

TRANSITION



MIRIGO KINYANJUI

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Table Contents

CHAPTER ONE	1
CHAPTER TWO	15
CHAPTER THREE	23
CHAPTER FOUR	36
CHAPTER FIVE	43
CHAPTER SIX.....	55
CHAPTER SEVEN.....	69
CHAPTER EIGHT	78
CHAPTER NINE.....	88
CHAPTER TEN	95
CHAPTER ELEVEN	104
CHAPTER TWELVE.....	111
CHAPTER THIRTEEN	127
CHAPTER FOURTEEN.....	136
CHAPTER FIFTEEN	149
CHAPTER SIXTEEN	167
CHAPTER SEVENTEEN	179
CHAPTER EIGHTEEN.....	187
CHAPTER NINETEEN.....	196
CHAPTER TWENTY ONE	217
CHAPTER TWENTY TWO.....	227
CHAPTER TWENTY THREE	241
About the Author	260

CHAPTER ONE

*There is a magic in that little world, home;
it is a mystic circle that surrounds comforts
and virtues never known beyond its hallowed limits.*

- Robert Southey

IT ALL STARTED with Miss Morgan's mum, Mina. It would be best, therefore, if we begin with her. Mina was the only daughter of a landowning British family, the Smiths. It was the only white family in Timau for miles around, with the only other people being the black workers employed in the vast plantation. Mina, therefore, had no playmates other than the children of the black workers on the farm. That she was white, and the children were black didn't matter to them. They all saw each other as friends. Mina, however, played mostly with the boys, as the girls were usually holed up in the servant quarters helping their mothers with house chores. Their parents often also didn't allow the girls outside their home in the evening after dark. This was to protect them from the male workers. Mina did not need such protection, as no one would have dared threaten her for fear of her daddy, the farm owner.

Notwithstanding this, when Mina came of age, she fell in love with the family driver, Mwangangi. He was an agronomist who had taken the job of a driver as he looked for an employment opportunity in his trained profession. Their love resulted in the birth of a baby girl. They named her Naila after Mwangangi's mother, who had come to like Mina very much.

Mwangangi loved Mina and would have married her. But her parents felt she was still too young to marry. They wanted her to finish school first and learn the family business. The parents, therefore, forbade her to marry the love

of her life, Mwangangi. They could not forgive the family driver for impregnating their only child and sacked him from his job shortly thereafter. Mina, however, vowed that the baby she bore with Mwangangi would retain the name, Naila, whether the Smiths consented to it or not. There could be no other name for her daughter.

After Mina weaned her baby, she was taken back to college and would later become an air hostess. She had not stayed long in the job before her eyes fell on a handsome pilot, Mr Morgan, who often captained the plane she served in. Mina was as pretty as could be, which the very handsome Mr Morgan could not fail to notice. When they started dating, Mina disclosed to Morgan that she was a mother to a baby girl. While she had feared that revealing this would make her lose her newfound boyfriend, she was happily surprised when he said he would not mind marrying her along with her half-caste child. Mina was especially glad because she wished to keep Naila as a symbol of her lost love, Mwangangi.

They took a while enjoying the moments they were together before Mina introduced Mr Morgan to her parents, whereupon he requested Mina's hand in marriage. He said he was happy to adopt Naila as his daughter and was overjoyed when he was granted the two girls – Mina and her daughter Naila. It was a very happy moment for Mr Morgan, who would give his adopted daughter the pet name "Miss Morgan". This was the nickname that everyone came to know her by, leaving the name Naila in the archives of the forgotten names.

Mr Morgan liked his stepdaughter so much that he would sometimes bring her to work in his pilot's cabin so that they could tour the world together. This went on for two years until the second-born, a baby girl, came. They named her Specca and was a complete replica of Mr Morgan. Life was good with the family and soon Miss Morgan started school and joined Grade One.

It was around this time that Mina's mother, Calda, passed on. She had been unwell with leukaemia that eventually took her life.

Not long after this, Mina and her young family moved to Mombasa where Morgan had found a job.

Smith would often visit them in Mombasa, usually at the invitation of her daughter. He always left satisfied that they were doing fine and were a happy family.

BY THE TIME Clement, the third-born, came, something had changed that no one could explain. Mina's love for Naila had so diminished that she did not want to have anything to do with her firstborn daughter. Mina did not want her to appear in public with the rest of the family and was left home alone most of the time. When there were guests at home, she was burnished to the bedroom to stay away and be by herself. Should the guests spend the night with the Morgans, she was forced to sleep on the floor in a separate room and would sometimes be denied food. Naila's young mind did not see these as mistreatments and thought that she was complying with what her mother thought was best. She, however, could not understand why it should be her and not the other siblings. It had only gradually come to her that it might have something to do with her adopted dad Morgan when she realised that when he came home, Specca and Clement would run to receive him and push her away from him. She also began to notice that when he brought gifts for the family, she was always left out while the rest got something. She, however, was able to bear with it because both her siblings would share with her whatever they had received.

As she grew older, she became curious to know who she was. She had now begun to see herself as different from her siblings and began to wonder who her parents were – though indeed they were her parents, who nonetheless seemed to hate and discriminate against her at every opportunity. Her young mind did not know where to start. But little by little she began to see how she might gain her freedom – not the kind of freedom to flee home, but the kind that would give her a better grip of her reality. She became an eavesdropper. She now knew her space and how to survive without annoying her parents. By the age of ten, her mind was already like that of a teenager ready to take on life. By now she had developed the courage to confront her mom Mina, who couldn't have cared how her eldest daughter felt. Naila's place in her mother's heart had long been taken by Morgan's family.

One day, her grandpa Smith came to visit them. He had gifts for everyone. This time, however, Mina and her husband Morgan seemed to treat Naila like their favourite child in front of her grandpa. Naila did not let her grandpa fall for the deception and when the opportunity arose, she told him her ordeal at the hands of her parents. She said that she wanted to go and stay with her grandfather at his farm. This concerned Mr Smith as he may not be able to

take care of or understand the needs of a granddaughter because he now lived alone, his wife, Naila's grandma, having passed some years before. Mina and her husband were quick to assure Mr Smith that they had no intention of bothering him with the responsibility to look after Naila. They now accused Naila of being such a naughty child that she was likely to give him a very rough time. After Grandpa Smith had left, Naila was given such a beating that she felt that she could no longer live with such beastly parents.

This led Naila – Miss Morgan – to report at the nearest police station, requesting the officers at the station to allow her Grandpa Smith to take custodian of her, or she be put in an orphanage if he declined. When Morgan and Mina were summoned, they could not explain why they should beat Naila so harshly. Mr Smith was summed too and upon seeing the bruises on his granddaughter's tiny body, he felt that he had no choice but to take her with him.

Smith's heart bled with sadness, more so when he remembered her tale of neglect and mistreatment at the hands of her parents. It was now clear to him that the abuse of her granddaughter had been a normal occurrence with Mina and Morgan. But Mr Smith had always known Mina to be a bit abrasive and knew that she could be harsh with her other children Specu and Clement and would intimidate them into silence not to say anything they might have witnessed of Naila's mistreatment.

Mr Smith decided it was for the better that he should take Naila to live with him because he would now have someone to talk to, especially on lonely evenings. He had developed an attachment to Naila when she was still a baby, having taken care of her when her mother Mina still lived under his roof in Timau.

A few days later, Grandpa Smith threw a big welcome party for Miss Morgan, who had never dreamt of such a welcome or celebration in her honour. But Mr Smith also saw the party as important, too, as something to bring people together. Because of this, being a big fan of the Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe, he recited a passage he loved from *Things Fall Apart* where a respected character in the book reminds his guests that:

A man who calls his family and friends to a feast does not do it to save them from hunger. They all have food in their own home. When we gather at the village in the moonlight, it is not because of the moon. Every man can see it in his own compound. We

meet because it's good to do so. So let's continue with team spirit and take advantage of the holidays and meet and enjoy each other's company regardless of our differences. If we smile together, it is not because we do not have problems, but because we are stronger than the problems.

After he finished reciting the passage, Mr Smith followed it with a quote from Mother Teresa, saying, “None of us, including me, ever do great things. But we can all do small things, with great love, and together we can do something wonderful.” For this reason, I want you to welcome my grandchild Naila, who is better known as Miss Morgan. She is the daughter of my only child Mina. I feel blessed to have her. I will have someone to talk to and not be as lonely as before. She will fill the gap left by my departed wife, Calda. I know you will welcome her and treat her with respect deserving of a Smith. Welcome, Miss Morgan.” This was followed by a round of applause from the guests, further surprising Miss Morgan with the enthusiastic welcome. Because of this, she got to know most of her grandpa’s neighbours and friends.

A routine soon established itself in which Grandpa Smith would wake up early to drop Naila at school and head back to oversee work at the farm before leaving again in the afternoon to read the day’s newspapers at a cafeteria at the Timau shopping Centre as he waited for Naila to break class and drive her home. It is the same school her mom Mina had attended and was dominated by children of white settlers and the affluent in the local villages.

She would walk to the cafeteria where Grandpa Smith waited for her, where she was treated to ice cream or any beverage of her choice. On some days she liked to have a junk plate of French fries and burgers. She liked to justify it saying that this was because meals at her grandpa’s could be boring and were often the same from Monday to Monday. If he told the house chef that he wanted rice with beef stew, the chef would keep with the rice until Smith was bored with it.

Naila pointed this out to Mr Smith one day as they were headed home, to which he agreed and assured her that he would have his menu revised to accommodate her. He explained how of late his ageing body didn’t seem to want most of the foods on the chef’s menu. He preferred a diet with little starch and a lot of vegetables as he had developed diabetes. He did not use regular sugar in his coffee, which he sometimes replaced with zero-calorie substitutes when he wanted to sweeten his coffee.

Mr Smith explained to Naila how prescribed sugar substitutes were safe and good at reducing blood sugar levels, and that because they lacked sugar did not cause tooth cavities. He went on to explain that some vegetables such as kale tended to give him stomach acid which gave him sleepless nights.

Naila began to understand how life had become difficult for her grandpa as he had aged. Even the wonderful bread his chef used to bake had been cut off his menu. “I miss it a lot,” he said, “especially the crusty part. The cake the chef served me for dessert was out of this world, but I am not allowed to enjoy it anymore.”

Naila said, “These are some of the foods I want back on the menu so that I learn how to make them when I get my own home. Ugali maize meal is another food I find delicious, especially when accompanied with well-done meat and a side plate of veggies.”

“I know my girl; I should be indulging a bit in the food I miss eating every once in a while.”

To get to Smith’s farm, one had to pass through a conservancy with all sorts of wild animals from elephants to warthogs and bird species. Naila could not remember hearing such beautiful bird chirps when her grandpa was driving her to her new home. As time went on, she got better acquainted with the beauty of the Savannah, which other than being quiet and peaceful, had a lot of interesting things going on. Driving through it, one might see an antelope suddenly cross the road with a cheetah in hot pursuit to catch its dinner. In the opposite direction, there might be a hyena scavenging or trying to steal a hard-worn meal from a family of wild dogs. It would be quiet for another moment before a large male elephant which usually forage alone would hoot making animals around it scatter. In another minute, one might see a leopard hauling its catch up a tree as the hyenas gather under it wondering how to steal it as they make the funny hyena laughter. There was always something unexpected happening. A herd of elephants might suddenly emerge from the bushes to cross the road forcing Grandpa Smith to stop the car at a distance as the elephant matriarch leading them stands guard for the herd to majestically cross to the other side of the road. It could take up to thirty minutes as Naila fascinatedly watched mother elephants urge reluctant calves to hasten their pace against a horizon turning golden indicating it would be dark soon.

Miss Morgan recalled an incident where they had to wait for two hours for a lion and its pride to finish feasting on a buffalo they had killed in the middle

of the road. As they watched the pride enjoy their dinner, Naila decided that this was the best time to complain to her grandpa about a boy who had pulled her hair in school calling her all sorts of obscene names. As she told this, she remembered the humiliation she suffered and was soon in a pool of tears.

Grandpa Smith tried to calm her by urging her to enjoy the scene before them. “Watch how the big male is enjoying the soft parts of the buffalo – the heart, the kidneys, the liver – which he will eat to his fill before leaving the leftovers of the carcass for the lionesses and their cubs. The so-called king of the jungle must be the meanest dad I have ever come across. At one time I had great admiration for the male lion and thought it was he who did the hunting to feed the lioness like human beings do. I was disappointed to learn that the lion's work is only to mate and open dinner prayers being the first one to enjoy a meal caught by the lionesses before the pride gets its chance at the table. It is such a sad thing. In the human kingdom, we start with the young ones, then the dad and the mom are sometimes the last. But while we plan our harvests, in the lion kingdom it is survival of the fittest. You don't want to be a weakling in that kingdom because no one shall wait for you to style up and be strong. Life is often a gamble in the kingdom—there is no guarantee you will catch a meal tomorrow. You better be advised to help yourself to a double portion as you may not find anything to eat for a week or more.”

Miss Morgan was still in tears and did not seem to have heard what her grandpa was saying.

“Miss Morgan, you should not waste your tears on such losers,” he changed the subject. “You are a pretty girl and very assertive. You should report such boys to the teacher. That is bullying and such boys should be punished for the disrespect they show you. Bullies should be reported to the school authorities. And if they would be willing to apologise for what they do to you, that would be good. It leaves both of you happy – him from his fear of being punished, and you from being shunned and branded a snitch by other students for reporting small things to the authorities. And to see that you are crying, it must have been a bad experience. I would like to know why he bullied you, Naila, but that is not something I can go and ask.”

“It is not that I am an angel grandpa,” Miss Morgan said regretfully, “I am the one who started it. It is the other girls who encouraged me to make fun of his one short leg. He is called Jay.”

“You see, Miss Morgan, no fight starts out of the blue. It is just like this one with the lions that we are seeing in front of us. There is always a trigger. This time you bruised that boy's ego, hence his reaction. You need to apologise to him. You cannot bully a disabled person. You might get off the hook, but God is offended by such behaviour.” Grandpa Smith reprimanded.

“My brother Clement and sister Specca offended me all the time and mom always seemed to side with them, Grandpa. They never got punished. Students feared them in school. When anybody offends them, mom always comes to school to report the bad pupils to the administration, and the bullies always get punished.”

“Grownups have ways of showing other adults how it is the other child – and not their own who was in the wrong. This especially happens when the parents of such kids are not there to defend them, which is often. What I will say, however, is that your mother is bringing up brats if that is what she does. When the case is left to the teachers to decide, the child in the wrong is likely to be punished. Teachers know how to assess the children and lead them on the right path, Miss Morgan.”

The discussion was interrupted by angry roars as the lionesses fought to gain a good position to feast on the buffalo after the male had had its fill. And, coming back to you and what happened, children should fight their own battles where possible. They always learn something every time they quarrel. They learn when to stop, when to strike back and when to walk away. They learn how to negotiate, where a ‘please’ is needed, and when to say sorry. They know when to ambush, as in the game of hide and seek. They learn how to use their skills to help others where they fail. They know what a ‘thank you’ does for them, and they use it as a tool. These are not lessons you earn from a defensive parent. You learn the lessons of life through such experiences. It is more rewarding to learn through action by yourself other than being coaxed by others to learn it.”

