

THE PITFALL



NDIANG'UI NDUNG'U

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to all true friends:

Those whose friendship stands the test of time...
whose sacrifices know no bounds.

May it all come around.

SYNOPSIS

On an evening after school, Catherine is sent to the market by her ailing mother. With permission to buy herself a piece of roast maize, she stands in line awaiting her turn.

But the antics of the aged Mzee Jommo causes Catherine to fall into the murky waters of an open pit.

The arrogant Mr Mkorofi has for over a year refused to cover or fence off his unfinished building.

It takes the bravery of the homeless Big Ben to rescue Catherine. He and the persistence of the village elder lead the residents in a protest that involves the police.

At the end of a long struggle, Catherine is compensated, Mr Mkorofi is fined and Big Ben gets a new home and foster parents.

SOKO STREET

Residents of Furaha town marvelled at it. The architect who drew the architectural design of this great town took hours and days in his mind to design it. Various streets hosting many people and activities of the day did so at different times of the day, in unique series of patterns. For instance, the sun always rose first on Maisha Drive, Mpweke road, Afya and Soko Streets. All the residents of this town flocked into these streets in large numbers through the avenues, before diverting their attention to their respective destinations. Office Street appeared as the catchment of people and the mainstream that swum a crowd of people across. Maisha Drive and Mpweke Road hosted residential areas for all. Estates and bungalows were constructed under the beauty of stretch lawns of grasses and rows of flowers along the paths to the doorsteps. Shade trees of Jacaranda along the alleys connected one estate to the other. The alleys stretched further to the outcasts of the town. Furaha town's Top market fed its people as the farmers and sellers brought Fresh goods such as groceries, fruits and other farm products to it for sale. The market had a perimeter wall around it and two huge black gates serving as the entrance and the exit, West and East of it respectively.

During weekdays, the streets would be crowded with people, vehicles, and Motorbikes. All manner of hasty movements exhibits a good number of people heading to

their places of work, if not into the various shops to do purchases. Messengers in different companies' overalls or uniforms hurriedly walked to and from one building to the other, making either delivery or picking up invoices and orders of their goods and services. Secretaries in their seductive attires, long polished nails and distinguished hairstyles cat walked across pavements or hallways from one office to the other.

Cleaners, genitors, and clients flocked the hallways and corridors heading to their target buildings. Walkers held Briefcases, envelopes, and papers tightly in their hands, from time to time. A few other track loaders, loaded and offloaded trucks at the front of warehouses' doors. This street swallowed everyone.

* * *

Catherine was among the people on the streets. Her mother had sent her to purchase groceries and other goods from the Tumbo Kubwa shop. Catherine's mother could not make it to the market that evening because she was ill. Earlier on that day, she visited Doctor Uzima at Furaha Level Five hospital, who advised her to take a three days rest after treating her. She had no choice but to follow the Doctor's precautions. Therefore, she decided to send her daughter to the streets who in return had accepted without questioning her mother. However, she felt lonely in the absence of her mother, whom she accompanies each time she goes to the market. To keep

her daughter motivated, she had allowed her to spend some ten shillings of the whole amount, to buy something to eat. Besides, her daughter had just arrived from school, and she had not managed to prepare a meal for her.

Catherine hurried across the streets to save time. She could not waste time for her mother required her to prepare supper later on. She was to go back home and prepare the meal. She had to be quick to avoid annoying her. Catherine's favourite sisal-woven basket swung back and forth, as she raced ahead. She got it from her grandmother, who wove it for her. She liked carrying it whenever she accompanied her mother to the market. It served them right from time to time, her mother gave her lighter goods to carry in it home. This made her proud of herself. She felt like a big girl.

As she quickly walked along the street, she remembered her mother's frail voice calling out of their mud house, where she sat that evening. She recalled that she had arrived home from school. They exchanged greetings after which she quickly went into the house. She wore a light navy blue skirt and a yellow T-shirt, wrapped a *lesso* around her waist. When she was ready she walked out of the house and sat next to her mother.

"Catherine, I have not been feeling very well today. I have been to the hospital and after the doctor examined me, he said I am suffering from Malaria. He gave me

medicine, which has since left me feeling drowsy. I slept all afternoon after you left and have not been able to go to the market to make purchases for the evening meal. I am not sure if you will be able to do the purchases now that the market and Soko Street are crowded at this time of the day.”

“Mother, although I feel hungry, I can go to the market, I know where to buy ...remember, we have been to the market together and many times...” she had offered to go and after a moment of silence, Catherine’s mother heaved a sigh and spoke.

“Alright, there is some money on my bedside table. Take it and quickly go to the market and buy...” Before she gave her further instructions, she quickly rose, straightened her *lesso* and ran to the house.

“Wait a minute mother, I am coming.”

She came back with a pen and paper. With the paper on her lap, she listed necessary items as her mother mentioned them. Finally, she rose and quickly went into the house, and picked up the basket. She slid her feet into her slippers at the doorstep. Her mother called out to her.

‘Hurry up and be back before it is too dark, you know girls are not supposed to walk in the dark,’ said her mother.

“Alright mother, I will be back before you know it,” she said as she was leaving.

“Catherine...” her mother called out to her as she walked towards the gate to their home.

“Yes...” she responded as she stopped and turned round to face her mother who was sitting up on the mat.

“You can spend ten shillings on something you like at the market,” she told her as an afterthought.

With the prospect of buying herself something at the market, she undid and rewrapped her newest *lesso* around her waist over her blue skirt and off she went to fulfil her mother’s wish. Her urge to get back home in time to prepare the evening meal before her father got home, energized her. She knew that her father, who worked at Baraka clothes factory in Baraka town, often gets home very tired. He liked to take a hot bath before sitting at his favourite spot under a palm tree outside the house. Here, he would read a Swahili newspaper while listening to the evening news from his two-battery Sony radio. He loved the deep voice of the KBC radio presenter Fred Obachi Machokaa as he read the news of the day.

Quite often, her mother would sit near him after pouring a cup of hot black tea into a big mug for him and stirring in the sugar. He liked it sweet. She knew he would not be happy should he not find things in that order. She

feared his loud scolding voice more than she feared her mother is beating. This is because he rarely beat anybody, though, when he did, it was a thorough beating. He would give an errant child, a tongue-lashing that would hurt more than several strokes of the cane from her mother.

THE MARKET

Within no time, Catherine was standing beside the big black metallic gate that served as the entrance to the Top Market. Although it was too much crowded, she managed to find her way into it. Upon arrival, she made up her mind to buy the weightiest of the goods first, which would make her go deep into the market. Quickening her pace, she headed to the coconuts stalls where men and women were selling them. The sellers laid coconut sacks on the raised ground stalls nearer to the various alleys connecting one point to the other in the market. This is to be able to capture the attention of the passers-by, so that they could consider buying from them first, before moving to the other stalls selling other products.

Time to time she was forced to ignore the voices of men and women that tried to draw her attention to buy their coconuts. To some extent, she was forced to hesitate and smile at them in acknowledgement and walking forth. Each of them enticed her to buy as they made their last sales before nightfall, when the town council officials closed the market. Indeed, they would address her in all manner of ways.

“Mrembo, njoo nitakuuzia nazi nzuri, (beautiful one, come I will sell you good coconuts) one called out.

“Njoo mama mdogo nikuuzie nazi nzuri tena bei rahisi”

(young mother, come I will sell good coconuts to you at a good price) yet another called out to her.

As she looked around to locate the old lady from whom her mother had instructed her to buy, another daring seller rose from where she was seated and attempted to take her by hand. She shook the hand off when she saw her. The old lady sat silently on a sack beside her pile of coconuts at the centre of the coconut zone of the market. She seemed to be dozing.

Catherine quickly strode to the old lady's stall and greeted the old lady, customary.

"Shikamoo nyanya?" (How are you doing grandmother?) She asked in Kiswahili.

"Marahaba mjukuu wangu" (I am fine my granddaughter) the old lady answered. She went on to inquire the situation at home, most precisely, she was doubtful to see the girl alone without her mother. However, after Catherine explained that her mother was sick. She was piteous of her. It was a norm to exchange greetings before making purchases. To end it as quickly as possible, she hastily and impatiently answered the questions.

"And how many coconuts do you want to buy today?"

"Mother asked me to buy two only," Catherine answered.

Smiling warmly at the girl, the old lady bent forth and

lifted one coconut after the other, shook it close to her ear and put it back on the pile that lay on a sack at the ground. Finally, she settled on two medium-sized ones. Paying attention to them and satisfied, she laid them on bare ground before Catherine's feet. Looking up she said.

"That will be thirty shillings but for the sake of your sick mother at home, I will take twenty-five."

Without engaging into further negotiations, Catherine quickly counted twenty-five shillings and handed the ten-shilling note and fifteen shillings in coins to her. She picked the coconuts and put them in the basket. She thanked the old lady as she lifted her basket to leave. In turn, the old lady wished Catherine's mother a quick recovery.

With the basket firmly held in her hands, Catherine let her eyes roam around the market in search of the other items she needed to buy. She headed off to the vegetable stalls. Here, she selected the best bunch of Amaranths and added them to the basket.

After she got them, she bought tomatoes, bulb onions as well as a bulb of garlic. As soon as all these items were in the basket, she could no longer carry it in her hands. She lifted it, and just as she had done on numerous occasions, she put it on her head and left.

Walking along Soko Street, she finger-counted all the items she had bought as she tried to keep record of

those she had not from the list she had made before leaving home earlier on. Once through, she headed to Tumbo Kubwa shop located some yards from the main exit to the Top Market. She ordered for half a kilo of sugar, half a litre of cooking oil, bread, tea leaves and lastly a two-kilogram packet of maize flour.

Finally, she handed over the small plastic bottle into which to pour her measure of the cooking oil. The shop attendant walked from one side of the shop to the other picking the items from the various shelves and laid them on the counter next to Tumbo Kubwa, who sat on a high stool with his big belly partially on the table. He bent to measure half a litre of oil from the bucket that stood in the middle of the shop with the tin cans placed on the lid.

“Is that all, young girl?” he asked looking down at Catherine with his big bulging eyes.

“Yes,” she quickly said. After wearing a large pair of spectacles over his eyes, Tumbo Kubwa lazily dragged the calculator on the tabletop close to him and tapped figures on it. He pushed each item across the counter close to her nose, which reached the level of the high counter.

“That will add up to one hundred and seventy-three shilling for you my girl,” he announced and yawned, a scowl enhancing the wrinkles on his face. He looked at Catherine over the rim of his huge spectacles. As soon as

Catherine unknotted one end of the lessa and peeled two notes from what she had, Tumbo Kubwa's scowl changed into a smile. His tongue quickly licked his thick black lips leaving bubbles on it, as he quickly reached out for the money.

"No wonder my mother says that Tumbo Kubwa is greedy!" She mused to herself. All this time, he had worn a sullen face but on seeing the money from me, his face brightened up. He could afford to give an ugly smile!

She thought as she slowly laid the basket on the floor. After packing all the purchases, he made up his mind to go to Raha Leo butchery to buy beef. The thought of it brought a smile to her face. Tumbo Kubwa was impatiently beckoning the next customer.

THE BUTCHERY

Catherine enjoyed buying meat from Raha Leo Butchery for two reasons: first, the air-conditioned interior of the butchery, offered a relatively cool atmosphere from the hot dusty air outside. Secondly, her mother said that the attendants were not as shrewd as those at Malipo Butchery attendants.

