. She has nothing left behind for her. She cannot stay with these kinds of people. The only person that was making her to stay was not anymore. She had a good reason now to roam around as she wished. As she was used to. What would happen to her? What would come as a result of her deeds? Only time would tell.

MY CASKET

LUCAS NM

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Time will tell when to slay a goat and when to dance at the cockerel's sound. Time will tell when to bury and when to excavate. Time will tell, time will tell. This was the time when time was not telling at all. This was the days when everything was dark. The atmosphere surrounding the small circular and grass thatched house of Soul was thirsty. Was hungry and was ragingly mad with all kinds of insatiable appetite. The urge to consume more and more. The need to swallow wholly. As to whom or what was to be consumed, no one knew. The spirits were hungry. The demons were angry. Someone had to go down sooner.

The mistake of walking away was huge. The catastrophes had to be felt with a huge thud. It was so unfortunate, that the people to bear the pain are the saints. The innocents that knew nothing about the pain.

After the burial, Peris never stayed around as it was demanded of her by the society. She never spent the night at the house of her husband. She decided to have nothing to do with him. Those closer to her argued, that Soul had not fully paid dowry for her. This qualified her not to have anything to do with him after his death as it was never fully known to people as per the societal standing, of him being the legally known husband to her. They had nothing binding as wife and a husband. Question is, why come to the burial and stand up,

speaking and representing herself as a wife to him knowing the facts so well? The answer is simple—she was doing it as a favor!

That very same day, she went straight to her parents' place and spent the night. After two days, she booked a ticket to Nairobi, where she was to report to work. The same place where she had been working before my father died. She had chosen to forsake him. Snatching all the children away and running to Nairobi. Leaving him unloved, uncared for and all together, a lonely man. This, I believe, is amongst the reasons as to why his death came too soon. She chose work over marriage. This happens in mostly in the modern world as compared to the good good African homes. Just like before, this time she chose work over tradition. This made the spirit of a dead happier. Sad, angry and inconsolable. This was the genesis of all the trouble that came knocking around her doors.

The day came and she started her journey. Calmly and happy as if nothing had happened. She chose to travel at night, perfectly suiting her needs. The journey was smooth. After several hours of traveling, the bus came to stop. A forceful stop that had to be made. The stop that brought an end to lives and the journey itself. They had been involved in a road accident. The bus was believed to have been split into two. They had rammed into a transit lorry. Her head, been split into two and her pretty face beautifully squashed to a potato-like structure. She was now dancing with her husband, her

mother-in-law happily ululating to her new arrival. Family now united.

This was painful to her family. This was nothing to me. This was justice to society. It was unfortunate that the thing happened to her. It was just to the norms of the society. It was cruel to the hearts of her family. It was a moment of celebration to me. Justice had been served in equal measures. As to the other people that died in the accident, they were innocent souls to cool down the spirit of my departed father. They just happened to find themselves in the company of wrong people.

This wasn't going to slip. Someone had to pay for what had happened. Someone had to Carter for the burial costs and add a bonus for raising the two kids that had been left behind. That someone, that someone was going to be the owner of the killer bus. The owner of the company. But how could they do this? How could they make them pay when they had also loss to suffer from? Families to apologize to. There was only one way to do that; filling a case against them. The bus had not been serviced—how did they know that and they were just mere passengers? To begin with, they were not even there to see the car, for if they were, they would all be dead by know. The bus was being driven recklessly—was there anything to show that? Were there any survivors that were willing to testify? Where could they get someone willing to do that when everyone that survived was full of worries and trying to block out what had

happened. They said they didn't even want to talk about the accident. They were gratefully traumatized.

There was nothing left to do other than deal with what had befallen them. That was the price to pay for the lust their child had for money. Things were done quickly. She was not buried next to her husband as many would have expected. She was laid at her own home. A quick burial attended by few people me being those counted as absent. I never got an invitation to see off my long-term enemy. Only to receive a call from my home neighbors few days after she was laid six feet underground, crucifying me. Telling me how evil I was and rebuking me for not attending the funeral. It seems to have worked perfectly as they wanted it to.