Miss Morgan keenly listened. Her grandpa went on. “I remember Fridays back in the day when we lived in Nairobi. The city council was strict in collecting revenue, including from parking tickets. Failure to pay saw council officers tow your car to their station. If it was on a Friday, they would not release it until Monday morning after the fine and towing charges were paid. Our dad used to tell us to be vigilant in town and, if possible, avoid town errands on Fridays. But should we use the car and it happened to be towed,

Dad did not care how we would do our shopping. Weekend errands had to be done in one way or another. We knew the train schedule, the bus schedule, where to trek and for how long because our strict dad did not have the whole day waiting for us to deliver on our chores. We learned the hard way. Had he been forgiving and quick to bail us out every time we messed up, we probably would have turned out differently. All of us made it, each in our own way. Ooh, where are the lions, what happened to their meal? They are no longer on the road. We must have been too busy talking to notice them. We missed that part. But not to worry, I am sure my camera has captured everything that has happened. Thanks to technology, we shall watch it when we get home.”

They tried to trace the lions as they drove home, but the animals had long dragged their carcass deep in the bushes.

It was fun getting home and joining the village children in their games. One of their games involved wheelbarrows. Each of Naila’s friends’ households had one. Some of them would bring their wheelbarrows out in the evening and compete with one another to see who would run the fastest while carrying a kid on their wheelbarrow. There usually would be around three wheelbarrows with which the contenders would run a distance of about 50 metres and return to the starting point. It was great fun as the rest of the children ran alongside them cheering. First, they would compete carrying one kid on the wheelbarrow. After that, they would compete with two kids, then three and so on. This meant that the group that won carrying one kid may not be the winner when carrying two or three kids. It also depended on who was more masculine and could run fast to win the race.

Winning while carrying three kids won the ultimate prize and the person driving the wheelbarrows was recognised as the strongest and fastest. One had to have muscles and must have practised enough because other competitors would similarly be as strong as the American boxer Mike Tyson, who we thought the strongest in the world. The ones being carried on the wheelbarrows also had to be brave, as the wheelbarrows dangerously hurtled down a hill sometimes losing their way and throwing the unfortunate rider into a ditch. But getting a few bruises was also part of the game for the boys. It was as if they liked the pain. They would sometimes load up to five kids on the wheelbarrow go at a high speed and would sometimes leave the ground and seem to fly in the air. Naila would years later remember a three-year-old boy thrown from such a wheelbarrow who lost his front milk teeth in the game at

age four, only for them to grow back giving him a good smile at age six. Boys, it seemed, liked rough games. The girls were usually the spectators when the competition to drive the wheelbarrow downhill started. They did not think the pain from falls was worth the ride.

The wheelbarrow, her grandfather once explained, was essential to farmers in the village. It was used to carry manure from the chicken pens and cowsheds to the farm, ferry coffee from the farm to the factory and carry milk from the farm to the milk collection centre. It would also be used to carry shopping from the market, or transport produce from the farm to the market. Wheelbarrows were moneymakers for the youth. Politicians knew this, and when they would promise to upgrade the wheelbarrow to a motorcycle to improve their earnings, the youth were sure to rally behind the politician.

Her grandfather recalled a memorable character called Duofold in a fascinating book he had read called *The Cloud Between*, who had invented a rickshaw he christened Coten. The rickshaw could be installed with an electric motor and used as a cart. Grandpa Smith was amused explaining that should the youth have owned such a cart or wheelbarrow and a politician offered to install an electric motor to power it, the youth would have gone to war to make that politician the president of the country. A wheelbarrow or cart was a tool people almost worshipped for its usefulness and was often the first wheeled contraption that African homes ever owned for those who could afford them during the colonial times beginning early in the 20th century.

He went on to explain that the second most respected means of transport in the village was a bicycle. Even Grandpa Smith owned one. As part of their daily exercise, Grandpa Smith and Miss Morgan would cycle around the vast farm to check progress on the growing wheat crop and whether it needed attention such as spraying pesticides. Many families would upgrade from the wheelbarrow to the bicycle as a means of transport to take their produce to the market.

NAILA WOULD FIND her life in Grandpa Smith's home full of interesting things happening, such as what happened with Captain the Dog. When one of Smith's favourite shepherds – a Samburu tribesman – was retiring, the shepherd made a special request. He wanted to be allowed to retire with the dog to keep him company. Captain was a special dog, which the Samburu

shepherd greatly loved for its skills in herding and protecting livestock. There was a particular incident in which Captain had tackled and injured a leopard that was after the sheep, greatly endearing him to the shepherd. Smith, despite his love for Captain, granted the request and gave him the dog as a parting gift.

Captain, however, had different ideas and decided that the retired shepherd could not be his master. And no sooner had he been taken to his new home in Marsabit, where the shepherd came from, he trekked back a hundred miles to the home he had been born and brought up in Smith's compound.

Naila was very delighted to see Captain the Dog back. First, however, Grandpa Smith said that the dog, which looked weak, had to visit the veterinary doctor in Timau for a check-up in case he had picked up an ailment like rabies along the way. Only then would he allow Naila to celebrate the return of his favourite dog. The vet found Captain a bit weak with a minor infection but would be up and about in two weeks with careful nursing.

With time on their hands after finishing with the vet, Grandpa Smith suggested they have something to bite at his favourite joint in Timau. It was while on the way that Wendy suddenly appeared.

"Dear merciful heaven, not again," Smith swore under his breath, though he was sure Naila could hear him. "I hate meeting this chatterbox Madam Wendy, yet we seem to always bump into each other when I least want it. When did she make it to this eatery? I thought I saw her entering a supermarket three streets away. Is she a witch or what?" He looked pale as he said this.

Wendy had a reputation for taking a lot of time speaking with anyone who cared to listen to her long tales of gossip about neighbourhood dramas. Nothing skipped her attention about the goings-on of the white community in Timau. Something odd about her was that she could wear the same attire for a whole week without a blink. She, however, looked well taken care of, as one could tell from her glowing skin. Though in her forties, she had remained single but had a grown-up daughter who had left home years before. She and her only sibling, a brother, had inherited enough wealth from their British father. And though she carried herself like a princess, everyone seemed to dismiss her as a rumourmonger.

Grandpa Smith tried to walk past her unnoticed but in vain. Wendy was hawkeyed and tapped his back as he passed by her table making them stop.

"You said you are going to school, Miss Morgan," she said, attending to the girl first. "Did you change your mind, or you are heading there now?" She had

busted her grandpa, who was the source of the information that she would be going to school but wasn't. They had earlier had a telephone conversation as Smith tried to find out from her where the veterinary had relocated.

"Hello Miss Wendy. I am here to have lunch with my granddaughter," Grandpa explained. "I have missed having sumptuous fish, and this is the only place in town."

"Hello Smith. I had just come for a cup of coffee. Now that you are here, I can share a meal with you and your granddaughter."

It was like her to invite herself and intrude into everyone's affairs. She smiled suggestively at Smith, but he did not smile back. She felt a fool loving a man who had no idea she was dying to have him.

Naila saw the smile and understood what was happening and thought it embarrassing and funny at the same time. *I've always wondered how it would be like to see Grandpa with a date. Her soft voice sounds so beautiful to my ears yet seems to sound so horrible to Grandpa who does not like her.*

By this time, Wendy was helping Naila with the menu, unconcerned that Grandpa seemed unhappy with her presence at their table.

Though holding a menu and about to make his order, Smith suddenly seemed to lose his appetite. This was no doubt because of his dread for Wendy's talkativeness which he knew would not allow him to enjoy the meal once she started speaking to him. For the moment, however, she was occupied with helping Naila choose the best meal.

But before Smith knew it, Wendy ordered a starter for all of them. Annoyed at being caught by surprise, he turned pink like one who had bitten into a hot chilli. *This woman is a nightmare and should dine alone. Wendy has now replaced my wife Calda to so disrespectfully order a meal for me and my granddaughter without first asking?!*

The food nonetheless came, and Smith was thoroughly bored with Miss Wendy's stories which only she alone seemed to enjoy and loudly laughed to. She spoke nonstop and referred to stories she insisted Grandpa was aware of but wasn't. In his politeness, Grandpa Smith would nod in agreement to whatever Wendy was babbling about. He was eager to finish his food to leave the table. But he knew he could not ignore her, as it was Wendy he often consulted on farming and where to source things he needed. She had her nose in everyone's business and could find anything. If he wanted to know

something, she could get him any piece of information for less than a plate of food.

By the time Smith and his granddaughter excused themselves, Wendy was still halfway finishing her meal. They left her at the table as Smith paid for the bill and went to the car. Wendy did not seem to care about being abandoned. She had three deserts to down—hers, Smith's, and Naila's. Seeing that the two were about to leave the table, the waiter came to collect the plates and would have served her the three portions. Miss Morgan, however, quickly grabbed her dessert on her way out. She loved her ice cream and there was no way she was going to leave it for Wendy to enjoy. She took it to the counter to be packed as a takeaway as she waved Wendy goodbye.

Wendy returned the goodbye with a wrinkled smile, which Miss Morgan reciprocated as she walked out.

Wendy loved her life and didn't care what anybody thought of her. She liked to say that she had only one life to live, even though she had made a mess of it by being too generous with men. She could hop into bed with anyone, from youthful men to grandfathers. Yet she was the same person who opened the church doors on Sunday. She lived by God's commandment to let every creature that has breath praise His name. But to Grandpa Smith she was just another creature he wasn't too keen to deal with.

He and Naila would have stayed longer at the eatery, but Wendy had ruined it for him. Once they arrived home, he didn't want anything about her mentioned.

"What a day!" Naila thought to herself. "I wish Wendy was a more likeable woman!"

She thought this with regard to her grandfather and could sense a connection between Wendy and her late grandma. This was especially when he spoke longingly about his late wife somewhat like one wishing somebody could take over her place. This is what Naila thought when he said, "My wife Calda was such a good cook. I cared little about the kitchen. Even though I have had to quickly learn how to cook since her departure, I have been cooking all the wrong foods. In my cooking, it has been for their taste rather than the quality of the food. I realised this too late and, adding it to a lack of enough physical activity, now I have diabetes and high blood pressure. That is what the doctor calls a lifestyle disease. Poor diet and lack of enough exercise, those two things. My father used to tell me we are in transit on this earth, so I should not be too

strict on things that make me happy. Food has been a source of great pleasure for me, not all food but junk food.”

“Not to worry, old boy,” Naila tried to assure him. “I remember our teacher once telling us that age and illness are inevitable. They are joined at the hip. She told us that the thing is to make life interesting for as long as it lasts as one grows old. Healthy eating at your age is good. The hurts shall become less with time. You can even take junk food once in a while. The teacher said it can’t hurt if you don’t take it every day. I love the smoothie blended with stinging nettle that you have been taking in the morning. Your skin glows now, and you look much younger. Keep it up, grandpa.”

“The stinging nettle soup has reduced my blood sugar levels drastically,” Grandpa Smith agreed. “I feel much better, and along with it, I am now taking less medication. I wish one never ages and stays young forever. I would advise you to start eating well and keep at it throughout your life, Miss Morgan. It is very hard to adjust to a lifestyle when you are an old guard like me. Be helping yourself to my now healthy dinner once in a while. These oils you guys eat in your food daily shall lead you to lifestyle diseases sooner than people my age got it. This is because we ate a bit healthier with farm fresh food when we were younger.”

“True Grandpa. I shall heed your advice. We have a lot of farm-fresh food and should take advantage of it. We should redo our menu again so that we both take the same meals, Grandpa. I should help the chef come up with something that both of us will enjoy.”

They were on the veranda and were silent for a while as they watched the sun set amid a splash of beautiful orange and golden-white colours as it went down over the horizon.

CHAPTER TWO

Smith's Ride

*Life is a long winding road like a twisted rope;
when you are in it, don't worsen things
by complicating it further.
- Joseph Hill, Reggae Musician*

WHEN THE GOVERNMENT at one time decided to increase the cost of petroleum products by 40 per cent, no one complained. But when soon after it decided to increase the cost by an additional 10 per cent, everyone was up in arms. This was around Christmas time. Realising the anger the hikes had caused among the people, and with elections around the corner, the government promised to lower the cost of petroleum products by 30 per cent. Lowering the cost, however, was not going to be immediate but would come after six months in June when the national budget would be read.

Smith took the price hike personally and decided he would do something drastic, as if he could singlehandedly punish the government. Although he could afford it, he decided that he was not ready to pay the cost of filling his tank as he usually did when fuelling his car. He resolved to henceforth be putting just enough gas to attend to each errand. After one errand was done, he would buy just enough fuel, often just a litre worth 200 shillings, for the next task around town. He vowed that he would continue with this until the petroleum prices were revised downwards.

The only problem was that his Jeep was an old, big engine fuel guzzler whose fuel gauge was spoilt and, therefore, could not give the correct reading. It, therefore, so happened that he thought he had put enough fuel and went galivanting around town when on the way home accompanied by Naila the car suddenly stopped. They scrambled for a jerrican at the back of the vehicle and hailed a motorcycle taxi to town to buy gas. And, true to Smith's vow, he only bought fuel worth 200 bob. But when they poured the fuel into the tank when they got back to the car, it wouldn't start. The tank was too dry for the fuel to be enough to start the engine.

Though Naila didn't say it, she thought that her grandfather ought to have bought a smaller car in line with his new habit of spending 200 bob at a time on gas. This, she thought, would have kept with what he had once told her about the Japanese philosophy of Kaizen about continuous self-improvement. Better still, going by Kaizen, he could have replaced the guzzler with a motorbike and this thing about the gas would never have happened. They took another motorbike taxi back to the gas station for more fuel. This time he was more mindful and bought fuel worth five hundred shillings but only after spending 30 minutes cursing the government for the inconvenience.

By the time they got home later that evening, Naila was too tired to do anything, not even to eat dinner or take a bath. But for the next six months, carrying jerrican to and from the stalled jeep because of finished fuel became her life. This was her assigned duty while her grandfather remained behind in the stalled car reading the newspaper to catch up with the news. Not accompanying her as he had done the first time made her wonder whether it was senility that had got to him. Her frequent trips with the motorcycle taxis became so familiar with people in Timau town that they gave her the nickname the "Jerry girl". It amused her that their tongues were too heavy to say "jerrican girl".

Finally, six months came to pass, and the cost of gas was reduced by 30 per cent but Grandpa Smith did not keep his word to be filling his tank when the cost came down. His habit of a jerrican had now become a lifestyle he was not about to change. To Naila, he seemed eager to have the empty tank of fuel so that she would always be on the motorbikes to the gas station. She tried reminding him to always fuel before leaving town but *wapi* (nothing). Naila was tired of what she termed his *firirida*, referring to a then-popular song with a peculiar dance. An idea then came to her to urge him to buy extra gas in the

jerrican and carry it as a spare supply of fuel instead of filling it every time the car tank went dry. That sounded like a good idea to her grandpa. And so they continued with the 200-bob worth of fuel he was determined to keep spending, except that he had now agreed to spend extra 500 shillings to fill a spare jerrican as emergency fuel. Naila saw this as a weakness that her grandpa should see this as reasonable. But she didn't try to persuade him otherwise.