Therefore, Catherine made up her mind to buy meat at Raha Leo Butchery. She lifted the full basket to her bent knee and tried raising it onto her head. Unfortunately, she could not. It was too heavy that she staggered. Just as she was about to fall, a strong hand held her basket and lifted it up for her. A voice finally came up.

“Your mother should not make you carry a heavy load on your head. You may not grow any taller!”

She recognized the voice. It was Mrs. Masumbuko’s: the kind elderly teacher of Neno Jipya primary School. She shyly turned around and faced her. Catherine explained why she went shopping alone before Mrs. Masumbuko launched further accusations against her mother. Shaking her head, her teacher lifted the basket onto her head as she spoke kindly to her:

“Tell your mother that I wish her a quick recovery. Assure her that her daughter will grow to be a very responsible woman!” she said.

As Catherine entered Raha Leo Butchery, she turned around to check whether Mrs Masumbuko had gone, only to find her gazing at her. “Poor girl,” she seemed to say. She waved at her as she reached for the door handle in anticipation.

It was quite hot on Soko Street. The evening sun sunk beyond the horizon as the vast mass of people mingled. However, that changed drastically as soon as she entered the butchery. The temperatures cooled, almost cold as soon as the self-propelled door closed. She stopped for a moment at the door to savour the cool air blowing towards her from the air conditioner erected on the wall facing the entrance. It felt like leaving an oven and landing in a freezer. No wondered so many residents of Furaha town flocked to it during the day, just to enjoy the cool temperatures.

To enjoy the breeze further, she took her time to place her order, despite the fact that the butchery was flocked with a number of attendants who were quick to serve its clients. She delayed further pretending to select the best chunk of meat freshly cut and laid down in a display box. This took a while until one of the attendants with a huge sharp chopping knife pointed at her saying.

“Wewe, unataka nini?” (You, what do you want?) His voice glowed.

The voice startled Catherine. She quickly made her order. The attendant quickly cut off a piece of meat from

the chunks hanging on the hooks above the display box. He bent to pick a few bones from chopping boards on a stump of wood. He weighed it on a weighing scale. Satisfied, he nodded to Catherine and reached out for a brown wrapper, placed the meat in it, and wrapped and sealed it with tape. He handed over the meat to Catherine. In exchange, Catherine handed over the amount of money required. Though she had not any other business in there, the room was so cool that she felt like spending more time in it. However, the sun was disappearing in the sky, and she had to hurry home to prepare supper.

ROAST MAIZE

The popping sound and the mouth-watering roasting aroma of Bwana Hindi's maize roasting tray beckoned Catherine. Her full attention stuck to a magnitude of people crowded at the fiery furnace, while some walked away munching pieces of roasted maize. One look at their grinding jaws set a Well in her mouth. As she was about to imagine how sweet munching could be a pool of saliva was finding its way out. She swallowed it earnestly. She imagined throwing one grain after the other into her mouth as she walked home that evening. There and then, she made up her mind. Yes, she knew what to do! With the ten shillings at hand, she decided to stop by and buy a share of roasted maize as she went home.

Within a short while, she joined the multitude of people surrounding the roasting tray before Bwana Hindi. Bwana Hindi was either busy fanning the roasting furnace or not turning the roasting maize. The crowd before him looked like a congregation waiting for a sacrament. They patiently waited. Most of them folded their hands and interlocked them together by the elbows. She undid the edge of her lessa and extracted a twenty-shilling coin. Taking a stride, she outstretched her palm and gave it to Bwana Hindi. This was to ensure that she never missed a share. Indeed, she longed to have a bite of it, for the popping sound of the roasting

grains and the thought of chewing it made her mouth water further. She made her order:

“Give me a piece, ten shillings worth please.” Picking the twenty-shilling coin and placing it into his apron pocket, Bwana Hindi responded.

“Young girl, wait for a minute or two while this cob roasts fully. I will give back your balance in a moment”

Bwana Hindi fanned the furnace expertly and turned the maize to roast evenly. They beautifully turn from white into golden brown. For some that would longer roast unmanned, he charred the black parts of them clean. One look at him, and you would definitely marvel at his charring skills. He did it away from the roasting tray, tossing the cob up, and back into his hand each time he wanted to turn it for further charring. This made everyone impatient including Catherine whose sight and the sweet aroma from the roasting maize left her eagerly waiting.

Finally, he laid the cardboard on a mesh wire on the maize roasting tray at the edge of the furnace to avoid it catching fire too. He clapped his hands clean of maize soot and ash, dipping his right hand into his white apron pocket. He extracted a handful of coins from it. He counted two five-shilling coins from the amount and handed them over to Catherine.

“Ten shillings is your balance,” he said.

Catherine nodded to affirm this and received the money. Hardly had she wrapped the coin onto her lesso, when she heard a voice booming behind her.

“Young girl, did your mother send you to buy maize or to buy vegetables from the market?” the gruff voice said.

At first, she did not take that it addressed her. She turned around to check it out. Perhaps know what crime whoever was addressed had committed. She could not hide her amusement when her eyes locked with the accuser. The big bulging red eyes popped out of their sockets. They seemed ready to fall off the big bearded face with thick eyebrows that sat on a thick neck under the mass of black and grey hair. His right-hand index finger with a long dirty nail pointed at her accusingly. As he spoke, the few brown teeth were revealed beneath a mesh of black and grey moustache.

Hardly had she explained herself than the bearded face man dashed forth in search. He took a few steps towards a charcoal seller's stall next to Bwana Hindi, pulled out a prank stick from a pile, and dashed back to Catherine. Lifting it high, he rushed towards her frothing.

“I will teach you a lesson, you shall never steal money from your mother so that you can buy maize when you come to the market!” he shouted.

“I am not a thief! I have been sent by my mother, and she has allowed me to spend ten shillings!” Catherine

shouted back while firmly facing her accuser.

“You are lying! I know little mischievous girls like you tell a lie. But today is your day. I will whack the mischief out of you!” he affirmed it as he made his way to Catherine.

He spewed saliva as he spoke. As his mesh of beards trapped some of it, that trickled down to his bushy chin. Some dripped onto his chest, as it stained and moistened his formerly white Microsoft Logo mid-section branded T-shirt. However, he raced unstably. Knee caps knocked each other, and his head constantly swung from left to right, back and forth, while his belly led the way darting from one side to the other. He was determined to discipline the girl.

Catherine was not sure whether the bearded face, the red eyes or the huge piece of stick scared her. She tightly held her basket strap across her head with her hands firmly. She quickly dashes behind one of Bwana Hindi’s clients watching the drama closely. She clung to his pair of trousers using her left hand. The man tried to free himself in fear of being smacked by the mad man, but the grip was too firm. He pressed her wrist after gripping her hand firmly, the pain was so severe that it shot through her arm to her shoulder forcing her to let go of the man. She sorted to take refuge elsewhere before the mad man caught up with him. Catherine dashed and hid behind Bwana Hindi. She peered to check the madman’s pursuit from time to time. She was so scared,

nothing of the sort had ever happened to her before. Sure enough, her eyes were welled up with tears; she made yet another spirited attempt to explain herself.

“I am telling you I did not steal money from my mother! She allowed me to use ten shillings of her money. She could not make it to the market for she is sick.” She insisted.

“Hey!” shouted Bwana Hindi, “Stop harassing my customer!” as he shielded Catherine from the advancing Madman.

“Move away and let me teach this little thieving rascal some manners!” he said back as he waved the stick menacingly.

Though Bwana Hindi was used to the Madman’s comical games such as his antics of role-playing a moral Sherriff of Furaha town, he could not tell what had got into the maniac’s mind. He appeared unruly on that day. True to his observations, the man had spent the entire day chasing after the youngsters. This scared bwana Hindi even more. In any case, if the man-caused any havoc to anyone, he would be responsible if they were ever together. Bwana Hindi felt responsible for the old man’s actions. He had spent the entire day trying to stop him, but it seemed like nothing was working as per his expectations.

Jommo, the lunatic has been roaming around the town

ever since Bwana Hindi can remember. He would sit next to him each day after loitering around the town. However much he was mad, he was well-educated. Neno Jipya Primary School had a great history of sending its first pupil to Elimu National School, one of the best public schools in Furaha. They prided on him over the years. As if that wasn't enough, he worked so hard and was enrolled at Faulu University to study Bachelor in Medicine. Luckily, he won a scholarship in his second year to study at Harvard University but unfortunately, he ran mad a year later. This resulted in him being deported back to the country. His parents Mr and Mrs. Rohosafi were tormented when he was brought back. However, peasant farmers in Furaha area, tried so hard to cater for Jommo's medication. They hired the best mental doctors, but it was all in vain. Their son's condition never got better. They gave up on him but ensured that he had shelter and food.

Jommo's life became a tragic tragedy. Unfortunately, he lost his parents in a road accident on a fine morning. They had been called to pick Jommo up from the streets after his mental condition worsened. Just like on this eventual day, Jommo walked into the market and turned chaotic. He walked over tomatoes roughing everyone in the market. As they travelled from their home at Umoja to the outcast of Furaha town to the East, a matatu they were travelling in was run over by an overspeeding truck. Not even a single passenger was left alive.

“Don’t you see you are scaring this young girl out of her wits? Stop this ranting! This girl has told you her truth, why can’t you believe that her mother gave her the money and stop scaring her!” Bwana Hindi pleaded.

He desperately yearned to get back to his roasting furnace. The cobs he had placed onto the mesh before the commotion were blackening, as nobody was there to turn them. He had been forced to move far away from the threat each time Jommo swung the weapon he held to threaten them. With each step they made, they moved to the alley before business shops and stalls, heading to an incomplete building situated a few metres from Bwana Hindi’s roasting furnace.

BIG BEN

Big Ben had been wabe Iohing the saga from among the branches of a mango tree. Everyone knew him very well, most precisely, the traders. It isn't that he was as big as he was referred to, but he was fairly big and independent. Holding a catapult in his right hand, he took a shot at Jommo the lunatic as he addressed him.

"Wee Mzae sareana na hako kamanzi... kwani kame du nini?" (Old man, leave the little girl alone. What is it that she has done to you?)

Unfortunately, he missed his target and hit the prank of wood. He hardly misses his prey. The rattle crack of his frail hands seemed to fuel Jommo's resolution to teach the girl some manners as he dictated it. Pointing up onto the tree, he shouted.

"You see who your advocates are? Crooks, just like you are! That's why I am saying you are up to no good and I have to teach you some manners!"

Anguished, Bwana Hindi's anger welled up especially after witnessing smoke billowing out of his maize roasting pan as the cobs burnt. Behind him, Catherine whimpered and clutched at Bwana Hindi's apron with one hand. The other tightly held the heavy basket.

The pair kept on moving backwards as Jommo swung his weapon, their full attention was glued to the

swinging prank of wood. Neither they nor the crowd was aware of the glaring danger behind Catherine and Mzee Hindi. With every move they made, they headed to a twenty by fifteen feet unsecured pit right in front of the incomplete building. The pit was full of water, almost to the brim after a previous heavy downpour. Every one of them moved their head to each side the prank swung headed. Suddenly someone shouted.

“Watch out! You are going to fall into the pit!” His loud voice rang above the pleas of the people to the old man.

The mango tree was Big Ben’s sanctuary, every time after collecting scraps in town; he would rest on its branches. More so, he made it after stealing a fruit from the sellers in the market. Reasonably, he never stole each moment; he only did it whenever he lacked scraps to sell to the dealer behind Top Market. Big Ben always scavenged for papers, plastics or metal scraps to feed himself if not buy a few mitumba clothes to dress. An old jacket served him right during the cold season and as a blanket at night.