Back to this little palace, everything seems to be getting tougher and tougher. Nothing seems to move well. Everything is just weird. I have been pushing through but the hate is more than the live I am getting. The rejection doesn't seem as the redirection any more. Or perhaps I should be a little bit patient with how things are faring on. Yes. That is what I am going to do. The person I was fighting for is no longer there. My little brother, George, is in a land that I know not of. After the death of my father, Sarah started making contacts. She used his number knowing that I was now the one having his phone. After five years, closer to six, it is when she is now trying to make things right. Trying to show up with a disgustingly smiling face. This is unacceptable! She didn't even come to the burial. She claims that she got the news too late. How is that

even possible? She has never wanted to visit that place. That I know of. She has always had her excuses. Now that he is gone, and the mistress is gone, is she going to shared her skin and come for the same kids she abandoned some years back? Is she genuinely sorry or she is just manipulating us and things around so that she can get her hands in what is always dear to her? I don't think so! You know what I think? I think she is just pretending. Honesty and genuine intentions have never been attributed to her.

Patience is no longer what I have. Discipline is now fizzling away. I feel like a man when in reality, I am but a small boy. I have heard and seen enough. This is the time to stand on my own. As I am planning for this, for a way out, my imprisoned grandfather dies while I'm there. His body is never brought home but is well taken care of at the prison. Since he has no family to take him, he is buried amongst other homeless people in a public cemetery. When you go wrong, even your own family can forsake you big deal. That is what happened to him. I have to think of a way of surviving to this place and do great in my studies. The odds, however, seems to be against me. At the school, the school deputy seems to be bitter ever since I was elected school president. As of the others, I am a darling.

The family has a teacher who happens to be teaching in this school. He has been on my neck of late. Moving around like a hungry crow. Watching everything move and reporting back to the family. Even when away from the homestead, I am still

more of like a prisoner. This is more disgusting than anything so far. He likes intimidating me and telling me of how powerful he is. Telling of how he can ruin my happiness and cut short my enjoyment at their home. How he can make a quick call to Kadamba and mess things up. He is a total narcissist. He is a pauper and a puppet. A man who cannot stand on his own.

This happened so fast. I was now trusting Sarah. Or maybe the situation made me to. She was planning on coming to get George back. At the same time, things got heated up at the majestic palace. Heaven turned to hell. I decided this was the chance to redeem myself. This was the day when I was going to walk away from all this. I remember it was on a Friday evening. I came home straight from school. I was tired. I had lunch and got some shower. After that, I went and milked the cow, as always. I fed the chicken and made sure they had plenty of water and food. The next morning was going to find me gone, just like Samuel and many others. No wonder she never stays with people that long. Always complaining and grumbling.

I dashed inside and parked everything that belonged to me. Hid them well and continued staying calm as if nothing had happened. She was intuitive. Seems like she knew what I was up to. At around seven o'clock, she sent my friend to call me from the kitchen where I was chilling waiting for the big day. Upon being told that I was being summoned, I knew something was wrong. I knew she got hold of the stuff and now I had to answer to all the charges against me. Funny.

"You are planning to go somewhere that we don't know of?" That was the first question that I was asked upon entering the main room.

I just looked at her face, and then, turned to the person who had been sent to call me. Smiled. I had hinted to James about my departure. Of how I was tired of the place and of how I was suffering silently. This is when I knew he was one of those friends that will stab you in at the back whenever they have a chance. All the information I was giving him, he was passing it down to his grandma, who, would later on pass it to the owner of this palace as they were chit chatting. What could they get in return? Why would they do that. Tell me of things that, if it were not for them, I would never have known, about this family. Bring me closer and make me to identify with their poverty. So, they were doing this for a plate of food? Selling me off so that James would take my place. Wow!

I had not seen this coming. I must have been so naive. So dumb. No wonder he had been spending less time with me and more time with her. No wonder, recently, he had started being so distanced and so quiet. No wonder, she had started accusing me of petty things that I didn't even do. Trying to make me look as rude whenever I answered to whatever she had asked. Terming me as rude and disrespectful. Saying that I was always moody and didn't want to talk to anyone. Saying that if I was not happy at that place I should just say. No wonder all these changes. They had been orchestrated by this James, together with his granny and facilitated by this old

woman. The thing is, I was needed to be quickly go e than I had anticipated. They were just waiting for the right time and the right way so that all the blame could be thrown back at me. Wow, this sounds like a perfect plan to work with.

"No." Was the answer that came out of my mouth.

"But I see you've already packed. It's like you've made up your mind and you no longer want to be part of this family."

To that, I didn't answer. I just stood there mute. Looking at them. Unshaken and just watching. Since I never responded, she went ahead and called the pauper teacher to come and solve this before it got out of hand. To come and talk some sense to his student. They took their seats at the table as I remained standing. Feeling unwelcomed and waiting for the decider to arrive.