NOT MUCH SEEMED to have changed on Smith's plantation, a section of which he had allowed his Africa workers to make their gardens. And just like his daughter Mina, he began to notice that Naila also played mostly with the boys as the girls remained in their homes helping their mothers with chores. The boys liked to come to his compound and do some work in the bakery and get some bread in return or get to ride his horses as a form of entertainment which the boys thought adventurous.

As Naila got into her teenage, she became friendly with a gardener called Mwangi who worked for her grandfather. As they got better acquainted, Mwangi informed her that Mina, her mother, had gotten her with a former driver at the plantation called Mwangangi. The gardener further informed the surprised girl that, upon her biological father being sacked shortly after she was born, he bought a piece of land next to the plantation and was now a flower transporter. Mwangi told Naila that he was willing to show him his biological father's place. They made an excuse to go shopping for her grandfather's plantation one day and made a detour to Mwangangi's farm.

It was then Naila introduced herself to her father. Mwangangi was very happy to meet her daughter, whom he introduced to his family. She got to learn that he had married a beautiful German woman with whom they had two children who, being half-caste, were not so different from her. Naila had then thought to herself: *My mother Mina must have set an example for this guy for him to marry a German!*

Naila was surprised to realise that she already knew his children Duen and Stella with whom she went to the same school, but who now turned to be her step-siblings. Naila was shocked to realise that they were her siblings. Duen was a bit older than Stella, who was almost the same age as Naila. With this, she immediately realised that her mom Mina must have slept with Mwangangi, no doubt with the knowledge that he was already married. Naila was disturbed

by this and wanted to know why her mother should be so careless a woman and seem to have no respect for families to sleep with someone's husband and father. This, however, was not the time to dwell on such issues. What mattered was her realisation that she now had a sister and a brother who were happy to accept her, in addition to being schoolmates.

As Dad Mwangangi gave her a tour of his farm and wanted to know whether Naila needed any support, she mentioned the hardships she had gone through with her mother and her husband, Morgan. He was sad to learn this but felt he could do little for her, first, because her grandfather Smith was taking care of her. He didn't want to appear disrespectful to Smith to appear to be taking over the grandfather's guardian role. But neither did Smith want anything to do with Mwangangi since the day he sacked him.

As they parted, Mwangangi and his daughter promised to be seeing each other once in a while. It was, however, during their getting to know one another that Naila got to know that her mom got pregnant at the same time as Stella's mom. Mwangangi explained that Lina, Stella's German mom, had at the time come to visit Mina, with whom they were great friends. Mina, therefore, knew that Lina already had a child with him. Everything had happened between him and Lina one night when they found themselves very drunk and shared a bed and one thing led to another. However, Lina had not mentioned to her parents who her child's father was and was not keen to marry Mwangangi at the time as she had college to finish. She returned to Germany where her parents waited for her.

In the end, however, after Mina's parents refused her to marry Mwangangi, she suggested to Mwangangi that he should marry her friend Lina in her void.

By the time Naila was done with her father, Mwangi the gardener and family driver had finished with the shopping and was back to pick her up. She went home the happiest she had ever been to have met her real father.

GRANDPA SMITH HAD FORGOTTEN to buy the fuel they had agreed with Naila he should store in the jerrican for emergencies. And so the jeep had stalled as she was being driven to school one morning. She was forced to hop onto a motorbike taxi so as not to be late for class. She was surprised to find that her desk mate Stella had not yet arrived, which was unlike her. She hoped Stella's dad Mwangangi had not formed the habit of fuel rationing like Grandpa Smith to have his car stalled on the road. Stella never showed up and it was a

very lonely day for Naila. She didn't know who to ask about Stella's whereabouts for her to miss school. Her brother Duen had completed primary education and sent to a boarding secondary school. This being a Friday with the following day not being a school day, Naila decided she must find out that evening after school what could have happened to her stepsister Stella.

Her grandfather had already informed her that he was travelling to Nairobi that day to attend to his freight business and would send a driver to pick her up. She saw this as an opportunity to visit Stella at her home, which she explained to her understanding driver Mwangi. She found Stella all alone in the gazebo adjacent to their house. She forced a weak smile upon seeing Naila, hinting that something serious had happened. The next moment Stella was in tears hugging Naila like one who sought some assurance.

"I started menstruation, Miss Morgan," Stella reported sniffing, as Naila was shocked. "It had been so uncomfortable and stressful that I had to skip school. I didn't think I could cope with the leakage and wet feeling in class."

"What!" said Naila when she found her voice. "That's tragic. I thought our teacher mentioned something like this starts at age fifteen. We are only thirteen years old!"

"I thought so too, Miss Morgan. But Mom had also told me it could start even at ten years old."

"Oh my God, that is scary. I am sure I will be next. What a disaster!"

"I know... I hate every bit of it. I have cried my poor soul the whole day. What to do, my dear Naila! It is a rite of passage that we can't escape."

"How is the experience? Does it come like tears, or how does it emerge?"

"I have no idea. I am on my third pad, but Mom says I am being wasteful, that I should use one until it is soaked. I am not sure how soaked."

"Everything shall fall in place soon and you will know what to expect. Can I see how the pad looks like, Stella? Are you able to walk?"

"Everything down there is new to me. I do not feel like it's my body anymore."

"You are a lesson to me. I will be carrying a pad from now on, as I don't know when this rain will reach me, Stella."

This made Stella laugh, the first time she was doing so since Naila's visit.

"Not really, Miss Morgan. Look at this one. It's called a pant shield or liner. Mama told me to use it on the fifth day when the flow is about to end. I will also learn how to use the calendar to track the days and will use the pant shield

just before the menstruation dates with a warning discharge telling you the rain is on the way. You can last a day with a shield pad when you are a beginner, I guess.”

“Right away, give me a pack Stella. I should already be having it by now!”

“You seem too eager for this rain, Miss Morgan. Wait for your time. You may have the pack, but I can assure you that you shan’t miss it when menses start, dear.”

“Rain or no rain, promise to be in school on Monday. At least you have this caregiver now that I am aware of it, Stella. We are in it together.” They hugged and parted, with Stella promising not to miss class.

As soon as Grandpa Smith was back from Nairobi, Naila did not wait to explain what her sister was going through. This reminded him how it had escaped his mind to remember that Miss Morgan was still a girl and needed someone to guide her on such matters. He didn’t know which of his friends he could approach to assist on this. They were all old now and a bit out of touch with such things. But he was happy that Naila could confide in Stella’s mom should it come to that. They are family anyway, he reasoned, sure that Lina would want the best for his granddaughter and not feel burdened with Naila’s female issues.

Grandpa Smith then seemed to realise that Naila had a girl’s needs and the following day he sent her with the driver to do shopping for things she thought she needed. He even suggested that they go pick up Stella and her mom to accompany her during the shopping. It was then Lina advised Naila and Stella that they needed black pants whereas all of Naila’s pants were white, which were easier to remember to soak and machine wash every three days. With menstruation, the black pants would hide the stains. From then on, Grandpa Smith started giving Naila some pocket money to sort out her issues without having to involve him all the time.

NAILA AND HER STEPSISTER Stella were very close and did almost everything together. They ended up attending the same college and would later work in the logistics department of the same company, courtesy of their dad Mwangangi. They were also both eager to start dating and get married.

Before that had happened, however, Grandpa Smith invited Naila to work in his freight company. He had always wanted a family member in the company. He recalled when he had begged his only child, Mina, to help in the

company but she was always too comfortable being Morgan's housewife. She now lived in France with her family and was too preoccupied with her comfortable Paris life to want to sweat it out under the African sun.

Naila had discussed this with her grandfather, and already knew about France and its famed tourist attractions including museums, art galleries, fine cuisine and dazzling beaches such as in Marseille. She wished she was still on good terms with Morgan to visit this magnificent land. Since she had moved in with her grandfather, they had never visited or invited Grandpa Smith to their family events. They seemed not to consider him and his granddaughter family anymore. Mina would sometimes hold a video call with her father, but ten years had now passed since they had had one. This made Naila convinced that her grandpa now needed her more, as he had nobody else to relate with, let alone kill his loneliness. She suspected Mina, her mom, must have tried to skim off Grandpa Smith and him telling her off ensuring that father and daughter never spoke to each other. For the moment, however, Naila looked forward to working with her grandpa.

Her colleagues had already planned a farewell party, of which they had agreed to meet at a joint near Cameo Cinema in Nairobi's central business district. It turned out to be fabulous and as the night wore on, they hopped from one discotheque to the other. By morning, they were thoroughly done. No sooner had Miss Morgan got to bed than her cat was at her bedroom door scratching it to be let out. She was like a zombie when she left the bed to open the window and let it out while warning the cat that he would be sleeping out going forward.

Later that day as she relaxed at home, she recalled her walk from their Upper Hill office where she worked with Stella to the party venue the previous evening. Stella's car was out on some errands and was the one they would have used. It had been a long time since she had walked through Uhuru Park, past the dual carriageway and down Kenyatta Avenue past the statue that she never understood what it meant with the white man between two black guys, one of them in traditional attire and a spear. As she walked down the street, she wondered why some Africans during the colonial period didn't wear trousers. She remembered Grandpa Smith telling her that the Kenya regular police only started wearing trousers in the 1980s.

But with the monument still on her mind, she thought that not many people seemed to know what it was about. She had watched on TV how pedestrians

on the street seemed blank when asked about it by a reporter. Some thought it was the Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama, others Jesus of Nazareth, as others thought it must be a person called Thompson who the Thomson Falls in Nyahururu in Laikipia County in Kenya is named after. Many had no idea what the monument stood for. Naila wondered whether it might be a statue of the Mau Mau General China or politician Oginga Odinga, or maybe Kenneth Matiba. She would later learn that it was a World War One and Two Memorial Monument.

When she later discussed this with her stepsister Stella, Stella amused her remembering their father Mwangangi telling her that the generation of their grandmother Naila, who Miss Morgan was named after, they referred to the two world wars as *mbara ya menjeneti* (emergency war). What they were calling the emergency war was actually the Mau Mau uprising against colonialism, which they confused with the First and Second World Wars. All they could remember was that it was a horrible war that claimed a lot of lives. They did not seem to know who was fighting who or who was being fought and why. All they knew was that the Mzungu (white man) was crazy and seemed not to have respect for Africans. Or who would leave their land to go and kill and humiliate a peaceful people in their land?

CHAPTER THREE

Smith Freights

*Never Say Never; if you know you can do
what you love, don't give up*
- Justin Bieber

WHEN MISS MORGAN STARTED working at Smith Freights, her grandfather thought it would be more useful for her if she started with their Nairobi office. This would better orient her to what her work would entail.

When she got to Nairobi, she found the firm had a beautiful and elaborate office run by professionals. The Managing Director was a middle-aged man called Alastair. Miss Morgan's first impression of him was that he was a jolly guy who seemed down to earth. His beautiful British accent fascinated her and made her wish she had been brought up in England, the land of her grandpa, who she liked to call His Lordship Smith. Alastair's office was elaborate and had a cabinet stocked with the fine things a young lady would desire—nuts, rare biscuits, and sweets to nibble at as she worked. She thought this must be a man who knew how to entertain, seeing that the office also had a fridge stocked with white wine and two or three varieties of ice cream. Her eyes also spotted some dark chocolate. *These treats in the cabinet and fridge give the impression that he must have a lot of female guests as this is one of the best ways to make them feel comfortable and bring business to Smith Freights.*

Alastair opened his Apple computer and showed Miss Morgan what the freight company was all about, including the company's vision and mission.

"Smith Freights, as the name suggests, moves cargo around east Africa," Alistair explained. "Our vision is to be the most efficient freight company in the region. Our mission is to offer the best services so that we become the

most sought-after transport company for our efficient and reliable cargo handling capacity. Let's take a walk, Miss Morgan, I show you around—and, by the way, why is your name Miss Morgan, the last time we met when you were younger you went by the name Naila.”

“Then you must have been in the family business for a long time to have such a detail, Alastair.”

“Yah! I was in love with your mom, only that she fell in love with a pilot. I never got a chance to propose to her.”

“The pilot is my stepfather, and he is the Morgan that I got the nickname.”

“Haha, what a joke! The same nasty man that made sure your mom disown you?”

Miss Morgan saw this as a joke and smiled, letting it slip.

She was taken around the company's departments and meet the people she would be working with.

The company staff were gathered into a room to meet her. She addressed them projecting a friendly demeanour. “I am not very good at memorising names,” she told them smiling and used the best technique she could to make everyone comfortable. “I know there has been a rumour in the corridors that the chairman's heir would be in the house,” she joked. “I am she. It's a pleasure to meet you, George. A pleasure to meet you, Bettie.” She mentioned a bunch of other names, before finally saying, “It is also a pleasure to meet you - the security team.”

The staff was happy and, with the way she greeted them, found Naila to be a down-to-earth person.

Alastair invited her to join a meeting of sales staff that was starting very early at 6 am the following morning. She was told that the meeting had to always be on a Wednesday at 6 am on the dot and must end at 8 am to free the salespeople to their work in the field. She was curious to know why it had to be on a Wednesday and not any other day.

“Wednesdays,” Alastair explained, “were considered the best day to hold a strategic meeting by any company worth its brand for several reasons. Monday being the day after the weekend, most brains would be fighting the weekend hangover to be able to concentrate at work. There would be the after-effects of weddings attended, the parties, the fights, the lost loves, the newfound loves, the bounced dates, the property the newlyweds may want to buy, except that they must punctually report to work on Monday. With all those issues playing,

nothing productive can be achieved. Monday is also a day many companies firefight the Friday mess. Most organisations are slow on Friday. Many don't come to work claiming to be Muslims who must attend prayers on Friday, meaning that their weekends start on Thursday evening. Tuesday is a sober day for everyone to sort themselves out before the Wednesday meeting. This means that the only days of productive work are Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday."

Miss Morgan was surprised at this and thought to herself: *I don't know how true that is, but I have to agree with Alastair. Maybe that explains why Smith Freights has grown in leaps and bounds.*

6 am will be early for me but I have no choice; I'll set the alarm at 5 am, she had told herself, but was at the office at 5.30 am, long before anyone had arrived.

After they came to work, she waited for the Smith Freights fraternity to finish their breakfast. She only took a glass of water before joining them. The reason she took water was because she was never able to have breakfast before 8 am. She would therefore break her "fast" when the hour came at 8 am.

As she entered the boardroom, she was surprised to find that even the office messenger was in the meeting.

"Alastair Sir," she whispered to his ear as they reached the door, "you had told me it would be a sales meeting. What is everyone else doing here?"

"The primary business of every member of this company is sales. Everyone has a role to play in whatever section they serve in this organisation. We use Kaizen methods," replied Alastair.

"What is Kaizen? Grandpa mentions Kaizen all the time, but I've never given it much thought."

Alastair smiled and said, "It could take a whole day to explain."

Naila nodded that she understood and smiled back. Her thoughts turned to the strange meeting as she looked for a place to sit:

I am curious about this sales meeting. The companies I worked as an intern never invited every member of staff to the same office meeting unless it was an office party. If it is about sales, only the sales team is invited. The production team held their meetings separately. A meeting was never held for subordinate staff. It was as if they never needed motivation. They were only summoned to a meeting when they made a mistake. The executive and management staff held their own sessions, and their decisions and orders

were passed down the hierarchy. What is this nonsense that every staff member can sit to discuss sales?