The boy always targeted the sellers when he could not bear hunger. He never ever stole from their customers or anybody from the streets. Every time he stole, he meandered through the pathways along the streets, targeting the mango tree. His pursuant found it tough to get hold of him, for as soon as he climbed up the tree, he pulled out the catapult and shot at them.

On the other hand, when clean enough to be trusted, he would carry goods for sellers from one point in the market to the other, if not purchases for customers from the shops to the bus stations. He would be lucky for, in such instances, he earned himself ten shillings. Some of his clients would be lenient enough to pay him twenty shillings. These were rare days not even during festive seasons when money would flow in bulk.

The boy's yell startled everyone as the rustle of the leaves marked his hasty scramble down the tree towards Jommo, Bwana Hindi, and Catherine. Everyone's attention shifted from the prank of wood to the boy jumping off the tree. As Catherine tried to look up to the tree, she momentarily forgot she had a basket on her head. It tilted from her left hand to her right hand. She freed her other hand that had all this time held Bwana Hindi's apron. She tried to regain her stability as she rescued her heavy basket that was slipping off her head but to no avail.

While everyone's attention was on Big Ben, Bwana Hindi seized a great opportunity to wrestle off the prank of wood from Jommo's hand. He jumped forward and got hold of the prank off his hands. They struggled back and forth as each one of them pulled it strongly towards themselves. Both of them tried to regain stability when their counterpart would pull the prank of wood

forcefully. The struggle caused havoc. With all his might Jommo pulled his weapon towards him and jerked off Catherine who by then had held back onto Bwana Hindi's apron shortly after regaining her stability. Before she was dragged all the way, she let go of the apron and stepped back to evade the wrestling men. Her heavy basket once again swung backwards, and she was forced to hold onto it with her two hands. It swayed off her head. It was too late. Little did she know that she was standing at the edge of a pit, she slipped back into the flooded pit. She let go of everything in an attempt to stabilize herself. Off she went. As she fell, Catherine let out a cry that appalled everyone around. Bwana Hindi's head snapped backwards. His hands flew towards her after letting go of the plank of wood. He tried to rescue her from falling into the pit, but it was too late. Jommo stopped in his tracks with the plank of wood held high above his head. He was a statue erected by the path. The gathering crowd, especially women, let out a pleading yell that brought the whole of Soko Street to a standstill. A slight splash of water as the heavy spilling basket landed on the water surface could be seen followed by a loud splash as she dived into the water.

For a moment, her hands and legs fought to remain afloat but with very little success. She started drowning in the water safe from ripples and bubbles that broke onto the surface of the murky water. She tried hard to gulp some air into her lungs. A few minutes later

nothing could be seen on the surface of the water but a while later coconuts, a satchel of Royco and an empty basket resurfaced.

RESCUE

As soon as Big Ben recovered from shock, he dropped his catapult and raced behind the incomplete building. A while later he emerged and went towards the pit, he checked into it and raced back to behind the building again. He re-emerged with a ladder in his hands. Without a word safe for a tough look at Jommo, he placed it right onto Jommo's feet. Shocked he jumped up to escape knocking his toes onto it and stepped back blankly staring at Big Ben. As he did it, a huge crowd of people was gathering around the pit closely monitoring the events of the day.

When it was intact, he took off his shirt and shoes, before diving into the pit. His splash was lighter compared to Catherine's thud fall. He disappeared into the water before resurfacing shortly to gulp some air. He paddled the water with his left hand, and he wiped his face with his right hand. He filled his lungs with fresh air and disappeared into the water again. Ripples and bubbles surfaced as he swam into the bottom of the pit. A few minutes later, he reappeared, looked around, and inhaled some more air before disappearing again. The crowd gathering around the pit was quiet in fear and anticipation.

Suddenly Catherine's head appeared, and she earnestly gasped for air at a pit corner. Everyone around the top of the pit raised an alarm. They shouted pointing at her,

the worries and tension had united them, and they did not realize that they were doing everything in unison. She found it hard to swim and with her mouth open, she took a gulp after a gulp of water as she tried to call for help. She slowly seemed to be losing her battle to stay afloat. She finally sunk into the water again.

Immediately after she sunk, Big Ben appeared once again. The lot of people shouting after him caught his attention.

“There she goes young man? You had better hurry up before the girl succumbs in water. Hey! Move it man. Do it now! There she goes.”

His sight was blurring though, he had to clear mirages of water flowing from his long hair down his face. He hurriedly wiped his face with his hand. When his sight was clear, he saw Catherine’s head pop out of water at a distance, and it disappeared again. He shot up halfway out of the water level and inhaled deeply before diving into the water once again. Eventually, he swam to Catherine.

Every business came to a standstill as most of the sellers and buyers stood by the pit if not crane their neck from their stalls to get a glimpse of the events. This gave some ample time for pickpockets and snatchers to steal displayed goods on stalls and walk away comfortably. Everyone was glued to the occurrences.

A moment later, the pair appeared again. Big Ben was holding the girl by the wrist, facing the opposite direction. Some of her shopped items were floating around them as they danced in the turbulence of waves made by the floating youngsters. From a close look, she was drifting into unconsciousness with the mucky water lapping at her floating face threatening to submerge her once again.

“Drop and hold the ladder carefully for the poor boy!” Somebody shouted from among the crowd.

The surface around the pit was too sloppy and slippery for anyone to lend Ben a hand. Thus, he had to pull up the girl’s weight and his up the rungs of the ladder and out of the pit. He held the unconscious girl with one hand as the other held onto the rungs of the ladder, nearest to the water surface. He sought the nearest rung under the water with his foot and carefully stepped on it to avoid sliding into the mucky water. Step by step, he started rising from the pit. He leans on the ladder for a time to retain his stability and hold onto the next rung as he climbed up. Though it was tedious, he pressed on, and by the time, he held onto the third rung, they were completely out of water. Silence around the pit was contagious. Only drops of water would be heard falling off as their splash intertwined with the rustle of the leaves of the mango tree above the pit.

Just then, someone reached out and lifted the unconscious

girl out of Big Ben's hands. Other bystanders gave Big Ben a hand. He sat next to the unconscious Catherine to catch his breath.

"Isn't she dead?" someone asked as he turned and stared at the crowd gathering around as if to confirm from them.

This snapped Big Ben's mind back to the present! He jumped up as he pushed out the crowd afar from the girl's sight.

"Give this girl some space to recover! She needs fresh air more than you uneducated people do!"

Thereafter, he knelt down and tried to resuscitate her. She did not respond at all.

"She is dead! Mzee Jommo has killed someone's daughter!" a voice came up out of the crowd.

"*Haiya!* Jommo with his foolish antics!" another added.

"He should also die!" another added as others followed in a chorus.

"He should die! He should die! He should die!"

The crowd charged as they bay for Mzee Jommo's blood. A good number of them started walking forth towards him. The poor old man was sitting under Big Ben's Mango tree; his head was drooped between his open palms with his eyes fixed onto the ground in front of

him. He was sobbing in fear of his pursuant wrath. He was worried that they might work on him harshly.

“Oh my God! What do I do now? I never wanted to kill the little girl.” He cried.

“Such an old man and you behave like a kid!” someone rebuked.

“I will not do that again. I did not want the girl to get hurt” Jommo retorted.

Within no time, a crowd gathered around him and started roughing him one by one. Some had stones in their hands, while others carried with them pranks of wood. Luckily, they were not quick enough to act. They seemed to buy time for a reason that was incomprehensible.

In the midst of the argument, Bwana Hindi stood towering before Jommo. The overhead shadow drew his attention and he gradually raised his head and fixed his glare into Bwana Hindi’s eyes.

“Didn’t I warn you numerously that you should stop scaring my customers, yet you haven’t heard me at all?” he paused and frowned angrily at him. His eyes sparkled through the slits across them.

“He has to be taught a lesson! A woman among the crowd declared. “The other day, he bullied my son rushing after him. My son almost broke a leg escaping

the fierce looking man. No wonder he ran; this man's bushy face features that of a Gorilla.

"Woooooi!" someone in the crowd moaned.

"I will not do that again please forgive me!" he pleaded

Suddenly someone lifted Jommo up like a bag of maize. Within no time, his feet were hanging in the air as he briefly peddled it. He was gently released to the ground a while later.

"Get up and leave this place now and let you not be seen anywhere around this place unless you have sales or purchases to make." He declared.

Furaha Gymnasium Bouncer's hoarse voice cracked from behind Jommo as he struggled onto his feet and tried to wriggle himself out of the grip with little success. The bouncer's face looked crumpled and one could confuse his huge masculine body to a hut erected by the road. This left Jommo speechless. Thus, instead of speaking, he hitched his dirty black coat, turned around before facing the ground, hobbling away. The thought that he had escaped lynching made him dare not to turn back.

“SHE IS ALIVE!”

Onto his knees, Big Ben worked frantically to revive Catherine. He laid his open palms firmly onto the girl's upper abdomen and pressed firmly downwards, once, twice, thrice. There seemed to be no response. Desperately, he quickly shifted his position and knelt next to her head; with his thumbs and index finger, he closed his nostrils. As a last resort, he brought his mouth to hers, parted her lips, and forced air into her mouth. He tried once, twice, on the third trial, she coughed slightly as her chest heaved slightly for the first time. All of a sudden she sputtered and just in time Big Ben pulled away to avoid the first jet of water shooting from inside Catherine. Torrents of dirty water flowed out of her mouth and nose as she coughed. He turned her onto her right hand as everyone looked at her in awe.

She's alive!" a voice came up.

"This 'chokora' knows so much!" someone commented.

"Chokora for president!" another jokingly shouted. Everyone burst into laughter as echoes of joy thrilled as they chanted all along.

Big Ben assumed them and paid his attention only to the whimpering girl. She spat a mixture of water and mucus. Ben put his open palm onto her chest close to her shoulder blades and the other onto her chest back and massaged her. This eased the cough and as she

emptied dirty water, the cough ceased.

Catherine stopped crying shortly after recovering. Her thoughts however wandered to her home under a mango tree where her mother lain. She was worried of her condition by then. Tears welled up, as she pitied her. She finally managed to sit up, shivering from cold and dumpy clothes. It was a breezy evening too, which accelerated the tremor. Catherine's knees folded as her chin rested onto them. Her hands encircled her legs. Big Ben settled down next to her patting her back gently to calm her down. The huge crowd stood right there too, watching.

Hardly had the storm settled when a blaring hooting of a car startled everyone again. The composed crowd scampered giving way to the over-speeding vehicle heading to the arena. Some ran into the incomplete building, a good number ran to the streets, others headed to Top market while the timid, hid behind the bushes around the incomplete building. Only Catherine and Big Ben were left-scared to the brim. Catherine tried to rise up and escape, but Big Ben pulled her back to her position and assured her.

"Stay put, whoever they are, they can't run over us without risking landing in the pit!" Big Ben whispered.

Her red teary eyes stared at him blankly as Big Ben wiped a mixture of water and sweat from her face with a

greasy handkerchief he pulled out of his pocket. As he did this, he keenly monitored the approaching car.

A loud screech of brakes brought the car to a halt about two metres from where the youngsters sat. Catherine could not stand the scary scene and hence she clung onto Big Ben's blue pair of Jeans trousers, who was kneeling next to her facing the car. The glaring of the car dimming lights of the day was blurring their sight to an extent that, they had to involuntarily shade their eyes with their open palms. A loud bang of the car door ushered a man's tapping of a walking stick, rustle of sand in the midst of renewed silence. A figure shaded the two youngsters. Expecting trouble, the crowd closed in on the trio.