Now, the eagerly awaited devil's entry came. He was staggering a little bit. His happiness had been cut shot. He had been summoned when he was having fun with the other boys at a local joint. This used to be his normal weekend schedule. Where he would start on Friday evening and end his promiscuity on Sunday evening. Then pick it up from where he left it come next weekend. He had six children and one of them was physically disabled. The other one, the girl, was mentally challenged and the rest were academically disadvantaged.

"Good evening. What is happening?" he started.

This time, no one answered his greetings. He was told immediately what I was up to.

"Talk to your student. Ask him where he is going. We found him packing up these things, some of which doesn't belong to him. Like these books belong to my granddaughter, even these clothes, they belong to my grandsons. They were brought from Nairobi and given to him since he came to this place with nothing. The few clothes that he was having were nothing but pieces of rags. Talk to him and get to know what he needs. We live with him peacefully and with full of love. He goes to school and all we ask of him is to study. Nothing more. We have even employed someone to help around the compound so that to make sure he has all the time he needs to perform in school. He is never bothered by anyone. James is my witness. You can ask him. I just fail to understand why he needs to run away in the middle of the night and leave us in trouble. Looking for him. He knows how much we love and care for him. I guess that is why he wants to run away from us. Just talk to him and get at the bottom of it."

"What is the matter, my son?" he asked grabbing my hand. With a strong grip. As if I would run away at night.

"Nothing." I answered him.

"Nothing? I can see that there is a problem, can't you see that?"

"There is nothing wrong. Everything is perfectly fine. Maybe you

should ask the person who asked you to come, what they think the problem is."

"You are so rude. You deserve some beating. You've grown some horns of late," he said that to mean that I was becoming exceedingly stubborn of late. That is what village people use to refer to someone that is rude, arrogant, stubborn and disrespectful.

The beating never happened. At the end of it all, he went home a drunk and frustrated man. I refused to answer to their stupid questions. Knowing very well that the next morning, I was out of that place. I was made to spend the night and asked to leave behind everything that I found in that place. Things of the palace never gets out to the village. You leave as you came. Even when we die, those of various beliefs will tell you, naked we came and naked we will return: to the earth. That is what happened to me.

Before he left, he promised me to face it rough. He promised to talk to the school headteacher, to inform him of my unruly behavior and make him alter my national examination registration. Not just alter, but deregister. That is how powerful he could be. That is how strong his influence over people was. He could make them do things for him as he wished. As to that, I didn't answer. I just kept mute and gave time time to unravel the occurrences as planned by mother nature.

Morning came, Edith was called to be informed of what was

happening. She had the right to know. Remember, she was the one that had helped me come to the place I was about to leave in the next few minutes. Our phone conversation was smooth. Free of shouting and quarrels. She told me that she was sorry. That she knew what was going on with their siblings, particularly the sisters. She told me the things she had been made to go through by her own siblings and how poisonous they were. How they continued poisoning their own mother and everything good that happened. They were the real definition of enemies of progress. She asked me to be strong and to keep contact with her. She asked me where I was going, whom I was going to live with and everything else. She asked me to help her with my mother's contact, asked her to take good care of me and ensure that I go to school. She was a better mother than the one I was having. After that, I packed my 'rags', made a call to ask Sarah if she was still coming around to pick me, and after the confirmation, the bodaboda guy was called and given clear directions; to take me to Majengo.

#THE END

MY CASKET

LUCAS NM

EPILOGUE

MY CASKET

#BOOK 2

CHAPTER ONE

This doesn't seem right. There must be a problem somewhere. This is not what we had agreed. No way! You aren't doing this to me. Tell me that you are kidding. Tell me that you are just pulling my legs. Tell me that this is all a cloud. Come on, I want you to talk to me. I want you to assure me. I want you to speak! Are you there? Are you coming? Okay. Let me keep my calm. Yes. Breathe in. Breathe out. Now, relax.

I have been sitting here from dawn, waiting for someone who, from the look of things, might not come. Where am I going to go? Who am I going to turn to? This is bad. All those people, that have been wishing me bad. Day and night playing for my downfall. What are they going to say if they get to know of this? Are they going to celebrate, laugh about and throw a party? Or maybe, someone will sympathies with me. There must be someone who will come to my aid. Remember am a village icon and a darling of all. Let me be patient and see how things are going to be.

One hour gone, two hours down, third hour, thirst and hunger are creeping up my guts. I have no money of my own. I can't

buy anything for myself. All I am going to do is seat here and wait. No matter how long the wait seems to be, I will be patient, at least for today. The day seemed very long. Long enough to make a mad do many things. The hours that I wanted to move as fast as possible, they seemed to lug behind and laugh at me. Reminding me that I was not in any position to make commands. That there was only a thin line left between me and a beggar. Between I and the street boys and girls that roamed around the streets looking for food. The only difference between me and them, at the moment, was the clothing that I was proudly calling my new swagger.