This seemed to irritate Naila, and she felt a bit disappointed that such a meeting should include even subordinate staff who may not understand the technical things that go on in sales. This was going to be the first item on her diary to report to Grandpa Smith. She almost spoke to him immediately on the phone even before the meeting was over. Her other concern was the cafeteria. When she went for a glass of water, she noticed everyone was served at the buffet table regardless of their status in the office. They all mingled as if the staff members were at home as a family.

Why would a messenger eat in the same dining hall as the MD? It is absurd and unacceptable to me. Is this a joke or what? This is the first time I am feeling out of place. I am not of the same class as these naive employees. I am a trained leader and cannot listen to cheap minds. What would I be discussing with a messenger or the gatekeeper, and worse of all discussing sales?!

Do these labourers know the hours we have put in class to be strategic marketers? How would they know how to mitigate risks for organisations or the notion of double sales for them to be in the meeting simply because they wear the same uniform as the sales team on a Wednesday? Won't they have forgotten their place at the gate or the kitchen, or on a bike running errands?

Do they understand terminologies like mitigating risks and closing sales? Have they ever heard of an elevator pitch? Do they understand what sales targets are and how commissions play?

If they think they have graduated from being gatekeepers or are unable to stand the heat in the kitchen they can go to marketplace and be hawkers there, not at Smith Freights, and not under my watch. I am thoroughly annoyed.

These guys need to know who Miss Morgan is. I am not a joke, and I need to assert myself before they take me for granted, as they have with Alastair.

Naila sat at the podium facing the staff who sat in a circle with no table between them.

Naila knew what she was talking about. In addition to her good grades in sales and marketing, Naila was also a passionate trader. She showed this even as a student when she would sell items to other students, competing with the school Canteen. She would buy the stuff from kiosks near her home which she would then sell in school. The vending machine at the canteen was poorly

managed and often ran out of stock. This saw her sales boom. She thought her experience incomparable with her business competitors who claimed to understand business.

Alastair shouted her name to leave the podium and join the Smith Freights team.

With these thoughts of grandeur in her mind, she was shocked to find that the only available seat was between the security guard and the office chef. This made her angry.

She, however, took the seat but ordered everyone to move so that she could sit next to Alastair.

No one resisted her order to move. They moved and kept their distance from her. Then the meeting started with a prayer, first by a Muslim followed by a Christian.

I wonder whether there is a difference when a prayer is conducted by a Muslim or by a Christian. There is only one God, and people's needs are similar. That arrangement of two prayers shall have to change too. I have no time for such dramas. You can pray quietly in your heart. After all, you know your needs better than anyone. Why must prayers be public to shout asking God to forgive you for committing adultery, stealing, or being mean to others, or even thanking God for things that none in the congregation would want to know or care about? Oh, the prayers are already over! But I have no idea what either of them has prayed about. My mind was busy dismissing that part from the meeting.

Prayers seemed to her to be about too many needs that suggested unhappiness. This made her remember having read or heard somewhere someone express something like a saying that "Doing what you like is freedom. Liking what you do is happiness." She thought that this was what a meeting should be.

The next phase of the meeting was to plan the targets for the week. The first person to speak was the security guard, Sam. Miss Morgan excused herself to go to the bathroom so as not to be involved in whatever irrelevant opinion the subordinate staff were going to offer. She decided she would only return to the meeting when it was Alastair's turn to speak. She responded to useless SMS messages from people she considered nobodies to pass the time. She finally went back into the hall after 20 minutes. She timed this from her experience in previous sales meetings in other organisations which usually took 30 to 40 minutes.

Time is of the essence, Miss Morgan thought to herself as she walked to the hall. Professionals should have no time for storytelling. All that matters is the bottom line, which must be attained by hook or crook. Professionals learn it the hard way. That is why they went to school to learn how not to follow their feelings but go by what the market demands.

As she walked in, she took in the goings on in the hall and was surprised that nothing was happening at the meeting. She not aware that it had had to stop and wait for her to return. She found this annoying and embarrassing at the same time. Everyone looked ill at ease, making her rudely think:

Everyone is looking at me painfully as if afflicted with constipation. Take more water and more veggies. You shall be okay.

“We have been waiting for you, Miss Morgan. Now that you are back, we can continue.” Alastair called the meeting to order.

The guard retook the floor. Miss Morgan was so mad that her body blushed red from the tip of her head to her toes, but she tried to keep her cool. *Why on earth would a meeting stop to wait for someone not interested in the nonsense these people are here to discuss? I am clear about the strategies I want applied in the company. I have proven universal strategies that successful companies use.*

She breathed in and out slowly to calm herself down and went on like this for a few moments before her anger subsided.

“Good morning once again, everyone,” the security guard Sam greeted his colleagues for the second time with a big smile.

Naila did not even move her lips to acknowledge the greetings. Neither would Sam have cared had he looked at her disapproving face. He was a self-made security officer.

“I have improved my customer care. As you can see, I waited patiently for our new family member, Miss Morgan. Welcome, Miss Morgan to the Smith Freights sales meeting.”

This made Naila angry, and she almost rudely responded to the security guard.

“This week I am happy to report that I have tied three accounts,” he said. “I gave an elevator pitch to my three irritated clients who had come by to pick our service profile to compare with others providing freight service in this city. They had visited four of our competitors, and Smith Freights was their fifth. I invited them to our state-of-the-art cafeteria and took them through our

service catalogue over a cup of tea. I realised they were foreigners and were interested in more than freight services. They also wanted to know how to source the products they merchandised in this country.

“I knew no one with better capacity to handle it than our able MD, Alastair. I informed him what it was about in his office, and he invited the three clients to the boardroom to be given a Smith Freights presentation about the company by Ashley. I noticed that two of the gents listening to her could not keep their eyes off Ashley, who is very beautiful and dressed like a model. I excused myself to return to my station at the gate where my colleague was busy with clients clearing trucks in and out of the compound. Thank you, Alastair, for closing the sale for me. The two foreigners’ retainer to the company is three million a month. It is a charity organisation and has allocated a three-year budget for the project. Smith Freights already has the contract for the entire duration of the project. We hope to work with the NGO for a long time as they establish their headquarters for Africa here in Kenya.”

Everyone stood up and clapped for Sam with appreciation for the accomplishment. Naila, too, stood up and forced a weak smile. *I have never in my life ever closed a sale with anywhere near the numbers just mentioned by this security guard.*

The second person to present a sales report was Sally. Hers involved calming down a lady who had come to the office to cancel a contract after her consignment was delayed by a day. Her client rejected the consignment because of the delay, making her incur considerable loss. Sally explained that she had opened her computer and tracked the schedule for the consignment. She was surprised to discover that the consignment had arrived on time at the airport, except that the airport authorities had changed its onward flight and delayed the consignment by more than six hours, meaning the plane hit the skies late missing the scheduled time to deliver. This meant the lady had grounds to claim losses from the forwarding airport. Maurice, Sally’s colleague, had then taken the client to the cafeteria for a snack where the sales manager assured her as they shared a meal. Her contract with Smith Freights was left intact, and the previous day prior to the Wednesday sales meeting she had doubled the service requirement in her contract.

“We have her for the next five years. Thank you, the sales team, for refining the game for us,” Sally concluded her report.

After Sally was done speaking, there followed applause from the rest of the staff, both for her winning the client back, and for the security guard's role in getting the sale. This left Miss Morgan wondering whether the sales theory she had learnt in class had made her a robot enslaved to the theory not to think outside the box.

Sam stood up to explain about another incident where some malicious casual workers had showed up at the company gate and tried to spoil Smith Freights name by falsely accusing the company of not paying their casual workers. They also claimed that the company had stolen from them. The casual workers had been dismissed for causing chaos and breaking some fragile products before they were loaded onto the truck. The damage caused the organisation some significant losses.

"I invited the workers inside to speak with Nelly about the loss," Sam went on. "But they denied involvement in the damage caused, no matter how Nelly tried to show evidence that it was their fault. Nelly decided that the wise thing was to approve their payment."

This provoked some in the sales meeting, one of whom could be heard murmuring, "I was not happy with the payment and went to her to complain that she was wasting company resources."

Hearing this, Nelly, who was seated at a corner in the meeting just smiled, then stood up and said, "Never argue with a fool. A fool can make you or break you. A fool or a stupid person has nothing to lose. He can destroy your hard work in mere seconds without a blink. The sooner you calm the storm, the sooner you get back your power. Despite being the aggrieved party, Smith Freights was instead the one to apologise to them. We not only had to incur losses but also had to pay the fools. The customer is always right and despite these guys being mere casual workers, they also are our ambassadors out there. It is critical that everybody protects Smith Freights' image from the lowest employee to the top-most manager or executive."

Everyone was lost for words. Not only did Nelly pay the workers, but she also gave them a gift hamper. It was only then they agreed to listen about loss and promise to learn from it. Two of the workers had since been employed as permanent loaders and were the most dependable. The third one seemed only interested in the wages to go and drink even as he took the hamper of goodies to his family.

“Thank you, Nelly, for being the ‘Abigail’ of the Smith Freights Family,” said Sam. “Abigail is the woman in the Bible who saved her husband Nabal’s wealth from the wrath of King David who was angry that Nabal had refused to serve food to the king’s army which was starving in the desert. In the meantime, the client we almost lost in the mayhem opened the account with us and has so far given us three referrals.”

Everyone stood up to applaud the security guard, for the second time. The Logistics Manager, Nelly, and Walter, the sales manager, took turns hugging him. His was an example of teamwork at Smith’s Freight Company.

In the meantime, Miss Morgan had been watching all these surprised at her business naivety. *I am so humbled. I am ready to learn like the two of the three fools who had come to Smith Freights to demand their wages. I am blown away by the security guard’s sales skills. How naïve have I been? I have never closed any sale close in amount to what this guard Sam and team have done!*

The next presentation must have also blown her mind. John, the cleaner who was also the messenger, seemed to fear looking in the direction of Miss Morgan. Maybe it was because of the way her eyes appeared to show contempt for the security guard as he gave his presentation.

“Good morning, everyone, I am John. I am the company messenger. I was sent to Sarit Centre to drop some fliers for the Smith Freights stand at the exhibition our company was participating in. When I arrived, our stall was still closed by 11 am. I could not reach the sales and marketing team – Bettie, Walter, or Rose. I opened my phone and went to our company website to learn what to do and see whether our products were arranged properly. Walter, the manager returned my call eventually. I informed him of the situation, and I offered to take charge of the exhibition stall until the team arrived,” he paused and smiled like one about to tell a joke. “The manager, who knew I sometimes wear our branded company T-shirt to work, informed me of a new County Government circular prohibiting branded clothes in the Central Business District unless the branded company has paid for an advertising license. That took me aback because most T-shirts, even second-hand ones we see on the street advertise something or other including some of the major brands, local or international. I wondered how County government officers distinguish which branded T-shirt is legal and which one is not.”

Everyone saw the joke, provoking laughter.

“Anyway, I thank this company for making all of us sales icons. I stood for the team. As I waited for interested visitors at the stall, Louis, an old classmate at primary school, popped in accompanied by his personal assistant, a lady. He was surprised to see me and told me he was looking for a freight company for his company that had extended its wings across East Africa. He was moving between 20 and 30 forty-foot containers of liquor every week to countries in the region. I asked him to meet my MD, Alastair because I did not have all the facts about our company. I told him my MD would be happy to visit him at his office, if necessary. Louis said that he preferred going to Smith Freights instead. I called the MD and alerted him. My schoolmate could see that I was a lowly messenger, but he must have felt he could trust the company that had employed me. It is probably because we had been good friends in school and perhaps because I was never in trouble. You can call this the power of an old boys’ network. I have tapped my classmate’s business worth 10,000 dollars a month for the next five years. The contract was signed last Monday. Thanks to the County Government’s meanness, it allowed me to shine.”

John took a seat as everyone stood up to clap for him.

I am not used to boasting how ‘I have no apologies for being me.’ Why lie? Books aside, I feel very intimidated by these nobody boys. When did these guys learn such skills, and who taught them? Grandpa always told me that business is about opportunity and being there at the right moment to grab it. I had no idea what he meant. I am learning this firsthand today. These guys equal my grandpa in skills.

The chef, Juma, was the next one in line.

My self-perception is now toned down. I am now more keen to know who took over the animal farm. No one is more equal than another unless you choose to be the lesser one. Technology disruption now arms everyone with tools to succeed in any field, whether with qualification papers or not, provided you dare take up the challenge. When Sam the guard presented, I was like ‘Who gave you authority to be a salesman?’ After he opened his mouth, I realised he is more experienced than I was.

“Good morning team. My name is Juma or Chef Poa. This month I have not closed a sale. If anything, I have made the company fail to register more sales due to a discrepancy on my end. Last week I bought the same cooking oil I usually buy – Xona. I found these letters in the cafeteria drop box that I would like to read out to you:

The first letter reads: *I have had diarrhoea for the last two days, and I suspect it has something to do with the cafeteria food. I did not eat there yesterday, and I am well again. What is off?* The second one reads: *I have diarrhoea. What has changed in the food? I took lunch at this cafeteria.* The third reads: *I have diarrhoea.* The fourth: *The food has been leaving an unusual aftertaste this week. Get back to the tasty meals you usually serve, Chef Poa.* And the fifth letter reads: *What is that smell with the chapatis?*

“I was stunned by these comments. I took a sample of the water I use in the kitchen to be tested for contamination, but there was nothing wrong with it. When I decided not to eat anything from the kitchen for one day, then ate the food the next day, I found something was wrong. I smelled the oil container and discovered an overwhelming smell like garlic. I took the unused oil in the 20-litre jerrican to the supermarket where I had bought it. They acknowledged the problem and apologised for not alerting me about an ingredient change. They asked me to read the label, which showed that the oil manufacturer had introduced garlic oil, which was distinguished by a red sticker on the label that I had not noticed. I was not alone. There were five of us returning the oil. The supermarket attendant in charge of the usual stock of oil had failed to alert the management when the stock was finished to inform customers who bought the garlic one unknowingly. They had thought that only two per cent garlic in the oil would not pose a problem. They also seemed to have forgotten that loud and unhappy customers could make them close shop. What has happened can be undone by detoxing the affected customers. The garlic oil should have been in the health section of the supermarket for those who would like use it, being a new product. And this is how I might have spoilt a good meal for some of you in the sales team who have targets to make. Blame the supermarket. It made a mess with our food for a whole week. Blame me also, I should have done my part and read the label!”

The way *Chef Poa* put it made everyone laugh.

“My apologies to you all,” continued the chef, “and thanks to those who took the time to put their complaint in the drop box. We are back on track again. I hope breakfast today did not have a bad aftertaste, and I hope no one shall miss work due to negligence on my part. We have added some hydrating soup on the menu which I invite you to take at no cost in case you need a

booster from a rough last week. Once again, I beg your pardon,” said the chef, bowing respectfully.

What a day. I feel at my lowest.

My diary is still empty of the changes I wanted to make in the office. I need to understand this Kaizen thing Alistair mentioned before I open my ignorant mouth to Grandpa Smith.

“Excuse me, Maurice,” said Miss Morgan to the person heading sales and marketing. “When is the next exhibition and where?”