"I am Mr. Mkorofi, the owner of the incomplete building over here; all of you are accused of trespassing on private property. I have the authority to arraign you into a court of law. But before that, can someone tell me what the matter is?"

A heavily built middle-aged man, in a long trench coat under which a black suit a white shirt and a red tie lay. His black shoes shone like a mirror on the golden ray of the evening dying sun. The brown hut onto his head marched with his light skin save for the well-trimmed beards that marched his black trench coat. As he spoke he hanged his walking stick onto his right hand, and he fumbled into his coat fetching a packet of cigarette and a

lit up.

“I can explain, ’a voice announced from within the crowd.

“Move your big bellies and give way,” someone else called out as he pushed everyone aside to make way.

A tall forty years or so old man in a white attire, that consisted his suit shirt and shoes emerged from the crowd. Comparing him with Mkorofi, he was a bit slim though healthy. His head and chin were clean shaved. He was fairly black, composed, and authoritative in nature. He walked forth and stood in front of the still glaring car lights before Mkorofi next to Big Ben and Catherine. Mkorofi who was by then smoking his cigar lifted his face as he released billows of smoke through his nose onto the man’s face. He coughed before mumbling a rebuke incomprehensibly. Big Ben rose up hissing in anger, but the guy signalled him to hold back which he did but stood right next to the two leaving Catherine sitting on the sandy ground puzzled.

Finally, Mkorofi lifted his walking stick and cleared his throat to speak. He was deliberately taking as much and enough time as possible to assert his superiority. Pointing at the man, he spoke.

“First..., who are you?”

“I am Jackson Kiti,” he replied.

“And what position do you hold in this town?”

“I am the Town Head within which your building stands,” he answered.

“Tell me what is happening here. I want to know what all these people are doing on my premises,” the man retorted amid clouds of irritating smoke. He held onto the stem of his walking stick and faced down. His face was completely hidden from the people in front of him.

RICH BAD MAN

“We have had a lot of troubles since this building was set here. First, the contractor infringed on the neighbouring land to the west of it, which is against the law. More to that, the construction materials were delivered and left to a neighbouring plot to the East without the owner’s consent or permission.” He paused. Someone moaned from the crowd.

“Shut up you loudmouth!” another shouted. Silence reigned again before Mr. Jackson continued.

“We have lived in this area long before you arrived and decided to put up this building over here. The pit dug before it, is dangerous to all of our animals and us. We requested your workers to cover it up but they rudely said that we should do it ourselves if it bothers us too much. They said we have hands that can hold a shovel and legs that can carry us back and forth, as we carry materials to cover it up. Consequently, many Furaha town residents have lost their animals in this pit nonetheless; it is hazardous for it harbours mosquitoes in the dirty water. Our children have been to the hospital almost on daily basis suffering from malaria. This pit has been lying open and full of water for the last six months and it’s not that you were not aware but you have turned deaf.” He paused and cleared his throat.

“Today’s incident is the last stroke on the camel’s back

for our own daughter almost died tonight. Were it not for this courageous young man who took a risk of diving into it to save her, I guess we would be singing a different song by now. By the way, she has lost all her belonging she shopped a few hours ago and her money too to this hole that you people left open.” Mr. Jackson explained.

Just as he prepared to speak again, Mkorofi lifted up his stick and gestured for him to remain silent. He dropped his half-smoked cigarette onto the ground and stepped onto it with his sparkling black cowboy boots. It went off immediately. He lifted his face up, took off his hat, and held it with his thumb and index finger, scratching his scalp with his left hand’s middle finger; he glued his eyes to Jackson’s. He seemed angered. He frowned and spoke pointing at him.

“You say this pit has existed for six months?”

“Yes it has...” the Jackson, replied.

“And everyone knows it does exist?” the man asked.

“Yes they do...But...”

“No buts, we want to deal with facts here as we get to the bottom of this matter as quickly as possible without wasting time.” He paused and then spoke, “so if every one of you knows that this pit exists, who is wiser between the pit and the stupid residents around here. I guess the pit has no eyes and ears but your silly residents

have.

Puzzled by Mkorofi's utterances, Jackson tried to open up his mouth and speak but not a word came out of it. He did not understand what the man was insinuating.

"What are you trying to say?" he finally managed to speak after a moment of silence.

After a slight cough to clear his throat, the man went on unperturbed. His index finger was pointing at Jackson.

"I believe that you are not deaf and you have heard what I said. What I am saying is simply that this pit has existed here for a while longer; it should not bother you if you are not passing through my land? He paused shortly and spoke again.

"...As a leader, you know your people are messing up by trespassing through my land and you still blame me for all the problems inflicted on this community? Do you by any chance listen to yourself as you speak? That cannot work. You see, even as we speak, all of you have trespassed and if I would want to hold you, responsible right now, I would do without a second thought."

Jackson tried to retaliate but he signalled him not to speak thus he shut up.

"And where is the girl you say almost drowned?" he asked as he turned to face the crowd.

"Right behind you" a voice replied. It was Big Ben as he

held Catherine on his shoulders in front of him.

He turned around and faced Catherine. Remorselessly, he looked Catherine into her eyes and in a stern voice, he spoke.

“You fell into the pit because you were trespassing on my land. Now, young girl, run home and inform your parents about what happened here, so that they can send you to the market again before it closes.” He turned to the crowd, “as for the rest of you, get off my property before I call the police.”

Big Ben’s anger welled up in him. He moved closer and looked him in the eyes and hissed into his face.

“If it were not for your negligence, this pit should have been covered, this construction area should have been fenced off, and this girl here would not have fallen into this pit. Subsequently, she would not have lost all her shopping!”

A bit perturbed by Big Ben’s daring, he took one step backwards and retaliated.

“You dare call me negligent? When I have brought development to this worthless town?

If I were negligent, would I have had all these property and others elsewhere?” he lifted his cane and pointed it at Big Ben, “Young man, can you watch your tongue before I whack you senselessly!” he said. Big Ben took a

step towards the man and held up a fist to him. Through his clenched teeth, he hissed.

“I dare you to try and see! I am strong enough to handle three of your type!”

“Listen to him!” Mkorofi shouted, “Aren’t you the rogue I chased out of my premises last month?”

“Yes! And you did not pay me even after I rendered my services to you diligently. You hired me to safeguard your construction site but paid me not at the end of the month.” Big Ben reiterated.

Catherine pulled at his dirty, worn-out jacket to let things rest. Taken aback by Big Ben’s bravery, he half-turned as he quickly headed to his car. Unsatisfied, Big Ben continued,

“The people of this town have a right to walk around in peace without the risk of falling into your open pits!”

The man ignored Big Ben and continued to walk towards the car. He put his walking stick under his armpit and fumbling in his pocket, he eventually fished out a mobile phone. He held it onto his ear after pressing a number of buttons and quickly spoke. Because of the murmurs of the crowd, one could not hear what or to whom he was saying it.

He opened the passenger door as the driver revved the Range Rover. Before he got in, he stood on the floor of

the car, supporting himself on the open door and shouted,

“I am now going to the police station. There I will report that there are trespassers who have harassed me on my own property. If you were wise enough, you would leave before the police arrive. If you will still be here, you know what the police are capable of doing to you. Leave!”

With that, he got into the car and banged the door shut.

The driver quickly reversed the car and drove off burying the people in a cloud of dust. Big Ben had not moved, Catherine had quickly scrambled to her feet and she was hiding from the glare of the headlights behind Big Ben whose sweaty face gleamed in the moonlight.

At the top of his voice, Big Ben warned, “let nobody move, we all have a right to be listened to and be protected from this kind of people. His arrogance cannot kill us all and will not cow us into giving up our rights! Let us wait for the officers and hear what they have to say!”

“But they will beat us senselessly!” a voice said.

“Shut up! You are a coward. You will scamper home and hide in your sheets as someone robs your rights from under your silly nose!” a seller scolded to the man.

“The young man is right!” shouted Mr. Jackson. I am going nowhere. I will wait for the police with this young

girl here so she gets her compensation and perhaps gets listened to.” He said that as he walked closer to Catherine. The two, he and Big Ben stood on either side of the scared girl.

“Better still, we can do a fundraising so that this girl can take food home to her parents.” Big Ben suggested.

“That is right! I know this girl, her father is my workmate!” A Hassan shouted from behind the crowd. He pushed through the people and stood in front of them with his hat in his hand. He put his other hand into his pocket and fished out some coins. He put them into the hollow of the cap and shook the cap. The jingle of the coins seemed to wake the people from their slumber. They came forward to put some money into the hat. Big Ben was very keen to spot those that would try to do as he would; were the circumstances different. To steal some money, he would have just pretended to be holding money in his clenched fist in the hat but instead would pick some cash out of it.

Almost all of the people gathered there came forward to give what they could afford in aid of Catherine. Before Big Ben and the volunteer could count the money, a short man in a brown ‘Kaunda suit’ with a briefcase in his hands arrived and stood in front of Big Ben and Catherine.

“What is happening here?” he inquired.

Big Ben turned around and faced the man. "It's just as you can see..." but before Big Ben could say more Mr. Jackson came in aid and shook the man's hand. Big Ben realized that the two knew each other and his anger subsided.

"Bwana Engineer, this girl here fell into this pit ...," he explained. His left hand held Catherine's shoulders and his right hand pointed at the pit. "It was dug by the employees of the owner of this building and left uncovered..."

"I know." said the man. "I have been trying to find the owner so that I can give him this demand letter from the government, requiring him to fence off this construction site as per the law but in vain."

"Then you are lucky and we too have got back up!" Jackson shouted above the murmur of the crowd.

"Why?" asked the man a bit perturbed by the turn of events.

"The owner has been here a few minutes ago. As he said, he is Mkorofi and I guess his name suits him. He said he has gone to Furaha Police Station to report harassment by trespassers on this premises. He will be back in a while I guess you should wait," Jackson responded.

"I am going nowhere dawn or dusk as long as he is coming back. That rascal has made me tear through this

place like a wolf looking for him. I am waiting right here.
He responded.

THE POLICE

A Range rover sport sped to the police station compound and halt directly in front of the flag assembly that stood at the centre of the well-lit perimeter walled compound with lawns of grass finely trimmed like a carpet, after the rows of flowers before them. Paths slide through the compound leading to different destinations. To the left hand of the entrance heading south, was a garage and a warehouse stood before it. A number of carrier trucks stood under the roof shortly after the warehouse. To the right hand just after the gate heading west of the compound, were waiting for tents. Clients are always settled there waiting to walk if need be. Furaha Police Station stood opposite Furaha Dispensary along Afya Street.

The station comprised five rooms curved to form a capital C design. Green corrugated iron sheets crowned roofing with the yellow, red and green stripes painted the buildings. Behind the administration block at a distance of five metres, the Station quarters inside a Kei Apple fenced compound. Hardly had the dust settled when Mkorofi hopped off the car and headed to the administration block. He stormed into a spacious room which was a waiting bay erected before a huge black counter with a huge book placed on it. A title was boldly written on it; *occurrence book*. Behind the counter stood a tall broad-shouldered man in uniform. He had a radio

call hung on a strap onto his left-hand shoulder. The officer was busy noting down in a huge diary. He was not startled when Mkorofi walked in.

“Good evening officer?”

“Good evening to you too sir, what can I do for you?”

“Officer, I have come to report trespass on my land by a group of people of Furaha town, led by a rogue who is inciting them and making unfounded demands on me!” he said.