At noon, I received a call that changed everything. The call that I had been longing for. From the other end of the call, there came a soft and caring Boise that sounded familiar to me. This is how the phone call was:

"Hello?" The sweet soothing voice greeted when I received the call.

"Hello."

"How are you fairing on?"

"I am waiting for you. I am hungry."

"Where are you?"

"I am at a place called Majengo. That is the place you will alight at. When you get there, you will see me." I said this giving a huge yawn.

"We will be there in the next few minutes. Stay safe. I am coming to get you."

"Okay. Bring me something to eat," she agreed to my request and ended the phone call. I had few more minutes to wait. Finally, after waiting for hours. I had only a few more minutes to wait.

To finally go home. To meet the woman that had abandoned me several years ago. Force years to be specific. The same woman that had left us not caring what will happen to us, is now the same woman that is coming to get us. Curious of what had happened to us over the years. Yes, I sat there waiting. The few minutes, turned into two more hours. But finally, the country bus pulled down. People alighted, my tiny cellphone; the one that I had been left with after the death of my father, now rung. Louder than before. It was my mother calling. My mother was here to get me.

From across the road, there she was. Standing still, smiling. Shorter than before. A little bit bigger. She had added weight. This was the first time she was stepping her feet to this land. The first and probably the last time. As we stood there looking at each other, her not knowing what to do? Not sure if the kind of reception she will get from her own son. The same son that had previously chased her away with soil clods. Denouncing her. As we stood there watching each other, another male figure came and stood by her side. Taller, of medium girth. I see this time she had brought a helper with her. She had found

herself a man after the death and burial of the father of her sons. Or maybe, the man has always been there.

GLOSSARY

MY CASKET

#BOOK 1

Ugali—corn meal

Matumbo—Offal

Chapati —Tortillas

Mutura—African Sausage

Githeri —Special meal that is of Kikuyu origin. Normally prepared using maize and beans.

Chafua—A mixture of tortillas and bean soup.

Maini ya ng'ombe—liver from the cow

Usisahau na pale tulipokuwa tukinywa supu—Don't you forget those days when we used to take soup

Matumbo ya kuku—chicken offal (intestines). They are normally consumed in some African countries as delicacies.

"Dickson, umeona nguo zangu?"—"Dickson, have you seen my clothes?"

"Zii, ulikuwa umeweka wapi?"—"Noo, where did you put your clothes?"

"Nilikuwa nimeziweka karibu na zako tukienda kuduf."—"I had put them closer to yours when we went swimming."

"Nguo zangu umeziona?"—"Have you seen my clothes?"

"Ziko hapa lakini zangu haziko..."—"Your clothes are here but I can't see my clothes..."

"Tafuta tu utazipata!"—"Continue looking around, you'll find your clothes!"

"Rudisha hio chai!"—"Pour back the tea!"

"Mbona?"—"Why?"

"Acha kuniuliza maswali mengi yasiokuwa na kichwa Wala miguu. Nimesema urudishe hio chai!"—"Stop asking me meaningless questions. I said you pour back that tea!"

"...wewe huendangi kazi."—"...you don't work."

Ndovu—Wheat flour commonly used by Kenyan families for baking, especially when making tortillas.

Kimbo—Cooking fat.

Museve—Someone of Kikuyu (Kenyan tribe) origin.

Narobi —Luhya accent for Nairobi.

Muana wa Saoro nende mukhana museve khutura Kiambu—A child born by Soul and a Kikuyu lady from Kiambu.

Tikini—Milk tea, especially of higher milk concentration.

Mlugha kutoka baluhya—Tribalistic statement to mean someone from the luhya land.

"Tunaenda na kina Brian?"—"Is Brian coming with us?"

"Watakuja wiki moja baada ya wewe kufika."—"They will be joining you one week after your arrival."

Mama pima—local sales lady who sells alcoholic brews.

"Dickson unaenda wapi?"—"Dickson where are you going to?"

"Mamkubwa mbona hutaki niende kwa kina Juma?"—"Aunty, why don't you want me to visit the Jumas?"

"Unaona hapo karibu na huyo ng'ombe?"—"You see closer to that cow?"

"Sasa?"—"Hello?"

"Poa."—"Hello."

"Yuko kwa bafu anaoga"—"He is in the bathroom taking shower."