“The next one will be in Mombasa for four days starting Tuesday to Friday,” he replied.

“Kindly ensure John, the messenger, is on the team of those manning our stand. Let us see what he is capable of achieving down there in Mombasa *raba*. He is more than the messenger he has always been. Promote the boy. He has made my day. Not that others have not done great, but his skills are better utilised in merchandising.” ordered Miss Morgan jotting something on a paper.

“Thank you, Miss Morgan, for giving the boy a chance. The guy who took up his duties that day of the exhibition was a casual worker. He can take over John’s position,” said Alastair.

Everyone stood up again to clap and congratulate John as well as applaud Miss Morgan's goodwill.

“We are out of time, guys,” said Alastair. “We can continue with the presentations next week. Let us do what we know best – sales. But before we close the meeting, let us listen to Wafula now that he made the time to be with us this week. Welcome, Wafula.”

“Thank you, Alastair. We have been doing our best out in the market. However, new competition has popped up. Brokers are flooding the market and buying all the cereals by offering high prices to farmers causing a temporary shortage. We need to be vigilant. I have assigned a staff member at the border to conduct market intelligence and look out for a lower price to save our clients a few coins and not expose them to the conning that has emerged at the border.

“The other challenge has been common delays as we get at the border to be cleared. Once we load the cargo, the officer in charge of clearing and forwarding should present the papers, log in and have the trucks ready for departure as he clears the paperwork with the supplies office. Sometimes we

suffer a lot when suppliers insist on cash payments, especially with new clients. Before the loading, the client should have already paid Smith Freights for smooth transfer of consignments.

“Weighing bridges are another nightmare. Our clients ought to be aware that we shall not exceed the official cargo limit. Some deliberately lie about the quantities they want to be transported, and we have twice been forced to reduce the weight of shipment at the weighbridge before crossing the border. The clients were unhappy. I recommend they are given a call to explain the procedure. Most of them do not read the contract with Smith Freights. It is our responsibility to be mindful of the condition of the roads and not to damage them with excess tonnage. Roads are paid for and maintained with taxpayers' money. This is the rainy season, and the trucks are getting dirty with mud. I recommend some float allocation for car wash to keep our brand visible while in transit. Thank you for the opportunity to speak.”

“Thank you, Wafula,” said Alastair as everyone rose once again, this time to applaud the regional transport manager.

Miss Morgan was disturbed by why Wafula should be the regional manager and a driver at the same time. It was explained to her that he was a temporary driver out of choice to relieve a company driver going on annual leave. He wanted to understand the hardships drivers face to recommend adjustments to ensure their work is more comfortable.

Miss Morgan would accompany Wafula to get a feel of the market the following day. That was what Grandpa Smith had recommended. This would ensure she would be a well-rounded leader in the company, both out in the market and in the office.

She followed Alastair to his office to learn what this KAIZEN was all about before hitting the road with Wafula.

CHAPTER FOUR

KAIZEN

*I try to create an environment where it's okay to make a mistake,
though it's not okay to be unfocused or unprepared.
I'm challenging and demanding but very patient.
- Reuben Santiago Hudson*

“THANK YOU for Asking about Kaizen, Miss Morgan,” said Alastair, as he checked his phone after an incoming message alert. He ignored it.

“By the way,” he went on, “well done. You were able to participate so well in the sales meeting despite this being your first day, my dear. Next time you’ll be even better. Thank you for giving John a chance to try his talent at the Mombasa exhibition. I have long lobbied for him to join the sales team in vain. The team has been reluctant; they feel like their space is being invaded by someone who will slow them down. Kaizen philosophy is yet to sink in their heads. It has been five months now since we have been practising Kaizen. By the time we are one year at it, it should be as easy and natural as breathing when applying it.”

“I cannot blame the sales team, Alastair. I had the same feeling when I came in the morning. I felt deflated to find security guards and messengers in the sales meeting. I almost walked out. But after hearing their accomplishments, I feel very humbled by the teamwork they showed. How come Kaizen started only five months ago, while Grandpa Smith tells me has been practising it at

the farm for a long time? I was never interested to know what it meant, but the term Kaizen is not new to my ears.”

“Everyone at Smith Freights resisted taking it up at first, including me,” admitted Alastair smiling. “Then Mr Smith took me to Japan for a month to learn about the philosophy. So important was it, he said, that he had instructed me to sack anyone not willing to learn it.” He paused as if looking for the correct words. “To put it simply,” he said, “Kaizen is a Japanese business philosophy that means ‘change for the better’ or ‘continuous improvement’. It involves all employees in processes that continuously improve operations and views improvement in productivity as a gradual and methodical process. Kaizen has five fundamental principles: Know your customer, let it flow, be at your place of work, empower people, and be transparent. “It can also be applied in personal life or at home, and in social life. In business, it takes advantage of team members' brainpower and inherent emotional inspirations, from the bottom of the pyramid workers up to the CEO. This is what you saw with Sam, the security officer, and the others who spoke. They own the process making the business their own.”

“And it rewards them, too,” put in Miss Morgan, “because they earn from each sale they make despite their job description. Because of Kaizen, the organisation becomes one big family that eats and works together. The organisation becomes something like a mother serving food from the same pot to her two sons – the gatekeeper son and the CEO. Despite one being very junior and the other very senior, the two happily dine together as siblings. Serving them, the mother must be very proud to see the fruits of her womb so content with each other. It makes the perfect moment for the mother to lobby the senior son, Alastair, to offer her junior son, Sam, the opportunity to learn and earn better in the organisation.”

The likening of the organisation to a mother by Miss Morgan somehow seemed funny, making them laugh.

“The CEO is well aware that it is not about making his very junior brother Sam a manager but to help unleash his potential as a worker by improving his marketing skills. Sam has already proved his dependability to the organisation by his work at the gate where he has earned respect for his work and has never had a negative incident to tarnish Smith Freights’ work. He is already armed with the necessary customer relations tools to deal with customers at the gate to solve their issues. The company has given its workers good training, which

assures them job security. Transfers to other departments are not approved before a worker has served two years at the station company resources have been used to train him. This allows the workers to entrench and improve his skills while serving the company. It has been gratifying to see people who have passed through the hands of Smith Freights prosper here and in other companies where they get employment. Kaizen makes everyone purposeful in discharging their duties knowing that in reality their employer is the client they serve and should be respected at all times. Because of this, we now have millionaire guards and messengers in the making as they climb up the corporate ladder every time, they improve their skills to handle more complicated tasks on their way up.”

Their conversation was briefly interrupted by Alastair’s personal assistant delivering files to his desk.

“But don’t forget that competition is fierce,” he resumed after his assistant had left. “If the junior brother or the messenger does not work to be the best at what they do, others will work day and night to take their position. This, however, is not a challenge for the employee only but for the business owner as well, as each relies on the other for the business to succeed in meeting clients’ needs, especially those clients without good communication skills to articulate their needs clearly. One must be able to understand such clients to address their needs.”

“No wonder everyone at the sales meeting had such a warm and welcoming smile when I met them,” said Miss Morgan. “I have always reserved my best smile for a definite client, one with real potential to buy a product. I didn’t think a security guard should deserve such a smile – but I now know better after Sam’s presentation. I, however, was a bit disappointed to see prayers conducted for the different faiths—Muslims and Christians—as if we do not pray the same God. I, nevertheless, appreciate everyone has a way of connecting with their creator—thanking Him for His favours towards us each day. Prayers give someone the courage to believe in oneself, making the inner you believe you are greater than the tough situations we face in life. Prayer is the energy we need to address our needs. It strengthens us as a team, helping the company succeed. Each member plays their part, just as hands, feet, heart, head, blood, nose, and mouth play their role in a person’s body. No part is superior to the other, they all do their part for the good of the person. I will

never despise any worker again, Alastair. Thank you for enlightening me on Kaizen. We learn every day, Alastair.”

“You are most welcome, my dear. I look forward to a great working relationship with you,” he said going behind his desk to take his seat. They had been standing all along. Miss Morgan took the guest seat.

Just then, Wafula knocked on the door and entered the office interrupting the Kaizen class. He was requesting Miss Morgan to join him so that he may orient her on their business tour with the truck.

She accepted the invitation and followed the transport manager. They found the truck they were to use had just been loaded with a client’s consignment.

Wafula opened the passenger door and requested Miss Morgan to hop in. The truck was high and had three stairs that she laboured to climb because of her tight skirt. Wafula got on the driver’s side and pulled her in after a bit of a hassle. The first lesson for Miss Morgan was that skirts were no attire for a truck even for the boss.

She noticed that behind the driver's seat was a small platform with a mattress and a blanket. She learnt that this was the bed on which the driver rested or slept when exhausted, as the co-driver took the wheel during a long transit.

“We will share the bed,” Wafula said casually. “You can bring light bedding in case you are not comfortable with what I have packed for my use. Make sure to pack light and carry only what will be necessary for a week or so. The back of the driver’s seat is all the extra space we have for storage and ‘bedroom’. It is not possible to keep our bags in the container at the back of the truck together with the client’s cargo because it is sealed to ensure the goods are not tampered with.”

“Oh my God! A whole week confined in this space? That will be suffocating. How are you guys able to survive on the road in here for a whole week?”

“It is not that bad, Miss Morgan. Think of the beautiful scenery along the way, the new people you will meet, the new cuisines, new cultures – you will have no time to think about the tight driver’s cabin.”

“That is reassuring. It makes me feel much more comfortable to take this *safari*. Thank you, Wafula. I look forward to the new experience,” she said as she excused herself to go and prepare for the trip.

The only thing that bothered her was her cat, which she would leave with Alastair's housekeeper during her one-week absence. It was a good cat with no issues. It was used to living in different homes. In any case, it would almost

belong in Alastair's house more than it was going to be in Miss Morgan's house. She had moved into a house next to Alastair making them close neighbours.

MISS MORGAN CALLED her grandpa on the phone to inform him about her first day at Smith Freights. She had a lot to report and complain about.

“How come the Kaizen you talk to me about all the time got introduced at Smith's Freights only five months ago, Grandpa?”

“I know. Do you remember how irritated you were when I used to fuel my jeep with only two hundred bob every day and the time-wasting back-and-forth to the gas station? That is how suffocating Smith's Freights has been to me. I had to take Alastair to Japan to learn Kaizen and appreciate its magic. Everyone is happy – both the staff and the clients. The customer satisfaction index has since hit the roof. The company has for a long time been a disappointment. I almost gave up on Smith Freights because of the losses the company was registering every year. It drained resources from Smith Gardens trying to support it, and almost brought the plantation to its knees. We were almost closing the business for the day when I encountered a bank manager, a Mr Dominic, who listened to me and advised that before I gave up, I should read what turned out to be the most beautiful book that I have ever read. The book was “Die Empty” by Todd Henry.

The author was inspired to write this book while attending a business meeting when a director of a big company speaking at the meeting asked the audience, ‘Where is the richest land in the world?’

“One of them replied, ‘Oil-rich Gulf states.’

“Another added, ‘Diamond mines in Africa.’

“Then the director said, ‘No, it is the cemetery. Yes, it is the wealthiest land in the world because millions of people have departed and carried many valuable ideas that did not come to light or benefit others. All those opportunities are buried in the cemetery with them.’

“The director’s answer was the mother to Todd Henry's wonderful book. In this book, he motivates everyone to pour out their ideas and potential energies into their communities and turn them into something useful before it is too late.

“This is my advice to you, Miss Morgan: do not go to your grave before you pour empty your rich mind to empower others with your skills, which they may not have known about otherwise. By ‘die empty’, the author means that we

should be generous to the world with our natural and acquired skills. Pass them to other people to use. Very few people are thinkers, yet they are great workers. With a blueprint, they can deliver anything and everything.”

“Grandpa, I know your policy to have always been, ‘If you have an idea, use it. It might make you smile when you are sad. If you know you have a good idea, sharing it will create friendships that will brighten your life. If you have a goal, don’t delay in seeking to achieve it. It may turn out to be your best source of happiness.’”

“I am happy you have kept those words of wisdom in your heart, Miss Morgan. Have the courage to know yourself and keep laughter on your lips. Business is for happy people, Miss Morgan. Share your love and you will find that it might make your life complete. Do not hold anything back. As the rainbow arches its way in the sky, so shall sunset warm your heart every day for your service to humanity and nature.”

“I trust you grandpa, but everything is so new to me at Smith Freights.”

“You have just started the race, my dear. You will find it an adventure that will come with as many achievements as it shall have setbacks. Stay focused no matter the storm that will come your way, my Naila. It is in this understanding that I apply Kaizen in all that I do. It has helped my businesses because through Kaizen, I have cloned myself in all my employees. Every one of them—from my housekeeper to the gardener and my staff elsewhere—understands my business. I have had to revive Smiths Gardens after nearly falling, which has distracted me from deeper involvement in the running of Smith Freights. I am glad it has started to shape up, which frees me to dedicate more time on the farm. I love the new person you have become, eager to understand how our businesses operate. Not to worry, I am here to guide you every step of the way, my dear Naila.”

“I get it now,” replied Miss Morgan, her face brightening with wonder. “You mean the tiresome back and forth getting gas for the Jeep was part of a strategy to test your patience from the inconvenience it caused you, Grandpa? You are such a genius, old boy!”

“I know, dear. It has been quite something. It gave me clarity, and I hope to do much better now that I have you in the business. Good luck on your journey tomorrow with Wafula, Miss Morgan.”

“Thank you, Grandpa. Stay focused. We shall make things work out to meet your expectations. Forgive the ignorance I have shown all this time. All I know

is that I am a determined entrepreneur who has been a late bloomer. But I promise to catch up with you very fast, Grandpa. I will not let you down. Watch me!”

“I know your potential, Miss Morgan, and I am banking on you to turn things around. Once again, all the best tomorrow on your first cargo delivery. By the way, you are an early bloomer. It’s been just a few days on the job, and you have already absorbed so much”

“Thank you, Grandpa. I was advised to pack my bag light, just like I used to when going camping. Thank you for the life skills you gave me while growing up, skills that I had least appreciated until now. It is now the time to test my wings in what you taught me.”

“I like that, dear.” They laughed. “Later, my girl. I need to hang up the phone to attend to some waiting clients.”

The call left Miss Morgan feeling energised from the assurances her grandpa gave her. She was the new infusion of energy in his flagship business, Smith Freights.

She had long forgotten what she wanted to complain about.

CHAPTER FIVE

Marketplace

*After all, is said and done,
a man should be left with something
to cling on to; even if it's false hope.*

- Anonymous

THE TRUCK LEFT Nairobi early the next morning for the Uganda border. Miss Morgan found the journey very fascinating and was quite observant as the long trip progressed. She observed how trucks on the road unrelated to Smith Freights kept following each other in a long convoy that was sometimes difficult to overtake, mainly because of the heavy oncoming traffic on the narrow single-lane road. The other challenge was the toll stations which only inspected cargo carriers like their trucks and were characterised by long queues. It was tiresome waiting in line for the cargo to be weighed and the paperwork done which added extra time to the already long road trip.

Wafula struck her as an easy-going fellow who displayed good skills on the road. He seemed to know every driver from other freight companies they came across. He would ask them practical questions about the road conditions ahead so that he may know what to expect. When they reached Nakuru, where they had a brief stopover to have some tea, a driver he knew advised him not to use the Kericho route as there were tea farmers blocking the road protesting the delay of government-issued fertilizer, payment for which they had been deducted a year before.