Hastily, the officer opened the occurrence book, started writing, and then paused.

“Sir, could you please start from the beginning so that I may record your case, then we will see how we can assist you,”

“Listen, my land, and building have been taken over by the area residents and you tell me to start telling you a story? How will a story help me?” He shouted angrily.

Before the bewildered officer could respond, an adjacent door opened. A senior officer walked out of it. He wore a brown uniform on the lapel and several medals that sparkled in the bright light onto the pocket of his shirt.

“What is going on here?” the officer asked.

The officer saluted the senior officer spoke.

“Afande, this gentleman has just come in and was reporting an incident sir!” he said.

Mkorofi moved forward, and stretched out his hand over the counter towards the senior officer.

“Good evening sir? I’m Mr. Mkorofi, the owner of the construction coming up along Soko Street.”

The officer shook the hand and introduced himself.

“I am Jackson Amani, the Officer Commanding this station.” Referring to his officer, he said, “His name is Corporal Mitei and he is on duty today... What can we do for you?”

Seeing the discomfort in Mr. Mkorofi’s standing posture, he invited him to his office where he explained his predicament. A few minutes later, officer Jackson called Corporal Mitei to his office and ordered him to summon all officers on duty to the station from their quarters. A while later, they all lined up in front of the station in riot gear, armed. Mr. Mkorofi paced back and forth restlessly down the corridor in front of the station.

A siren faintly wailed at a distance. It became louder and nearer to the masses of people gathered at Mkorofi’s construction site. Shortly, the wails brought to a halt the two police landcruisers and Mkorofi’s Range Rover before a crowd at the pit situated in front of the incomplete building. The Police officers hopped out of the trucks

immediately. They stopped and took to their positions securing the area. Mkorofi proudly alighted smiling.

Furaha Police Station Commanding officer, Mr. Jackson Amani hopped off the cruiser and stood right before its headlight rays. His thumbs rested on his belts onto his wrist. He said nothing but stared at the crowd of people gathering.

Mkorofi's voice came up as soon as he stood next to officer Amani.

"I told you, idlers to leave this place but you didn't, I am back and I have the law enforcers with me. Can everyone leave my premises or I order the police to make you leave!"

He waved his stick at the people and towards the road.

Wise and calm as he appeared to be, Amani retaliated and spoke calmly ignoring Mkorofi's arrogance.

"Fellow Citizens, this is private property, you are all trespassing. Can you all leave immediately? Any one of you who defies these orders will be arrested and taken to the police cells and will be presented in court tomorrow morning to answer to charges of trespass and damage to private property! However, as you do so maybe we should create some time to hear from both sides besides, it is equally important to administer justice according to the law."

As soon as he finished speaking, people chanted from the cowering crowd.

“Haki yetu! Haki yetu!” more and more people took on the chant and the noise deafened.

The police officers held up their guns over shoulders ready to take action. Catherine held onto Big Ben and Jackson. Everything happening around scared her so much that she wished to rush home with or without her shopping, as long as she would be far from trouble.

The engineer calmed the crowd after standing onto the bull bars in front of Mkorofi’s vehicle. His voice was loud enough to silence them all at once. He spoke addressing the commanding officer.

“Bwana Officer, it is good that you have chosen to protect this man here. It is true that we are on his property. But had he been responsible enough and followed the law, nobody would be here today. None of what has taken place would have happened! Our goats and chicken would not have died in this pit, this girl would be home with her parents, and we would not be here,” he paused.

Mkorofi took a quick glance at the engineer but the little he could see in the glare of headlights and the moon in the sky was a figure of him in his vehicle. He could not stand the challenge thus, he retaliated.

“What do you mean by that? You intend to incite the crowd for no good reason! Get off my car and my property!” he lifted his stick as if getting ready to strike him. Nevertheless, it was difficult to get to him since a police officer stood between him and Mkorofi, pushed him back and warned him.

“Patience sir, I think there is more to this matter than meets the eye here. You were quite economical with the facts...” he paused, “All the same; we have to get to the bottom of this peacefully. There is no need to resort to any sort of force or violence.”

The engineer addressed begrudging Mkorofi as he brought down his stick.

“I have with me a letter for you from the State Ministry of Housing and construction, obliging you to fence your construction site with immediate effect.”

He laid his briefcase onto the car bonnet and opened it. Out of it, he extracted an envelope and held it out to the Commanding officer. After reading it, he passed it forth to Mkorofi.

Reluctantly, Mkorofi walked forth and reached out for it. He took it and held it up to the light; he turned it over and examined it carefully. He opened it and bent to read it in the car’s headlight lamps. The Commanding Officer bent too to read it together with Mkorofi. They silently did. A moment later, they straightened up. Holding the

letter onto his left-hand palm and his walking stick between his feet, Mkorofi straightened the lapels of his jacket one after the other before clearing his throat and facing the Engineer. Addressing him, he said.

“I think you people have something to do than stand here in this evening and accuse me of some funny wrongs. Who does not have eyes to see that this is a construction site and needs to keep off? Why do you have to fight so hard to chase away development in your miserable town? In fact, you should be thanking me for changing the face of this town and creating employment for your poor people!” He laughed a peal of hollow solo laughter.

Mr. Amani took a long look at him, shook his head and turned to the people and said,

“Fellow citizens, you see, there is no need of being violent against each other yet we can make an agreement if we allow each other to reason.”

“How dare he come and insult us in our town?” demanded Jackson the Town head. “After all, it is his construction that is wreaking havoc on our otherwise peaceful town!” he added.

“Yes! He can go and build it elsewhere! We don’t need it!” Someone shouted.

The police officer tried to contain a situation that seemed to get out of hand.

“Fellow citizens, I believe a resolution can be reached if we can be a little bit patient with each other...”

“We want this matter sorted out here and now! You never know, someone might end up dead in this pit!” shouted Big Ben.

“Yes! Here and now!” shouted someone else from among the crowd.

“Now! Now! Now! Now! Now!” The crowd yelled.

Catherine boldly came forward and confronted Mkorofi, crowd fell silent immediately to listen to her.

“What does the letter say?” she demanded.

“Err...err... nothing much...just a notice to the owner of the building...” he said as he dismissingly tossed his left hand towards the building. Growing bolder, Catherine turned to the engineer enquiringly.

Without waiting for more prompting, he responded,

“The letter is addressed to him,” he said pointing to the man, “Mr. Mkorofi has been time and again asked to fence off this construction site to keep passers-by out of danger. However, he has always cited the high cost of fencing material and labour in the task. He has therefore been going around trying to bribe government officials. Some have taken his bribe and promised to protect him. Unfortunately, they did not tell him there was so little

they could do. Here now are the facts about how much danger his action is exposing the citizens to,” he said.

“We foresaw such a thing as has happened today and have been demanding he puts up a fence. So far, he has been evading me. Today, I caught up with him. Coincidentally, the exact danger we had foreseen has occurred. Luckily, no one has died or been severely hurt, thanks to this young man’s quick action,” he turned round in search of Big Ben who took steps forward to stand next to the engineer. On seeing Big Ben, dripping wet in his dirty clothes, he took a step away from him, by then he had climbed down from the car. Big Ben was oblivious of his looks and proudly stood alone in front of the crowd.

“I am sure that had this man followed the law, none of this would have happened. I would be at home, tending to my sick mother and I would not have lost all the shopping and money in this pit,” she paused, pointing at the pit behind her. Everybody turned to look at the open pit full of water as if they had not seen it before.

“Young girl, what is your name?” enquired the engineer.

“Catherine...” she answered.

Addressing Mr. Jackson Amani, he asked:

“Given what has transpired and in consideration of the law, does this girl have a right to record a statement and take this man to court?” he said.

Realizing he had been caught unawares, Mr. Amani went silent for a moment and then looked at Catherine, the Engineer, Mr Mkorofi and the crowd were anxious sly waiting for his answer, and he feebly answered.

“Well, er-er yes she has. Considering that the law requires that all construction sites be fenced off to save people from what has happened tonight.”

“Then why don’t you take her and the Town Head as a witness with you to the police station so she can record a statement?” the Engineer asked.

“I do not think there is a need for that... We could reach an agreement here and now without taking the long process,” suggested Mr. Amani.

Mr. Mkorofi head bowed listening but kept a keen eye on the crowd lest it charges at him. Mr. Amani looked up into the moonlit sky, cleared his throat pursed his lips and spoke.

“... or what do you think Mr. Mkorofi?”

“I don’t think I had asked anyone to pass by my construction site. I believe anybody with eyes can see this is not a place to play around. Besides, which mother in her normal senses would send such a child to the market at this time? Here, I do not see any reason for me to be involved. I should be going now, I am getting late for dinner!”

He turned around, but before he could get out of the glare of the headlamps, one of the officers reached out to him and caught hold of him. He was jolted back. The silent crowd gasped at his indifference. Someone at the back shouted;

“What kind of an animal is this?”

“A hyena!”

“Let us deal with him!” yet another shouted. The agitated crowd surged forward.

On hearing this and realizing he had antagonized the people, he tensed and allowed himself to be pulled back close to Mr. Amani, while the other officers shielded the crowd from getting to him. The crowd halted.

“Mr. Mkorofi, if you do not reason differently, these people might choose to take matters in their own hands. My few officers and I might find it difficult to protect you. Besides, they are demanding what is rightfully theirs,” said Mr. Amani.

“I don’t understand what they want because they are just bleating like hungry sheep,” he shot back.

Angrily, Mr. Amani faced Mr. Mkorofi squarely and looked at him through slits of his eyes. He hissed to him.

“I suggest you deal with this matter here and now, treat these people fairly and with dignity, or I will personally see to it that you are charged in a court of law for

negligence and putting the lives of fellow citizens at risk!" He asserted.

The engineer, the Town Head, could only afford smiles directed at Catherine and Big Ben as they silently watched the spectacle between the officer and Mr. Mkorofi.

Lifting both hands into the air together with his walking stick, Mr. Mkorofi admitted defeat,

"Alright, I agree Mr. Officer. Allow me a moment to think," He pulled a pack of cigarettes from his pocket, extracted one roll, and lit up. As he released curls of smoke over the people's heads into the dark sky, he looked around at the gathered crowd. Everyone anxiously looked at him.

PEACE AT LAST

Impatient, Big Ben stepped forward threateningly. Catherine and Mr. Amani held him back. Mr. Mkorofi watched. He dropped the half-smoked cigarette, stepped on it said to Catherine.

“Alright, young girl, I think five hundred shillings will be enough to buy your groceries. After all, you do not look like your parents can afford to buy much at the current market prices. As for the rest of you, why don’t you find something better to do or go home and sleep?” he said swinging his walking stick over the crowd.

“This man is surely arrogant! We should be allowed to deal with him in our own way!” Shouted a voice from the back of the crowd.

“Bwana officer, why don’t you allow us a few minutes we teach him some manners?” shouted another.

Catherine, with tears in her eyes, confronted Mr. Mkorofi. She could not believe that any person would dare call her parents poor yet they had given her most of what she needed. She loved her parents and did not want anybody to say anything negative about them.

She found herself standing in front of Mr. Mkorofi and her voice quivering, she addressed him, as she had never done to anybody else.

“When did my parents ever come to you for assistance to

feed me? Have you ever seen my family at your doorstep begging for anything from you?" she asked without waiting for any response...

"Your riches belong to you and your family; I would never wish to have you as a father, however rich you may be. If you think being rich makes you any better, let us wait and see where you will be buried when you die, if not only six by six feet!" she stopped after sensing a hand on her shoulders.