“One smart Omwami tells them the amount they paid for the fertilizer was exaggerated,” the driver explained to Wafula. “It is five times more than in the market. The farmers seem to trust Omwami, who is an educated fellow and people go to him for advice. The farmers have burned some tires on the road in the protests to express their anger. This has attracted all manner of hooliganism, blocking the road for users.”

Wafula understood what this meant and could not tell for how long the protests would go on. He could not take chances passing that route because

the threats it posed of looting cargo by hooligans. He told Miss Morgan that they must change the route and take the Eldoret-Kitale road.

The agricultural sector in the country seemed to be in a crisis. Another driver had mentioned farmers in Maasailand in Narok protesting and menacingly waving their traditional *rungu* clubs after a long delay in payment of crop insurance following a prolonged drought. They would hear nothing of the government proposal to pay them, which would entail further delay.

All the trucks seemed to be aware of the trouble in Kericho. So, traffic was heavier than usual with many trucks along the Eldoret-Kitale road. They found many of them parked in the small towns along the way. They stopped in a small town just after Eldoret at around 3pm to have lunch. The break would allow Wafula a rest before resuming the journey. Wafula had explained that he didn't want them to take the stopover in Eldoret to avoid being caught up in the town's traffic when parents began collecting their children from school and the matatu taxis started ferrying office workers home.

Miss Morgan was impressed that Wafula had placed orders for their lunch long before their arrival which they found ready. It impressed her more that they were served farm-fresh food, which was how she liked her meals. *It is amazing how some guys can be so organised like Wafula to meticulously plan ahead. I notice that most drivers here are ordering whatever is available in this makeshift hotel. This must be the same with other roadside hotels.*

When they finally arrived at the Busia border, they found it not very busy. This was because most of the trucks were still held up by the protests in Kericho and Narok. They were, therefore, attended to quickly and were soon on their way to Kampala to deliver the consignment.

The next day, they were back at the border to load a waiting consignment of soya beans for a client in Mombasa.

Wafula was always on the lookout for business opportunities. He checked the day's prices for other cereals and sent them to Nelly at the Smith Freights sales office. Nelly assured him that the sales team would soon be on it to find interested clients and have whatever they wanted delivered when the truck was its way back.

"I am exhausted and have no energy for border procedures and logistics," Miss Morgan said.

On the Kenyan side of the Busia border town there were some good hotels. Wafula booked her in one for the night.

“There’s no rush,” he told her. “Take your time and relax. We shall start our journey back tomorrow at 2 pm.”

That evening after she had rested, they sat to dinner, after which they shared a drink and a dance. Wafula noticed how some men eyed Miss Morgan with hungry eyes. She looked white in their eyes. To keep her safe, he stood guard with a stern face to make sure no one made any unwanted passes at her. The day, however, ended without incident.

The next morning, Miss Morgan sent a comprehensive report to Alastair and shared with him email correspondence she had on the project with the Sales Manager, Walter.

The hours passed fast, and they were soon in the truck on their way to Mombasa. Miss Morgan noted that it would be a 955km journey. A small car usually took sixteen hours to Mombasa from Busia. In a heavy truck like theirs, it would see them take three days on the road. It would be a long tedious journey. She, however, took heart that she would travel enjoying the beautiful scenery and key places, beginning with the Lakes Victoria, Nakuru and Lake Elementaita. Others were the Menengai Crater, Aberdare Mountain Range, the Rift Valley, Mt Longonot, Hells Gate, Ol Karia Geothermal site, and any number of different wildlife.

It started to drizzle halfway to Kisumu City. As they drove, they saw a lady being rained on by the roadside as she waited for public transport. Wafula offered to give her a lift. Naila wasn’t sure this had anything to do with Kaizen. She decided to wait and see. She helped the lady get into the truck. The lady sat between them and was next to the driver.

Miss Morgan thought she saw Wafula’s eyes occasionally straying towards the pretty lady, not unlike a lion hungry for its prey. Her name was Sasssy, she said. She and Wafula seemed to have hit it off immediately with the lively and entertaining conversation that ensued. Miss Morgan may have been a spectator, but she interestedly followed the conversation as the two discussed matters ranging from the bed to the sitting room to the kitchen and school. The girl had ready answers to whatever Wafula brought into the conversation.

She was kind with her words and generous with her knowledge. She interested them with a description of the Kisumu Museum, its history and the heritage on display of tribes in the region. She pointed out the Crying Stone of

Illesi as they passed through Kakamega. They could not see the famous dripping of the 'tears' down the stone as it was heavily raining, hiding the 'tears'. This led Sassy to describe the weather patterns of the region. This interested Miss Morgan so much that she jotted down notes about this. She explained that knowledge about weather patterns was important for a freight company, as it helped anticipate road conditions in case of bad weather.

As the small talk continued, Sassy explained that when it rained at night, it seemed that the sun was not too hot in the following day. She thought this was because of the damp ground which absorbed the heat.

As the discussion had progressed, so did it seem to Naila that Wafula was falling in love before her eyes. She also could read a similar interest in the girl, making Miss Morgan think it adorable to watch the two fall in love.

She smiled to herself when a thought crossed her mind that all Wafula seemed waiting for was the girl to say, "I do." She saw this as how life could be generous for lonely drivers on the road. With this, she wondered to herself, "Has Wafula met the woman of his dream in this girl? Such a well-informed and down-to-earth girl."

The girl was shy but very pleasant. Naila would have fallen for her, too, had she been a guy.

Their discussions took them a journey of about 40 km, beginning when they picked Sassy up to the moment she said she had reached home. It felt like her company with them had lasted only five minutes.

She pointed out to them her parents' house, which could be seen from the roadside. She said she didn't have a mobile phone to communicate with them but insisted they visit her next time they would be on their way to Busia. "I will be happy to serve you our traditional food, my good friends," she promised.

They assured her they would be back this way again. She promised to accompany them to the border when they did.

Wafula was confident he had made a good impression with the girl he now considered his Queen Sassy. The rain was still going on when he stopped the truck to let her off.

He offered to Sassy his jacket to cover herself from the rain, but also as a good excuse to visit her parent's home on the way back to Busia.

It turned out to be a very busy time for Miss Morgan who was now scheduled to be on the road for a month instead of the planned one week. As for the journey after dropping off Sassy, no sooner was the cargo delivered to

Mombasa than they were on their way back to the Busia border for more cereals two days later. They had no client with ready consignment to transport to Busia, which usually helped defray the costs of a return journey. Wafula called his network transporters to see who might refer him to a client. He got one who wanted household items delivered to Kisumu.

Miss Morgan found the main challenge on these trips to be the lack of adequate toilet facilities along the road and the uncomfortable sleeping arrangements in the truck cabin before they could find decent hotel accommodation she could get a shower. Sometimes it would take them up to three days without enjoying a shower. But Miss Morgan felt it was worth it, as it was experience gained and now understood what it entailed to be a driver for Smith Freights. *I now understand their needs—no more assumptions.*

THEY MADE GOOD their promise and stopped by Sassy's home. As he had planned, Wafula was going to use the excuse that he had passed by to pick up the jacket he had lent Sassy to cover herself from the rain when they had dropped her. They parked the truck by the roadside and walked to Sassy's home.

Wafula's heart was pounding in his chest as they entered the compound. He wondered how it was going to be like to meet Sassy's family, for whom they had carried some shopping. They took in the simple open-plan house and saw some chickens scratching the ground for food in the compound. There was a cowshed set at a distance from the house. They also noticed a granary by the side of the house, which suggested the kitchen was located near it. The compound was dotted with beautiful trees that grew on carpet-like grass.

They knocked on the door, and a pleasant middle-aged woman opened the door and warmly welcomed them. Her husband was seated at a gazebo in the backyard. It was as if they were expected visitors. As soon as they had introduced themselves, they were invited to a dish of fish and Ugali that was served with tasty indigenous vegetables. They imagined Sassy must have gone through a lot to persuade her mama to prepare the meal.

As they were having tea after the meal, they requested to meet Sassy. The mother turned to them in surprise. She asked them when they last spoke with her daughter.

“Three days ago,” Wafula replied, adding, “I had lent her my jacket to cover herself from the rain.”

The mother excused herself and went out to the gazebo to have a word with her husband.

From the window, Wafula and Miss Morgan could see the surprise on Sassy’s parents’ faces. Wafula hoped the surprise was out of excitement that their daughter Sassy might be dating him—as he seemed the one most interested in her. The father stood up and they observed the parents approach the sitting room where they were.

Sassy’s parents went straight to the bedroom and came with a portrait photograph of Sassy. They asked whether that was the lady they claimed to have met a few days before. They confirmed it was her.

The shocked parents informed them that Sassy had died three years before and invited them to see her grave. On the cross marking the grave was a hung jacket, which they belonged to Wafula as they approached the grave.

It was the turn of Wafula and Miss Morgan to stare in shock. How could one explain this? Were it not for Wafula’s jacket hanging on the gravestone, the now doubly shocked parents would not have believed Wafula, no matter that their daughter was deceased.

Wafula was very devastated, as he had been certain Sassy was not only living but also liked him.

“Sassy informed us of her former college, Kenyatta University, which turned out to be the same college Wafula attended,” Miss Morgan said, shock still on her face. “She even described her lecturers by name, who Wafula also knew,” she added.

The parents seemed puzzled by this.

“Did she attend Kenyatta University,” he enquired, seeing the puzzlement on their faces.

“No,” the father replied. “Her college was Moi University, Eldoret, not Kenyatta University, Nairobi.”

“Does she have siblings?” Wafula enquired.

“Yes, she does. The sister is at Kenyatta University doing her masters degree. Her name is Gradah.”

“Thank you for having us,” Wafula said finally, as there was nothing more to add. “Sorry for your daughter Sassy. May she rest in peace now.”

They excused themselves and left. Wafula vowed to never again offer a lift to a stranger. So shaken was he at the turn of events that he wanted a day off to spiritually cleanse himself. The strange discovery about Sassy was a sign of a bad omen to him. They briefly discussed whether to get a stand-in driver to take Wafula's place to allow him to take the day off because Miss Morgan's driving licence did not include the qualification to drive a truck.

"In high school," Wafula was saying, "I impregnated a girl named Gradah. I wonder whether it was she who was mentioned by Sassy's parents. I need to follow this up with an old friend to see whether she still has Gradah's contacts. Maybe Sassy is impersonating her sister, or vice versa."

"Why would Sassy do such a thing?"

"I loved the sister Gradah, but over time I forgot about her. Life has been very busy for me, Miss Morgan."

"Good luck, my dear. I hope she is the person you think she is so that you may marry her. These roads are not safe for singles like you. There are too many good temptations."

"You can say that again, Miss Morgan."

They were surprised to find police officers by their truck. It appeared there had been an accident. Then they saw a broken bicycle in a ditch next to the truck. As they came to the truck, they discovered it had been broken into. The local person they had asked to look after it while they were gone was nowhere to be seen. He must have pocketed the money he was given as a tip and disappeared.

Miss Morgan reprimanded herself: *No wonder Wafula had warned me not to pay the young man to guard the truck before we were done at Sassy's home.*

It was a lesson learnt as she walked ashamedly behind Wafula.

In the meantime, the cops were accusatively looking at her as if she had enticed the driver to go for a quicky with her in the house they had emerged from.

"Habari Boss," greeted Wafula. "What's going on here?"

"Why did you leave the truck unattended?" one of the officers demanded. "We found these good-for-nothing boys trying to break into it. That is reckless. You must also be a reckless driver to have knocked the bike guy and not bother to check whether the cyclist was okay or report the accident."

“What are you talking about, Boss?” asked Wafula shocked at the accusations. “We stopped because madam needed to use the toilet. About the cyclist, I have no idea what you are talking about. From the look of the bicycle and where it has landed it cannot have been from the front of the truck. As you can see there are no scratches or a dent to show where it hit the bicycle. As you know, these guys are in the habit of clinging to the back of trucks to be pulled along, which is what must have happened. And now that an accident has happened, we are made to take liability. We have installed a dashboard camera for this very reason. We can view the footage to prove to you we are not the cause of the accident. Get into the truck, officer, so that we can check the footage. I hope you took a photo of the injured guy?”

This was the first time Miss Morgan was learning that the trucks were installed with cameras.

Wafula showed the dashcam footage on a small screen, and luckily it had images of both the rear and front of the truck. The bicycle rider had been clinging to the truck for quite some time. There was an unattended stone left by a reckless motorist who must have forgotten it there, maybe after changing a flat wheel. The footage showed it was this stone that tripped the bicycle landing it and the rider into the ditch.

“How is this our fault officer? If anything, you should lock up the guy for his recklessness.”

“The evidence is clear. But we need to take your statement at the police station, just in case the rider or his family comes claiming foul play and wanting compensation.”

They found some relatives of the bicycle rider already at the station looking troubled and desperate. They had come to report the incident and wanted the matter pursued. They claimed the driver of the truck was liable. They only calmed down after the situation was explained to them. Miss Morgan reached into her handbag and gave them some money, which Wafula was not very happy about.

The policemen, in the meantime, even though it was their duty to offer the assistance they did, were asking for “tea” amounting to a lot of money for stopping the thugs from breaking into the truck.

Miss Morgan left it to Wafula to deal with. The thugs were forced to pay Wafula or risk jail. He shared some of the money he was paid with the cops.

The cops wanted all of it, which Wafula flatly refused. It was their duty, after all, to check crime for which the government paid them a salary.

“Thank you, Miss Morgan,” he said to make a joke on her. “At least I have gotten something out of this mess. I’ll use the money to buy a new jacket to remember Sassy the ghost.”

As they left the police station, they were informed that one of Smith Freights’ trucks had broken down in Busia and would be grounded for a week. This meant that its driver, Musembi, could relieve Wafula and take his truck. This would allow Wafula to take a day off.

After delivering the client’s household goods in Kisumu, they drove to Busia where Musembi took the wheel from Wafula.

Miss Morgan thought Musembi equally a very handsome young man as Wafula. He also had good taste in the fashionable clothes he wore.

As they were introducing themselves, Musembi said he was from Makueni. He was a tall fellow, which made Wafula think he stood out for his height unlike many of his shorter tribesmen.

The new driver oversaw the loading of cereals onto the truck before they headed back to Mombasa with Miss Morgan. Wafula would remain behind. He came from the region.

Musembi was saddened to learn of Wafula's ordeal. He repeatedly cautioned Wafula never to let a woman into the truck if he didn't know her. Miss Morgan was happy about the lecture Musembi was giving. He seemed to understand the concern she felt when Wafula invited Sassy, who was a stranger. Musembi apologised to Wafula for being so forthright, especially because Wafula was his immediate boss. Bidding him goodbye, Musembi and Miss Morgan proceeded with the journey to Mombasa.

SCRUTINISING HIM, Miss Morgan thought Musembi didn't look like a person suited to be a driver and was curious to know how he had become one. He looked intelligent and his educated English sounded of one qualified for a station above a normal driver.

Musembi informed her that he was a university graduate and had a degree in mechanical engineering. Being an engineer required that he be proficient as a driver, and that was why he had taken driving trucks as a part-time job as he waited for a vacancy to open in the engineering department at Smith Freights. He said that he enjoyed his job as a driver and that it had been fun touring the

East African region on different assignments. The job had taken him to the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan, Ethiopia, Tanzania, and Uganda, among others. He had just returned from Burundi and Rwanda before his truck broke down in Busia.

As they approached Nairobi, Musembi remembered that the South Bypass had been officially opened and that all trucks joining Mombasa Road were now required to use it to avoid causing heavy traffic when passing through the city centre as used to happen. He, however, didn't know where to enter the new road. It was Miss Morgan at the wheel and was good at it despite her lack of qualification. When they reached Kikuyu town, she enquired about the where to enter the Southern Bypass. The person giving them directions ignored her and instead spoke to Musembi. This made her angry. *I am the one who has asked for directions and the guy ignores me and speaks to Musembi. Can't he see I am the driver here? Why do men overlook or look down on women so much? Does he think Musembi is my husband or a boyfriend?*

She, however, said nothing and forgot about the incident as they continued with their journey with Musembi directing the way. She liked that Musembi trusted her with the wheel, unlike Wafula.

They stopped at Mlolongo, Machakos County, for the night. She was surprised to see all sorts of women all over Musembi.

Referring to the women, who seemed out for a good time and probably make some money off men, she thought to herself: *These 'outside caters' look like well-dressed women and must be smooth talkers. They know how to make a man feel loved. They are seductive and know precisely how to make a man enjoy himself with them. They know how to package themselves in a manner that a man has no choice but to reward the beautiful being after a treat during their night shift. Some of the women are not good looking and may not want to beg men to take them. And so, when they spot a likely victim, they spike the man's drink with drugs and disappear with his wallet when the drugs knock him out. The poor man might lose everything including his documents. He might then have to tip parking boys to look for his documents where they may have been dropped.*

Aware that this is what happened on the road, Smith Freights drivers usually carried two wallets, one for money and the other for documents. The one with documents never left the truck cabin. They had learned this the hard way.

Miss Morgan had heard of how some of the women targeted affluent men with the expensive phones that one used a thumbprint to open them. They would take such a man to the room they had booked, and once the man was asleep use his thumb to unlock the phone and drain his mobile money accounts before disappearing into the night.

Others robbed men of everything—phones, watches, shoes including their clothes, leaving the victim naked and stranded in the room unable to get out.

Other women would position themselves as second wives to the truck drivers, some of whom took the responsibility to pay bills for the women's families. Some of the drivers would even set up businesses for the side chicks. The truck drivers often brought with them household items and consumables they bought cheap along the way, changing the lifestyles of many of the women's homes. Some of the drivers would keep up to three or more women besides their wives in towns along the way to “service” them when on the road.

Male drivers were spoiled for choice. Women would throw themselves at them. They knew the drivers usually had a lot of money from incentives to help smuggle stuff across borders. Sometimes the drivers smuggled people, documents, and even trafficked children. It was as if the women could smell the money on them whenever the drivers made a stop in the towns.

Miss Morgan also heard how many drivers didn't usually protect themselves when having sex with the women in the towns they would stopover.

“They forget that they are not the only men that own these women,” a waiter who was serving them at a hotel observed, adding, “They don't care for making babies except to relieve their burning balls. Though they entertain the women, they pamper their wives too. And being on the road for too long, they usually buy stuff for their families at home and send them via public transport to their wives. I often see them at Mpesa stalls sending money to their families. But the drivers remain loyal and committed to the other women until the day they lose their jobs. Those who replace them take over from where the retired driver left.”

With their husbands away, their wives were left to care for themselves and their families. Some of the wives were so neglected by their travelling husbands that it was their neighbours who would spend sleepless nights trying to see how to assist while still raising their own families.

Learning about the men who desert their wives seemed to give Miss Morgan new insight into them and their seemingly uncaring attitude toward their

children. This led her to conclude: *Men take care of their kids and their carers, including the kids fathered by other men. They do not give a damn whether the children belong to them or not. The only one who belongs to them is the woman. She is the only one that matters to them. The man pampers his woman, and the woman plays manager to his offspring. I would wish every woman to know this secret.*

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CHAPTER SIX

Intangible Evidence

*Love, like everything else in life, should be
a discovery, an adventure,
and like most adventures,
you don't know you are having one
until you are right in the middle of it.*
- E.A. Bucchianeri

MISS MORGAN FOUND being in a truck day and night travelling could be fun watching the world pass by. But it could be scary when she remembered the stories she had heard about drivers in the small towns. She was thinking this as Musembi, who was at the wheel, entered Bujumbura, the capital city of Burundi, to deliver a consignment from Mombasa.

Their arrival started with a delay in offloading the cargo as they waited for their clearing agent to deliver the consignment documents from the border with Rwanda. Miss Morgan thought things in the tiny country seemed to go a bit slower than in Kenya. It took two days for the documents to be delivered.

This gave her time to relax where they had booked themselves at a three-star hotel. She felt tired from sleeping rough in the cabin and in the uncomfortable roadside hotels in the small towns. She wanted to spoil herself a bit. She wanted to go to the hotel pool to swim, something she had not done in a long time. She feared she might have forgotten how to swim. She decided to first have a snack before taking the swim. As she sat down at the table she

was assigned, she noticed a man whose eyes she thought had been following her as she entered the restaurant. She was surprised when the man rose from his table and came to join her.

“Hello, Madam, are you okay?” the man asked. Miss Morgan felt a sense of relief that he spoke in perfect English in this country where everyone only seemed to speak in French.

“Yes, I am. You?”

“My name is Leonne. Can I sit with you?”

“Yes, of course, you can. I am Miss Morgan. A pleasure to know you, Leonne.”

As they had breakfast, she found Leonne conversant with the East African market. He seemed to know much about products most in demand and their profitability. It was a learning experience for Miss Morgan, but she didn’t want to show it. *I don't want to display my ignorance, but this guy is making it hard for me to ignore him.*

After they were done with the breakfast she offered to pay, seeing that Leonne didn’t look like one who had much money.

As they left the restaurant to take a walk, everyone seemed to know him and returned their greetings with a smile. Though they didn’t ask, he could see it in their eyes they were curious to know who the “white lady” walking beside him was.

Miss Morgan couldn’t avoid noticing this and thought to herself: *Not a bad thing to be thought of as his woman.*

Indeed, she spent the day with the stranger who, as the day progressed, went on to proclaim her his lady. This made her body feel strange before she realised what the feeling was: She had fallen in love with Leonne. It had just happened, and she could not tell why she should fall in love with him. To her, he wasn’t the greatest-looking guy, but he was a tall, big guy with broad shoulders and had a beautiful baby face that was complimented by a killer smile. She found his deep and commanding voice endearing.

As for him, her beauty and the scent of her perfume made him lose it.

Their want for each other had been there all along. They were like two hungry beasts when they went for it to relieve their desire for each other.

It was a long time since Miss Morgan had had sex with a stranger that she felt nothing for, doing it just to enjoy herself. To her surprise, Leonne had a

great caress, making her body crave for more. She could not let him go when the evening came but had to allow him because he had no change of clothes.

She had to fight the urge not to call him the following day. In the end, it didn't matter whether she had called him as Leonne was at her hotel that evening to take her out for dinner.

While she had thought him not good-looking before, she now thought him handsome and an okay guy to hang out with, especially after such a long dry spell without the intimacy a man could give.

It made her time in Bujumbura with Leonne, who was Burundian, very entertaining.

Leonne was, however, not her kind of man. Miss Morgan saw her future occupied with a more established man, and not with a simple guy like Leonne who only seemed happy to enjoy life with nothing to show for it. *If you are willing to cough money, road freight is the one industry you easily meet the 'outside caterers', both men and ladies.*

The following day she was feeling a bit tired and wanted to treat herself to massage the hotel offered to its customers. She wanted to have it and then take a nap, but Leonne had other plans and was already knocking on her hotel room door to take her out. He was beginning to feel like he owned her.

As she was going to open the door, she thought about Musembi. He has been busy since the day they arrived. He would meet with her once a day in the morning, then he would spend the rest of the day out in the field.

Musembi called just as she was letting Leonne in. He wanted to confirm with her whether they would be leaving by 4 am the next morning as they had planned, which she confirmed.

Leonne was listening and was, therefore, not surprised that Miss Morgan should request that they exchange contacts. She apologetically told him that she wished to be allowed to rest because of her travel early the next day.

Clearly, Leonne was not ready for that. He dived into her bed in a manner that amused her. Girls hardly did such things. She also had never seen the boyish behaviour with the men she had ever bedded. Neither did she with the boys grew up with to have witnessed it. She was still laughing when he urgently pulled her to the bed, immediately turning her on. He didn't have time to waste with a pack of condoms. Neither did she seem to care. They were both hungry for a more authentic feel. Nothing mattered. Nature was taking

its course. Miss Morgan hoped that they were safe not to end up “baby-making”.

When it was over they fell asleep without having spoken a word to each other. Very early the next morning, Leonne treated her to an unsatisfactory quickie that left her wanting more before he left as he had a flight to catch.

Soon after, the alarm went off and after a quick shower she dressed up in a flash and joined Musembi outside in the truck. To her surprise, he had a lady guest with him in the truck.

“Meet my friend Biazu,” he introduced the lady. “I schooled with her in college. We had never met since until yesterday at the hotel as I grabbed a meal.”

“She is travelling back to Nairobi with us, Musembi?” Miss Morgan asked with anger in her voice.

“Nice to meet you, Miss Morgan,” quickly said Biazu to calm her, seeing the anger. “Sorry for the inconvenience. I shall be alighting in Naivasha.”

“Not to worry at all, Biazu. I am used to sharing this space. Feel free, my dear,” Miss Morgan welcomed her despite herself.

Upon starting the truck to begin the journey, Musembi discovered that the fuel gauge was reading empty. He got off the truck and confronted the hotel guards, who he was told had become notorious for stealing fuel from parked vehicles. He called the police. Fearing the repercussions after the police had arrived, the guards owned up and pointed out the one who had emptied the tank. The thieving guard brought back all the diesel he had siphoned in Jerricans.

This was all new to Miss Morgan and so serious was it that she thought Wafula ought to have mentioned it in one of the sales meetings. She now understood how drivers must go through a lot in the field, as the office guys sitting comfortably at the headquarters complained and made demands on them about delayed deliveries, as sometimes happened.

MISS MORGAN WAS BEGINNING to think the dramas of road transport were becoming too much. Her assigned month on the road was not yet over and she was not sure she could continue with this aspect of her job. *I am not used to so much firefighting.*

On the day they started the journey from Burundi, they witnessed a fuel truck that was ahead of being stopped at gunpoint. They would later learn that the truck was forced into a forest, emptied of the petrol, and rolled off a cliff.

On another occasion at a border crossing, they were shocked to discover children had clung under their truck to cross unseen as they smuggled items to the other side of the border. They would never have discovered them had it not been that one of the boys, Haron, was run over by the truck crashing one of his legs. The boy would survive, but it was a painful experience for Miss Morgan who authorised taking him to a private hospital for treatment and ensuring that he was going to be fine. She authorised Smith Freights take responsibility for the accident. This was even though it was the boy who was in the wrong, as well as his family for sending him to undertake such dangerous work. Still, the family didn't want to hear that. Biazu was very helpful and was able to calm down the injured boy's relatives.

She knew that should the boy not receive proper medical care, he would lose his foot. Miss Morgan felt that she could not let this happen. It cost the company a lot of money, but she didn't care.

She called Leonne who was already in Nairobi to make a booking at one of the best private hospitals to admit the boy, who was flown there by a chartered plane.

Leonne could not understand why Miss Morgan should take responsibility for the recklessness of the boy and his family.

On her part, she thought to herself: *I guess it is a man's thing not to care much for the less fortunate. Or maybe it was the poor boy's recklessness that irritated Leonne?*

It turned out Haron was a refugee in Burundi who, in later years, would return to his home country Rwanda. He would grow up to become a minister with his country's government and would be one of Smith Freights' best friends recommending the company for business.

IT SEEMED TO HER that knowing Leonne was a boon; it had drawn her attention to the market potential that his country, including Rwanda, held. *It was not in vain I paid for his breakfast the day I met him.*

The breakfast had paid off, and it seemed that potential clients in the country appeared to trust her more than her competitors during her stay in Burundi. She had left with orders she was to follow up.

She hoped that Leonne did not get the impression that she habitually slept with any man she met. But did it matter what he thought?

Who cares, anyway? I miss his jab, but I guess he was just a passing cloud.

THE BORDER POINT seemed more efficient clearing the trucks, which hastily followed each other on the road. It seemed the drivers were in a hurry to cover as much distance as possible before the day was over.

As had become a habit for Miss Morgan, she enjoyed the sunrise, this being an early morning, even as she took in the scenery. It served as a distraction not to pay too much attention to Baizu and her romantic exchanges with Musembi, who sometimes fondled her. This would make Baizu appear to faint when he fondled her, and this would arouse Miss Morgan.

I miss Leonne. One day I shall take revenge and put him on the truck the same way these boys do with their women... Oh no! I cannot do that. I am a professional with a lot to account for, unlike my drivers. I can't allow this young boy's romances to distract me, otherwise I might not attain my marketing goals before I go back to the office full-time.

That evening Miss Morgan went to bed with nothing but Leonne on her mind. It surprised her to think that any slender, dark man she saw on the streets would be the Leonne she so missed.

WHEN THEY REACHED Naivasha, Miss Morgan felt that it was too good an opportunity not to enjoy the town with its many attractions and fine hotels by the lake. This included hot water springs near Mt Longonot that some hotels offered as an attraction to bath in.

She suggested that they report a fake breakdown of the truck so that they could buy themselves an extra day to have an adventure in the town. Musembi was quick to buy the idea especially because he wanted some quality time with his love Biazu. They parked the truck in a safe yard and took a cab.

There was an eatery Miss Morgan liked called Curry-On that served chicken *tikka* and *bhajia*. She found it irresistible and was her favourite stopover, whether for breakfast or dinner anytime she passed by.

Baizu, who was from the town, took them around all the beautiful places. When dusk was about, she requested Musembi to drop her at her home. She

invited him to join her later for dinner so that she could introduce him to her dad.

Miss Morgan decided to leave them to it, as she was tired from the many days of merry making all the way from Burundi to Naivasha. She wanted to have an early night at her hotel to rest. She parted with Musembi who went to order *nyama choma* and buy whiskey to enjoy with the lady he claimed was his future wife. The whiskey was for his father-in-law-to-be, with whom he would share the drink. Miss Morgan thought he looked stunning with the new shirt and pair of trousers he had bought at a shop in the town. He made her miss the dating scene. Her only extravagance during those road trips was a warm bed and good food.

I should not wonder why I have never thought of a long-term relationship. I love a good fling, one that has no strings attached. I must be the only one of my agetates not thinking of settling down.

With these thoughts, she headed to the bar for a tot of brandy. She wanted to knock herself off with the drink and call it a day. Instead, she found a lady sitting alone in the bar and requested to join her.

They took a round of drinks and opened up to one another. She said her name was Gena. She was married and a mother of two but was dating a younger man. He was to join her shortly after finishing with a shower in their room.

She is married and dating someone on the side, while here I am single, and no one has ever proposed to me?