"Young girl, let me handle this, please..." said Mr. Amani as he pushed whimpering Catherine backwards towards Big Ben who reached out for her hand.

"Mr. Mkorofi," he said slowly. "I think it will be in order if I laid the cards on the table for you to make a choice. There are three options for you. First, I will arrest you for flouting the law, charge you with negligence and disobedience to the law and take you to court first thing tomorrow morning. This is because, you, of all the people, understand that construction areas should be fenced off for public safety. Alternatively, you may choose to commit yourself to sorting out this matter as per the reasonable demands of these people whom you have obviously offended. Lastly, I will leave you alone, walk away leaving you at the mercy of this crowd to sort out the mess you created. So, please make your choice?" he asked.

He immediately surveyed the crowd of people. The engineer

was nodding; Jackson the Town Head was just staring at Mr. Mkorofi blankly.

Mr. Amani took the rare opportunity to redeem the spoilt public officers' name that was connected to bribery. He was out to prove to the public that good officers, who value true justice through the rule of law, still exist. Good men and women who took oath to serve were right there before Furaha residents. They were free from any form of suspicion as they toiled to solve the case transparently.

Surprised at the turn of events, Mr. Mkorofi stared at all the groups of people in turns. He turned to Mr. Amani who stared back. Big Ben and Catherine who stood aside from the crowd just stared blankly at him while the crowd was anxious to act on him.

“Hic...Hic... Leave him to us! We will teach him a lesson! My pregnant goat drowned in this pit!” a drink that had just joined the crowd shouted.

“Shut up you drunk!” someone ordered him.

“Drunk or not, he has a right to compensation!” another retorted.

“Are you sure he owns anything apart from his two legs, hands and a drunken head?” another added.

This seemed to heighten Mr. Mkorofi's fear. His eyes darted from one party to the other as he stepped back

towards the passenger's door of his car. Realizing Mr. Mkorofi's intentions just before he opened the passenger's door of his car, one of the armed police officers blocked the way. As Mkorofi made another step backwards, his back collided with the cold butt of a gun. He stopped and looked behind him; his eyes met the cold stare of one of the police officers. The police officer nudged him with the gun. Disappointed, he walked back to his initial position in front of the car. The crowd cheered.

"Alright, what do you want?" said Mkorofi.

"Mr. Mkorofi, I would ask for two things only. First, you must ensure that this young girl is fully compensated. Secondly, you must make a written commitment when this construction site will be fenced off so as to prevent another incident as has happened today from recurring." Said Mr. Jackson.

"The drunken man whose goat drowned in the pit must be compensated too!" shouted someone.

Yet another shouted, "Big Ben must be paid his salary as a guard!"

"That's alright with me," shouted someone.

"I almost fell into this pit the other day as I was walking home," said the voice.

"You must have been drunk! Who doesn't know you drink

yourself silly?” shouted another.

A burst of loud laughter rang out.

“Does it, therefore, mean he should die?” reiterated another. More laughter rang out.

Lifting his hand up to signal for silence, Mr. Amani told to Mr. Mkorofi.

“What do you say?”

Anxious to have this matter done away with, Mr. Mkorofi nodded as he spoke “I have no problem with that.”

“I have a pen and paper,” offered the engineer.

“Give your driver enough money; he will take this girl for shopping as you write your commitment to fence off this site within the next three days,” ordered Mr. Amani.

“Three days!” Mr. Mkorofi exclaimed. He looked around pleadingly... “It’s not possible!” he retorted.

Mr. Amani nodded in disagreement. “It’s either you do it in three days or this crowd decides your fate...!”

“Yees! The crowd shouted. *“Ofisaa tuachie kidogo tumtie adabu!”* (Leave him to us for a moment we discipline him).

He pleaded.

“Please give me a week!” he pleaded.

“We actually wanted it done yesterday, but it’s three days or nothing.” Said the engineer.

Mr. Mkorofi did not dare protest any further.

“Alright, it’ll be ready in three days’ time,” he reluctantly said.

“Good!” said the officer, “Now give your driver money for the girl’s shopping.”

Mr. Mkorofi hesitantly extracted cash from his pocket and gave it to the driver. He quickly received the cash and nodded at every instruction.

Without wasting time, he opened the car passenger’s door for Catherine to get in. Big Ben did not wait to be ushered into the vehicle. As his hand went to the lock to open the rear door, he saw the driver at the back of the car holding the boot open for him. He gestured at him to get in the boot. He paused and then pushed the door shut.

Slowly, he walked to the rear of the car and stood as close as he could to the driver. Through clenched teeth, he spoke.

“My friend I am not going to sit where your boss’ dog sits whether you like it or not.”

“So?”

“That girl is my responsibility. I am going with her!” Big

Ben opened the passenger door hopped in and banged the door shut. The driver quickly hopped to his seat and started the vehicle.

As the trio left, Mr. Mkorofi was shepherded to the concrete steps of his building where the engineer gave him a pen and paper. Someone switched on the torch on a phone. Mkorofi started writing.

Less than half an hour later, Catherine emerged from the comfort of the car and boldly stood in front of Mr. Mkorofi. On seeing a shadow fall on the paper, he was writing on, he paused and looked at Catherine.

“The money was just enough for the shopping, but my mother’s money and mine got lost in your pit!”

Without hesitation, Mr. Mkorofi dipped his left hand into his left-hand trouser pocket, extracted a handful of notes, and without counting, he handed them to Catherine.

As Catherine turned to go, Mr. Amani called her.

“Catherine...” She stopped and turned.

“Please allow me to accompany you home after a stopover at the police station. I will have to explain to your parents why you have come home late. Otherwise, your mother might give you a beating for a mistake that is not yours.”

Catherine remembered that her sick mother must be

much worried about her. Her father must have arrived from work and must be waiting for his tea and dinner. All her courage oozed out of her. Worry and fear flooded her mind and body. She put the back of her palm over her mouth to stifle any noise she might make in fear of what awaited her at home. She quickened her pace to Mr. Mkorofi's car and opened the rear passenger door where Big Ben was sitting with the full basket next to him. She quickly dragged the basket towards her and almost lifted it onto her head when Big Ben pulled it back.

"What do you think you are doing?" he demanded.

"I have to get home quickly, otherwise, I will be in trouble for the lateness!" she explained to him.

Big Ben held the basket firmly and called out to her.

"Hey, do not panic, you are already late. If none of these people wants to take you home, I will and explain to your parents what has happened. But before then, wait!" With that, he unlocked the other door and hopped out.

Big Ben headed to the stairs where Mr. Mkorofi was seated on the stairs of his unfinished building but halfway there, he met with Mr. Amani whom he fearlessly confronted.

"If nobody wants to take that girl home, I will...." He said, his left-hand thumb pointing behind him at Mkorofi's car.

The Officer stopped short, regarded Big Ben and laughed aloud.

“Young man, if you take her home the way you look, she would be chased away from home,” he said pointing at Big Ben’s dirty and wet clothes. Big Ben looked at himself and felt silent. The officer was right.

“Anyway, I am taking her home after Mr. Mkorofi here finishes. Do you mind us going together?” he inquired. “You could fill in what I leave out. By then the crowd had dwindled. Only a few leaned over Mr. Mkorofi’s shoulders to read what he was writing. Soon, Mkorofi looked up from the paper and handed it to the Officer who held it up to the light of the car and read.

“I Jared Mkorofi, owner of plot number 8, Soko Street, Furaha Town do hereby commit myself to:

- 1. Fence off my construction site in the next three days.*
- 2. Compensate the residents who lost their livestock and goods in the pit at my construction site.*
- 3. Pay Big Ben a two-month salary for his services as a guard at my premises.*
- 4. Maintain peace and treat all with dignity and respect.*

Signed on this day...”

Turning to the Engineer and Town head, he said.

“I believe that will suffice.”

“Y-y-yes officer, but we need to know the amount he is to pay,” the Town Head responded. The Engineer merely nodded.

So, apart from the young girl who has been taken care of, what is the cost of the goat?” the officer inquired.

Ten thousand only,” someone shouted.

“It was a goat, an emaciated rogue goat, not a cow!” yet another retorted.

Lifting his hand, Jackson brought the comments to a halt and spoke.

“Normally, a good goat cost eight thousand shillings.”

“And mine was a good goat” the owner responded.

“Then the goat owner will be compensated at a total figure of eight thousand shillings. How about Big Ben, how much does Mr. Mkorofi owe him?” the officer asked.

“We had agreed on five thousand shillings a month! That makes it ten thousand shillings!” Big Ben quickly responded.

“We, therefore, deliberate on a total of eighteen thousand shillings should be paid by Mr. Mkorofi; eight thousand for the goat, and ten thousand as salary to Big Ben. Given the circumstances, I will overlook the fact that he

is underage.” The officer said as he handed over the document for Mr. Mkorofi to make amendments by adding the amounts due. As soon as this was done, it was passed to Jackson and the engineer to confirm. In the end, he took the paper and put it in his pocket.

He turned to Mr. Mkorofi and said, “I want you to accompany me to the Police station. The payment of the arrears deliberated here today has to be done and we need to know how that is supposed to be done. I suggest that we have the arrears settled down immediately without further delay. Are you ready to accompany me peacefully?” he inquired.

“Yes sir I have no choice,” responded Mkorofi.

A few minutes later, a team of two men, Jackson and the Engineer and two youngsters in company of Police officers lead by Mr. Jackson Amani, Furaha police station Commanding officer, drove along Soko Street heading to the Police Station. Mr. Mkorofi rode his Range Rover sport in the midst of the two Land Cruisers ferrying officers. It was around 9:00PM.

A while later a trail of dust settled as the three vehicles rolled to the Station parking lot. They all alighted and walked to the police station. Shortly after walking into the administration office, Mr. Amani dismissed the other officers who headed to the station armoury.

Mr. Mkorofi was directed to the reception desk to Corporal

Mitei. Mr. Amani subjected him to record a statement with him as they walked forth to his Office. He firmly ordered him saying,

“Officer, if this man dare disturb you or speak rudely to you, do not give him any other chance, throw him into the custody. He has proved to be naughty and proud. Do not entertain him and if you do, I will lock him in together with his driver here. They must learn to respect the authority and uphold the rule of law. We will not entertain madness here. And you,” he turned to Mkorofi and addressed him. “When you are through, wait for me here but if you feel like leaving, you can please yourself. Furaha town isn’t too vast to walk,” and to the officer “you are free to perform your duties, thank you.” He concluded as he responded with a salute from Corporal Mitei.

“Yes Sir.” Corporal Mitei said. He resumed his duties as the boss walked into his office. Calmly, Mkorofi recounted the turn of events as Corporal Mitei wrote down everything. Meanwhile, Mkorofi’s driver sat silently on the couch waiting for his boss.

A spacious heavy maroon carpeted room hosted a huge black wooden oval desk. Onto it was several files and a Dell Desktop on the right hand. The office phone sat on the left-hand side of it. Several leather clients’ seats stood right before it. A Modern comfort brand black leather office seat was placed behind it. There was a

huge wooden shelf that revealed a series of trophies and catalogued files in it.

Catherine looked around puzzled. She had never been to a police station before. She has often feared it since she knew it, she believed that all wrongdoers were arrested and locked into the custodies. She hesitantly walked in and reluctantly took a seat.

Big Ben was bold and fearless, street life had hardened him to a point that he learned to cope up with every situation. Ben intervened and helped Catherine to relax.

Mr. Amani walked to a refrigerator situated beside the shelf on his right hand, flipped it open and pulled out soft drinks. He served them after inquiring about their favourite drinks. He joined the rest as they shared a drink together.

Shortly, he reached out to the phone and made a call. Just as he put the receiver down, a lady officer walked in and saluted him to report her arrival. Her boss signalled her to engage the girl.

Madam Jasiri walked to Catherine smiling; she squatted before her seat and murmured incomprehensibly to her. Catherine deeply exhaled and smiled back at her. Madam Jasiri stretched her hand to hold hers. She stood up holding her bottle of soda in her left hand. She boldly made her steps towards the door. Big Ben tried to rise up but he was ordered back to his position. Officer

Amani assured him that the two ladies meant no harm at all. He settled though uncomfortable at first.

“Do you like this place?” he asked him. Big Ben nodded amid gulps of the soda. After gulping down half of the soda, he belched and sat back in the chair as the Officer did.

“It is beautiful, clean, and cool. I would want to work in such an office when I grow up...” he said so as his eyes roamed around. His voice trailed off as his eyes roamed the office again.

“You can and will if you study hard in school and excel,” he said.

After a moment of silence, he cleared his throat and Big Ben’s attention was drawn to him.

“Now, as Catherine and the Officer record the statement, let us talk about you. Tell me about yourself,” he said.

Big Ben looked up to the ceiling and then his gaze fell on the officer.

“Officer, my story is complicated. I am supposed to be in school. But how can I go to school when I don’t have a home when my father is in prison. In fact, I am not sure of where my mother and my siblings are.

He went silent abruptly, sipped his soda before gazing onto the floor. Every other person in the room was curious to know what had happened to him. None

seemed to know who he was or where he came from. The Town Head recalled seeing him roam across the street over the years over the years but he had never thought of his predicament deeply. He had dismissed him as one of the street boys. On the other hand, the engineer admitted to having seen the boy on the streets as he went around for daily infrastructure construction inspections. He had never paid much attention to him.

Disturbed by the prolonged silence, the officer asked,

“How and why did all this happen?”

Ben looked intently at the bottle of soda for a long moment, heaved a sigh, and surveyed the three gentlemen. He spoke.

“My father is the first born in a family of seven. My rich grandfather had five wives but loved my grandmother the most. When he died, he left the responsibility of running the family affairs to my father. The rest of the family members conspired and accused him of crimes he had not committed fabricated witnesses and got him jailed for sixteen years. So they could take over grandfather’s vast land and sell it to a Mambo leo sand mining company without the interference of my father. Soon after my father was imprisoned, my mother, my two siblings and I were sent packing. I could not stand the sight of my mother begging for a living so, I left. That’s how I found myself here.”

He heaved a sigh and reached for the soda and gulped down the remaining, laid the bottle on the table and leaned back looking at the officer.

Just then, madam Jasiri and Catherine walked in. Both of them were speaking lowly and engaging in a burst of hearty laughter. She finally ushered her back to her position. She walked forth and reported.

“We are done, sir!”

Mr. Amani rose up from his position and walked forth to receive the file. He appreciated the officer’s job well done. He perused through it. He gave it to the Town head and the engineer, the two witnesses present. They read and returned it to him. He returned it to the officer and instructed her to catalogue the file as he officially dismissed her.

As the officer was reaching out for the door, he turned to Catherine and asked.

“Christine, how did it go?”

She smiled and said, “it went well and I have a new friend!”

She said as she rose up, and walked to Madam Jasiri reaching out for her hand and holding it fondly. Everyone burst into laughter and nodded in agreement.

“Oh that is great, I guess she will have to accompany you home together with us. Let us go before your

parents are worried further about your whereabouts. They must be searching for you everywhere,” he declared.

The seven of them walked out of the office hurriedly and headed to a land cruiser. Shortly, Mr. Amani released Mkorofi after ordering him to avail himself of the station daily for seven days without failure. Off they went. Mkorofi and his driver too boarded their Range rover and drive away. The officer’s cruiser driver drove off to the streets at 10:00 PM.

First of all, they halted at Maisha Drive where they dropped the Engineer and Mr. Jackson to their residential homes. The Town Head entrusted Catherine to them as they saw no need to have him accompany them all the way. They assured him of her safety as they left to travel to Catherine’s home.

HOME AT LAST

The bright headlights of the car illuminated a man pacing next to a chair under a big mango tree; a radio was placed on a stool next to him. On seeing the blue and red light at the top of the car, he stopped pacing and rushed towards the car that had stopped at the entrance to his home. A woman who had been sitting on the doorstep of the house quickly scrambled into the house. She only peeped out when she heard friendly voices.

“That is my father and that is my mother,” Catherine explained, pointing at the two.

“Stay in the car!” ordered Mr. Amani when Catherine and Big Ben attempted to get out with them.

The two watched as the three police officers, Mr. Amani, Madam Jasiri and the driver walked to where her father stood. They could not hear what was being discussed but they could feel the relief in her father’s voice as the discussion continued.

As they watched, Catherine got the chance to examine the wad of notes given to her by Mr. Mkorofi. She counted in total ten five-hundred-shilling notes and held them out to Big Ben.

“This is for your troubles, were it not for you, I would have drowned in that pit,” She said to him.

Big Ben extracted himself from the ongoing discussion

and stared at a wad of notes in Catherine's hand. She shoved them into his face. He looked at the money and at her. He shook his head in refusal. Instead, he extracted yet more money wrapped in his cap from his pocket, the mixture of coins and notes.

"These too belong to you. It is what the people donated for you before Mr. Mkorofi gave what you have." He held her outstretched hand and poured all the money into it.

"I can't take it. It is all yours. I just did what I could have done under any circumstances." With that, he drew his attention to the on-going conversation.

"No, you saved my life; furthermore, you need it more than I do." He turned to look at her for some time. Then he spoke.

"I didn't ask for payment. Besides, I can manage without it."

Lost for words, eyes welling with tears, Catherine looked right ahead at the four people. She held the money tightly in her hands.

Her mother had left the house and was standing next to her husband, anxiously looking at the police car. Perhaps she was eager to see whether her daughter was fine.

As the two youngsters sat there waiting for the long conversation to end, Catherine thought she heard some

soft sobs from Big Ben. She saw him wipe the tears flowing from his eyes with back of his clenched fist. She realized he was crying!

“What is the matter, Ben? She asked holding him by the shoulder.

“Nothing,” he answered. She however, didn’t relent her curiosity. She eagerly asked.

“What about the tears in your eyes?”

Big Ben turned to face her and with his left hand, he pointed at the group conversing from a distance.

“They remind me of my parents, I mean the last time I saw them,” he said.

“What happened to them?” she asked.

He shook his head and bowed down, speaking in a sorrowful voice.

“It’s a long story, but policemen came to our home one morning and conversed with them. My father went into the house and then came out buttoning his shirt. I was playing outside the house. A moment later, they left. That was the last time I saw my father.” As soon as he had said this, he bowed his head, wiped more tears off his face, and looked up.

“But that was in the past. I have learned to live with it,” he reassured her.

“I am very sorry. I am also very grateful to you for saving me from drowning and standing by me, you are so bold!” She offered. They both went silent as they watched the scenario in front of them but each in their own world of thoughts.

A few minutes later, Madam Jasiri beckoned them to go to where they were. Quickly, Catherine Clambered out and rushed to her father and mother and hugged them fondly. Big Ben followed with the basket of shopping on his shoulder. Her father held her by the shoulders, pushed her slightly away from himself, and looked at her teary face.

“Are you alright?” he asked, looking her in the eyes.

“I’m fine father, thanks to Big Ben here,” she said fondly holding his hand.

“Yes, Officer here has told us the whole story. We have been looking for you everywhere. I came to the streets to look for you shortly after arriving home. Your mother told me that you went to the market. Unfortunately, I did not find you. We were planning to go report that you went missing at the police station. However, it was difficult to come along so quickly. Your mother was so tormented so was I. We thank God, you were saved and they brought you back just as we were about to give up. Thank you, Bwana Amani and your colleagues, for finding my daughter and bringing her back to me, we owe you big time.”

He lastly turned to Big Ben.

“Young man, thank you very much for your courage and your big heart. I am grateful you saved my daughter from drowning in that pit.” He held Big Ben by the hand and with the other hand-held Catherine to himself. As he let them go, he noted that her daughter was trembling. Her clothes were dirty. Concerned, he sent Catherine’s mother and her to the house. Catherine had to change into dry and clean clothes as quickly as possible.

Mr. Amani was so grateful that he and his colleagues were able to get the girl home after all. However, he was still concerned about the boy. Curious, he enquired to know much more concerning him. Thus, he asked.

“Young man, who are you? I doubt that your real name is Big Ben or something...?”

“Yes, people around here call me Big Ben... But that is just a Nickname. When I came here from Makazi village about 10 Kilometres East of Furaha town, I wore a T-shirt with a big clock image on the chest and beneath it, there were two words, written BIG BEN. That is where the nickname came from,” he explained.

“And where do you live currently?” asked Catherine’s father.

“He scavenges in the town,” Mr. Amani observed.

“Okay. Does he go to school, he seems to be of school-going-age, but the clothing manner betrays him!” Catherine’s father observed.

“I am not sure about it but maybe he should tell us what we don’t know about him so far. Mr. Amani said.

The boy’s excitement faded away immediately he heard the remarks. Tears of agony welled up his eyes once again. He felt weak and trembled. He took a few steps away and sat onto one of the stones that paved the flowered path to the tree shade. He supported his head between his hands and onto his knees, he fixed his elbows. He rubbed his head gently as he remained silent for a while. He was probably composing himself before speaking. No one could tell what was going on his mind but everyone was keen and eagerly waiting for his response. Finally, he raised his face, wipe tears off his eyes, and spoke.

“Yes, I should be in school... unfortunately I am a victim of violence over the inheritance. My relatives sent my family and me out of our home after they sent my father to prison. They falsely accused him of misusing my grandfather’s wealth. Being the first born, my grandfather left him in charge of the family and the family’s wealth as he passed away. He was entitled to share it out to them, which he did. Unfortunately, my uncles sold everything they got and spent the money extravagantly. Left out with nothing, they hatched out a

plan to pursue my father's wealth. I was too young to know how they managed to win but the last thing I remember, my mother, my siblings and I walked out of the so-called home two days after my father was taken to jail. In fact, his case did not go through court trials.

My mother tried to rescue my father from the false trial that befell him. She was not powerful to do so. On the eventual day, a gang broke into our house at night and marched us out after terrorizing us. Nonetheless, they never harmed us but they vowed to act if my mother pursued the case. To make the matters worse as soon as we walked out of our house, they blazed it. A whole bungalow that had taken my parents years to build was brought down into ashes, save for the bricks that lay on the ground as the walls collapsed. We witnessed that horrible scene helplessly.

The angry scene brought agony and frustrations to each of us. I could not stand seeing my mother begging for a shelter and food. As she headed home to our maternal grandmother's home, I took to the streets, since then we haven't seen each other. I am not sure whether they got there safely or not," he concluded.

"That is disheartening and I would wish to know much more about what happened. I am curious about the whole saga and I guess justice must be founded on the basis of the truth of the matter," Mr. Amani observed.

Catherine's father was about to speak when her daughter

interrupted remorsefully. She had been listening as Bin Ben narrated the story.

“Daddy, since he saved my life and has nowhere to stay apart from the tree that shelters, far away, can Ben stay with us until he finds his parents?”

Puzzled by the unexpected requests, he stammered.

“I...I...I don’t know...”

“He saved my life, why can’t we also save his?” she persisted.

He surveyed the officers next to him in the limelight of the cruiser’s headlights as if seeking help from them. They said nothing. They stared at him blankly. Defeated, he addressed Catherine.

“Catherine, you know I cannot make that decision alone. I have to talk to your mother...” He replied.

“Mother have no problem with that I know; after all you are the head of this family. Is that true my friend Madam Jasiri,” She pleaded as she seek support from her newly found friend. The officer smiled and nodded her head without a word.

“I know, but there are so many things to consider. If Ben has to stay with us, we have to know clearly, who he is, where he comes from, and such things. Furthermore, he has to eat, dress, go to school and many other things a

child needs. Just because he is tall does not make him grown..." he observed.

Ben looked away and bowed his head. He was only fourteen years old though he felt big enough to take care of himself. He never wanted to be a burden to anyone. He felt dejected and rejected. He rose up and started walking away but someone summoned him back.

"Hey! Young man, where do you think you are going?" He did not respond. He walked on.

Catherine's shrill voice stopped him as he was about to take a further step.

"Don't you do it Ben; you shall stay here with us for whatever cost," she firmly warned.

He did not dare take a step. Catherine's utterance was a command.

Ben walked back and stood a few steps away from everyone.

Satisfied, Catherine quickly fished out all the cash she had from her pocket, straightened the notes, and stretched out her hand to her father.

"Don't worry daddy, with this money, we can buy Ben a school uniform, books, a school bag and a few clothes. We can go to school together!" She explained.

Shocked to see the proffered wad of notes, he suspiciously

eyed the officers as if to seek an explanation. They all nodded in consent. Amani cleared his throat and said.

“The money was given to her as a compensation of havoc caused to her this evening by Mkorofi’s pit resulting to loss of her belongings. We are aware of it,” he assured. “Furthermore, Big Ben has ten thousand payments from Mr. Mkorofi dues he never paid after Ben guarded his premises. That amount might reduce his expenses in your house too for a moment as we plan otherwise,” he added.

“Phew!” was all her father said as he leaned back onto the seat and scratched his balding head.

“Oh! Okay, then that solves one small matter but we still have to ask your mother. If she agrees, I have no problem, since a lot has already been taken care of,” he said finally.

Catherine rushed to the house and came back tugging at her mother. She stood in front of the men and the Lady redoing her unwrapped lessa and waited.

“Ehe? Here I am, she says you called me,” she said.

Catherine went around and stood next to her father.

She then prompted him with a slight shove of his shoulder. “Go on, ask her, dad!”

BIG BEN HAS A HOME

“Mama Catherine, this boy saved Catherine’s life, his name is Jayson Juma, but I hear he has a nickname. They call him Big Ben. He has nowhere to stay. Our daughter has requested that he stays with us....” he paused.

Taken aback, she looked at everyone around her, but none seemed surprised or startled. She faced her husband.

“Baba Catherine, can we talk?” she said as she beckoned to him to follow her. He rose, and they walked about ten paces from the rest. For five minutes, the couple was involved in a serious debate.

Er er...I am not sure if this is right, Baba Catherine,” she started.

“I know but we have to do something. Besides, he saved her, and he is a kid like any other. Why don’t we give it a trial?” he asked.

“This boy is a crook, maybe even a criminal; he doesn’t look like a good character to me. Look at the way he looks at us; he could even pose danger to our only child!” she argued.

“Mama Catherine, he may be a street boy, but I guess he is not a criminal. Besides, we will only house him on the condition that the police assist us to find his parents as

soon as possible.

“But...but...” she started to say.

“Look here,” he said getting impatient with her, “we will keep him under very close scrutiny and observation. Should he turn out to be wicked, we will throw him out and inform the police.”

She stood watching him, her hands folded over her chest and shoulders.

“I’m not very sure about it... I fear...” she broke off.

“My dear, we will break Catherine’s heart if we send him off. Besides, we will be very unkind to send this boy off, especially after the sacrifice he made for our daughter if what Catherine, the police officer and himself have told us is true,” he pleaded. Silence followed.

At long last, she heaved a sigh and said,

“Alright, he can stay, but on two conditions.”

“And which are these?” he asked, looking at her with a bit of suspicion.

“One, we have to closely monitor his level of discipline, should he show even the slightest hint of indiscipline, he is out!” she warned firmly.

“Okay with me,” he said.

“What’s the second one?”

“We must find his family!” she stared at him.

He hesitated for one long moment before answering.

“I believe it is possible, and the police can help us do that,” he responded.

“Now that it’s settled, let us go back there and pass the message,” he said.

She stood her ground, facing the ground as he started to walk back and hesitated. He looked at her and paused. Her mind seemed far away.

Then she spoke.

“Do you realize what this means for us?” she asked as she reached out for his hand.

What do you mean?” he asked.

“That we have to give these two children equal attention as if both are our children?” she thought aloud.

“I believe we can manage. After all, he may be the son we have not had,”

With this, she faced up to him and smiled. They both turned and went back to the anxiously waiting trio. Eight expectant eyes watched them. As soon as they stood in front of the three, Catherine looked up at them and asked;

“Dad, mum, he can stay with us, yes?”

Her father roamed his eyes across everyone's, sighed, and spoke.

"Catherine, yes, Big Ben can stay with us. But on two conditions...."

"And which are these?" asked Mr. Amani.

"First, Big Ben," he paused as he looked him in the eyes.

"Your discipline will be under probe. We do not know you, and so we must be sure. We also have to ensure that you will not be a negative influence on our daughter. Nobody knows you very well in this area. Those that do know you do so negatively, but I believe we will manage," he paused and looked at Mr. Amani. Mr. Amani nodded and tightened his grip on Big Ben's shoulders.

"Secondly, Big Ben has parents; we must help him find them. We may give you everything you may need, but we cannot be your Biological parents. I believe you would be the happiest child should you find them. I believe the police officers here can help us achieve that," he concluded.

"I believe Big Ben is disciplined though an unfortunate child. He can easily prove his worth. We will do all we can to trace the whereabouts of Ben's parents. We shall investigate the claims about his father's arrest and imprisonment. We shall ensure that justice is administered according to the rule of law."

“Young man, you are very lucky to get a second chance in life, make sure you do not waste it. Respect your benefactors and never ever make them regret having given you a helping hand. Okay? Meanwhile, I will in the next few days, launch an enquiry to the whereabouts of your parents. I want you to pass by my office every week as you go to school, so I can keep track of your performance both at school and at home. Ben, I hope you are capable of being a good boy, show gratitude to this family.”

With tears welling up in his eyes, all Big Ben could do was look him in the eyes and nod. The police officer patted him on the shoulders and turned to the couple. Before speaking, Big Ben wiped tears off his eyes and facing down, spoke;

“Thank you for showing love to me when nobody cared. I will always be grateful for that,” He said no more. With his wet, soiled handkerchief, he wiped his face.

“I guess we are done.” They nodded.

“Then we should be getting back to the police station, there is another delicate matter to be handled tonight,” he concluded.

“Now that the matter is settled, Catherine and Big Ben go into the house as we bid farewell to the officers.” The two shook the officers’ hands and left. Before they got in, Catherine’s father called out.

“Catherine” they stopped and both turned.

“Bring a pen and paper,” he requested. While he wrote the officer’s phone number, Catherine’s mother interrogated the officer further.

“Officer, I hope the decision we have made will not bounce back badly on us,” she said.

Surprised at her doubts, he answered, “I do not see that happening. This boy does not, in my judgment, seem to be a bad one. It is only that fate threw him out of the home. But should he prove otherwise, please let me know, and we will promptly see what to do,” he said. “Finding his parents and seeking justice may not be easy, but with patience, persistence, and prayer, it is possible. That is if they are still alive.”

Catherine’s mother interlocked her fingers to her husband’s left hand as she made an assurance to the police officer.

“Officer, we will do the best we can to ensure that the boy is happy and comfortable.”

“God will look kindly at your deed. Well, I will be off now. Please come by the station, so we can put on record the day’s events just in case anything else comes up in future. It’s good to be cautious of any eventualities...better safe than sorry,” he said. Just as they were shaking hands, Catherine slowly walked past her mother and father and stood in front of the officers.

Looking up, with a smile on her face, she said.

“Officer, thanks a lot for your help, I now have a big brother to protect me...” having said this she rushed to Madam Jasiri and hugged her warmly before speaking to her

“Thanks my good friend, salute, I will be passing by the station to see you, madam. You are a great friend to me.”

“Thank you too, my child, you are my friend too, and I will be waiting for you when I am not busy. Besides, I can seek permission to meet you from my Boss here in case I am busy.” Madam Jasiri responded. She looked at her Boss seeking intervention.

They all broke into hearty laughter before Mr. Amani said.

“Permission granted.”

That said and done she ran back into the house. Surprised, the two parents and the officers just looked at each other and laughed aloud once again. The laughter rang deep into the darkness.

They waved at the officer as the police car reversed into the road and as the tail lights faded into the night. They turned to each other. For a moment, none said a thing. Catherine’s mother was the first to recover.

“I really don’t know, but I have a strong feeling we have done the right thing,” she said.

“I hope and believe it will just turn out right,” he reaffirmed.

“Let me pick the chairs, we go inside and see what the two new friends are doing,” her husband added.

EPILOGUE

The tall slim man in a vest and a wrapper around his waist walked out of the house and made his way to the chair that stood under the largest tree in the compound. The tree stood in one corner of the clean swept compound. Next to the chair was a stool. On the stool, was a thermos flask, a melamine cup and a sugar dish filled to the brim with sugar? He gathered the wrapper, tucked it in between his legs and sat. He heaved a sigh of relief and for a moment, he laid his hands on the arms of the plastic chair and looked into the branches of the tree. He felt the cool air blow into his face over his closed eyes.

As if prompted by an invisible force, he quickly turned his attention to the thermos flask. He uncorked it and filled the cup almost to the brim. He replaced the cork and scooped three full teaspoons of sugar into the black tea. Using the same teaspoon, he slowly stirred the sugar into the tea. After stirring for about five seconds, he scooped a spoonful of tea from the bottom to check for any sugar left undisclosed. Finding some, he stirred some more. He did this again. Finding no sugar in the teaspoon, he laid the spoon on the stool next to the sugar dish.

He lifted the hot cup of tea slowly to his mouth, pursed his lips and sipped. A shallow sip that barely got any tea into his thirsty mouth. Halfway to the stool that stood in

front of him, the cup changed route and headed back to his still pursed lips. He sipped again. This time the action brought slightly more tea to his mouth as he got accustomed to the heat of both the cup and tea.

His thoughts wandered away from his hot tea to the two children who had just entered the house from the road beyond the hedge that surrounded the house. These two children were a product of fate. One by grace the other by chance. It was interesting to observe the obvious affection between the two as well as the reciprocated nature of their relationship. The girl had of late developed a sense of almost perfect responsibility while the boy, being taller and apparently older had built a confident protective wall around both of them.

“It is not easy,” the man said to himself, “but it is possible. He could be the son I don’t have and a blessing to this family or...” He shrugged, avoiding any negative thoughts that might get him to regret and therefore renege on the choice he had made. He believed that he had made a choice even God in heaven would be happy about...

“Yes, I can and should.” He said to himself as he reached out for the small transistor radio that sat under the stool on which the now empty cup of tea stood.

“It all depends on him and the will of God. And who am I to refuse or disobey?” he said to no one in particular.