“Life is full of ironies,” Miss Morgan said. “The married are the envy of the singles who run after their wives and husbands. But no one gives the likes of singles like me as much as a glance. Is it that I emit such repellent energy, Gena?”

“In life,” replied Gena, “we have choices to make before we leave the stage.”

Before Miss Morgan could respond, Gena’s boyfriend joined them. As she excused herself to leave and give them some privacy, Gena declined to let her go.

Miss Morgan accepted to remain and thought with amusement: *I am here seated with a lover, the boyfriend, and a wife, Madam Gena.*

It somehow felt normal and within a short time, they were making merry, making Miss Morgan forget her loneliness. They partied for another hour or

so. And as each got tipsy the more the drinking became fun. They ordered another round.

MUSEMBI KNOCKED ON the door of Biazu's parents' home. He remembered that her mother died just after they had graduated from college. Musembi had even attended the burial. He remembered Biazu being very devastated by her mother's death. Musembi felt so sad for her that he spent a month with her to console her. She had then left for the United States. They had lost touch until their meeting in Burundi.

Musembi knew there wasn't much to tie Biazu to her father's home. He, therefore, expected her father would allow them to join in holy matrimony.

An elderly man who looked well-kept answered the door.

"Hello young man, what can I do for you?"

Musembi was surprised to recognise the old man but didn't let this show. He asked respectfully, "Are you dad to Biazu?"

"Yes, I am. *Karibu ndani*. Welcome young man." He clearly had forgotten the young man.

"I am your guest. My name is Musembi." He smiled as he handed him the bottle of whisky and *nyama choma*.

"Thank you very much," said the old man. "Please have a seat I serve this *nyama* we eat together because I know why you have come at this hour."

He disappeared into the kitchen and returned with a tray and some ugali he had prepared to take with sour milk. He made the table and set two plates.

Musembi was confused and wondered why the old man had not brought a third plate for her daughter, Biazu. He decided not to ask and wait. He scanned the room and saw Biazu's graduation portrait hung on the sitting room wall. He walked to where it was hung to look at it closely as he waited for the old man to finish laying out the table. He noticed another picture with people who looked like students standing together with Biazu's parents. He recognised himself and was the only male student in that photo. He took the picture from the wall to admire it, as he tried to remember the names of the other three college girls in the picture.

Biazu's dad joined him to look at the photo. Musembi pointed at himself in the photo. The old man joked pointing at the picture saying that the young

man – Musembi – had long been in his home – long before he stepped into his house.

“Let’s first eat, Musembi, then you explain who the others are in the photo,” the old man said and proceeded to serve the meat. Musembi opened the bottle of whiskey. He felt that he needed a shot of the whiskey to steady himself expecting his woman Biazu to join them at the table. She was taking too long in the shower.

They finished eating and Biazu was nowhere to be seen. Her dad finally came to the purpose of Musembi’s visit.

“Biazu invited me,” he replied. “I gave her a lift from Burundi and dropped her off here a little earlier. I was to join her here for dinner with you. And, as an African man, I decided to buy liquor for my friend’s father and share it as a sign of my friendship. She was kind enough to tell me your favourite brand. I wonder why she has not joined us for dinner, yet I called her as I was about to enter the house and she informed me that she was taking a quick shower, then join us.”

The dad seemed thoughtful and didn’t speak for a while. Then he lifted his head and faced Musembi. “When were you with Biazu today, young man?”

“A few hours ago,” Musembi replied and was a bit irritated that the old man should ask the question, yet he had just explained it to him.

“Are you sure that is Biazu in the photo you say was taken when you were in college?”

“Yes, I am sure, Dad. I schooled with her, and always looked forward to meeting her after her studies in America. I waited for her because I had feelings for her and would have liked her to marry me. God heard my prayers, and we met in Burundi,” Musembi replied. *I am not here to pay her dowry. Why is the old man grilling me like this?*

He suddenly saw tears running Biazu's dad's cheeks. Musembi wondered whether the tears were of joy that he had said he wanted to marry the daughter. *Maybe he loves the daughter too much to imagine letting her go and get married.*

“Who do you know among these people in the picture, young man?”

“Here is you, her late mom, Esther, and Anna, my former college mates, and here is the love of my heart Biazu. This photo was taken on our graduation day, three years ago,” Musembi replied.

He was by now getting agitated that Biazu should abandon him to be asked unnecessary questions by her dad.

“Actually, Biazu did not leave America alive,” reported the old man sadly. “She was involved in an accident there and died on the spot. I had no money to transport the body back. We – my son and I – decided to rest her there in a Catholic missionary graveyard. My son resides there. I attended the burial and returned home. Gregggy, my son, and I are the only members of my family left. I did not remarry, and I have no intention to. How then could she have been in Burundi? If you saw her, this is to say that her soul never rested as I always feared. And that is very sad indeed. It means I will have to have her body exhumed so that we give her a proper burial here next to her mother. Maybe her soul travelled back with me when I left the following day after her funeral.” The old man was crying as he said this.

Musembi didn’t know what to think or how to react. This could not be real. He could almost feel her touch and passionate kisses remembering when he and Biazu took to bed. He could still feel the warmth of her hug before she walked joyously home earlier on. How then could it be that it was all an illusion?

He remembered Miss Morgan and Wafula telling him a similar story about giving a lady a lift who turned out not to exist. He did not believe them and was not about to believe that this one about Biazu could be true. Such things didn’t happen.

“If it is true Biazu does not exist,” Musembi asked her father who was likewise in disbelief, “how could my senses have deceived me? I saw Biazu with my own eyes, I smelled her perfume, I listened to her laughter, I kissed her lips, and she promised me her love in her beautiful voice, the same voice she invited me for dinner and guided me to her father's house. I spoke to her on the phone thirty minutes ago and she asked me to ring the doorbell and that her dad would be the one to answer because she was taking a shower.”

Musembi stood up and traced the bathroom sure that he would find Biazu there. The dry floor of the bathroom told him that it had not been used that afternoon or evening. He checked all the rooms in the house, including her dad's bedroom. The other two rooms had no bedding and did not suggest somebody was using them.

Musembi called Biazu's phone number again. This time it was off. He showed the number to her dad, who told him that it used to be his wife’s

number and that he now used it for his M-PESA transactions. He said that nobody had ever called since his wife's death. They checked the call log, and Musembi's telephone number did not reflect on the phone to show he had called or that there was a missed call.

Biazu's dad felt traumatised. His had been a quiet and peaceful life until Musembi knocked on his door. He was not sure he could trust this young man, unable to decide whether he too was from the dead like he claimed of his daughter. The young man might even be a ghost himself to seem to know so much, including the people in the picture.

Forgetting about Musembi, the old man was overcome with sadness to think that his daughter's soul could be loitering around, probably unhappy. He must have her body exhumed and brought home for burial.

Musembi had nothing more to say. He excused himself to leave. He wanted nothing of the old man's decision to have Biazu's body exhumed. Instead, his concern as he left the house was why Biazu's ghost should choose to find him where he was in Burundi. Nothing made sense to him. He walked the two kilometres to the hotel through a bush in the dark away from Biazu and everything he had seen that day. He would later wonder how he had made it to the hotel, as he couldn't have seen where he was walking, yet he made it.

He found Miss Morgan with her new friends Gena and her boyfriend Greggry still at the hotel bar.

Miss Morgan could not recognise him at first. When they had parted as he left for Biazu's home, he looked very smart. Now he looked dishevelled and was a ghost of himself. When he reached them, he collapsed on Miss Morgan. He was like a broken child. A surprised Gena and her boyfriend saw the compassion on Miss Morgan's face and understood that they knew each other. They stood up from their chairs to assist her take him to his room.

He could only moan and seemed unable to speak. They all understood that whatever had happened to him, he was too traumatised to talk. Miss Morgan requested the hotel to put an extra bed in his room. She was going to sleep there to watch over him. Greggry brought some sleeping pills and gave Musembi two tablets to swallow with a glass of water, which he did.

Sometime later, he woke up screaming. Miss Morgan helped calm him and, after ensuring he was wide awake, he tried asking him why he was acting so weird for one who was in love when they last parted.

"Biazu is a ghost!" he shouted. "She died ages ago and was buried in the States. It seems she used me to get her father to exhume her so that she can be

buried next to her mom at their home. Mine was her mission to communicate that to her dad. I never believed the dead could return as ghosts. I never believed it when you told me about Sassy. This must be common and no wonder there are so many movies featuring ghosts.”

“What do you mean ghosts, Musembi? Didn’t we spend three straight days with a lively and laughing Biazu? Isn’t she who took us around this Naivasha?”

“Biazu has never been to Naivasha,” he replied still unable to believe. “His father moved here immediately after his wife’s death, and after Biazu had long been living in America.”

“Oh my God,” Miss Morgan said with shock. “And how could Biazu have been so conversant with those places she took us around, including the game parks? And the garage she directed us to park the truck, might it be an illusion too?”

“We have to confirm about the truck first thing in the morning. It would be bad should the truck not be there because I would lose my job, and probably yours, too, for the lie we told the office.”

“I don’t think it will come to that,” she assured him. “And if it does, I will be answerable. But we should leave immediately. We should leave this haunted town of your departed love behind us. I have Gena’s business card and will call her later and not at this hour to say my goodbye.”

They packed their belongings quickly and paid for their rooms as they checked off at the hotel’s reception. They found the truck in the garage where they had parked it.

This time, it was Miss Morgan at the wheel as Musembi was still too shaken to drive.

Musembi called Wafula several times before he answered the phone, half asleep. He thought the truck had had a breakdown and that his assistance was needed.

Musembi told him what had happened. He used more than a thousand words to describe Biazu, and by the time he was finished narrating the story to Wafula, they were already in Nairobi’s heavy morning traffic. It surprised her that the traffic was heavy and slow even on the Southern Bypass, recalling how fast it was the last time she drove through it.

Musembi felt re-energized after speaking with Wafula and felt that he was now ready for the wheel. He would take it over after they had breakfast at their next stop just after the industrial area of Nairobi.

Just before they had left, Miss Morgan had taken some time to clean the cabin. “This is all the home we have for another three days until we get to Mombasa,” she said, and he broadly smiled back at her as if to assure her that he was his normal self again.

When they reached the Mlolongo toll station, it angered Miss Morgan that getting clearance always took too long because of the huge number of waiting trucks.

“It is like a village of all manner of trucks,” she said trying to make a joke of it.

In addition to inspecting the cargo for contraband, there were unusually many traffic police officers who often appeared unannounced to inspect the trucks for traffic violations including roadworthiness. It so happened that one of Smith Freights’ trucks they found at the station had had a minor accident with a personal car after its driver drove in front of the truck. The truck had a patch where it had scraped the car.

As the waiting became too long, they took turns to sleep on the bed in the cabin as the morning cold turned to heat. Unable to take it anymore, Miss Morgan took a room in a nearby hotel. She knew that, at this rate, it would take them another day of waiting before being attended to.

Musembi said he would also take the day off to visit her mom in Nairobi. Miss Morgan thought that he looked like one who needed assurances from those closest to him like his mother that he was OK after the Biazu incident. They left the truck under the care of an agent at the station.

She had once heard that the Kamba, Musembi’s ethnic community, had cleansing rituals after contact with departed souls. If it was true, she thought that Musembi needed it.

He came back even more refreshed the following day. They found that the agent had helped clear their truck at the toll station and immediately started on their journey.

In the meantime, Miss Morgan had decided that this would be her last trip, whether to Busia or any other border. The experience of encountering dead people who came back to life had left her shaken. She feared she might be their next target. She couldn’t imagine going through the experience her two drivers had to endure. She wondered whether the incident had anything to do with the truck, or her personally, or even the route they encountered the ghost women.

She thought that if it was about the two drivers' sins, they must have paid them with the experience with the ghosts. As for her, she didn't want to attract whatever it was that brought the ghosts. She hoped Leonne was not a male version of the ghosts.

THE GHOSTS WERE STILL on Miss Morgan's mind when she was finally back in Nairobi after wrapping up her field trips. The first thing she did was to call Wafula on his phone to know whether the ghosts suddenly appearing disguised as women was a common occurrence along the route. His encounter was the first time he had ever heard of or experienced it, he said.

He was however happy to report that he was in bed with Gradah, with who he had been separated. They had a daughter who was now a teenager. He joked that he felt too young to be a dad to such a big girl. He fathered the girl with Gradah when still in high school. He took it that the appearance of Sassy's ghost to him was to remind him to take up his responsibility as a father.

"I wonder why the burden of raising a single child is often left to the woman," Miss Morgan commented. "It is good that you have shown up for your daughter, even if it is when she is already a teenager. Some fathers never show up at all."

After settling down in her office, she gave a comprehensive report of her trips to the different countries. She gave recommendations on areas that the organisation had not already identified that needed more work to ensure smooth operations throughout East Africa. Her big takeaway from the trips was her realisation how the dynamics in the field were different from work at the office where, even for those overseeing transport operations, all one needed was a computer. Out on the road, one had to be alert at all times, as the trucks and their drivers tended to suddenly encounter all manner of challenges, not to mention the ghosts. If one was not careful, life could change in a blink of an eye.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Dating Life

*Stay single until someone complements your life
in a way that makes it better to not be single;
if not, it's not worth it.
- Mathew Coast*

MISS MORGAN REMEMBERED the beautiful tight dresses she used to wear at her former job before she adopted the more suitable jeans for fieldwork riding in the company trucks. She would now change into fresh dresses each day, unlike with jeans which she would have on for three days without a change. Her former life where she drove a sleek car and led a quiet life was very different with her current life which had become hectic. Despite taking up her new office, she was still in what she thought an informal marketplace where she met all manner of people, some of whom cared little about who she was. Remembering when she was on the road, some referred to her by a nickname, depending on which town was having a stopover. In some towns, they called her Miss Morgan, in others *Mzungu*, and yet others referred to her as The Blonde. Her insistence that she only be referred to as Miss Morgan fell on deaf ears.

Being on the road was like she had lived in a different dimension. She would most of the time keep by herself reading a book or sleep in the cabin in the truck waiting zones when she was on the road.

She, however, had to accept that she had to be with the people if she was going to gather business information in the new towns they came by. Opportunities sometimes appeared overnight, which meant she couldn't afford to ignore people or lose the opportunity.

Another thing, she never spoke about education. She was a city girl and the small towns seemed to her were for dropouts. The learned the "A" students in the towns were far outnumbered by the school dropouts, who had to work hard to feed their families. Being outnumbered made the elite – the "A" students – quickly adapt to the social situation they found themselves if they were to fit in and put money in their pockets.

Miss Morgan began to think that "A" students seemed puppets of "D" students who were the traders and the richer ones. The "A" students ran the official government systems that enabled the "D" students to conduct the businesses that made them rich. Those were life's ironies that nobody could do anything about. While the educated civil servants relied on their salaries, the traders understood the rules of demand and supply in the market that brought in the money. So long as one understood the rules of the market, it didn't matter whether one had good command of the English language or not. Just respond to the market and the money would follow the trader.

Miss Morgan learnt these lessons the hard way, that she needed the "D" students to put money in her pocket. For this to happen, she had to dine with them and understand them to walk the journey in which to sell them the value Smith Freights offered. It took time, but it usually yielded results, attracting many traders who ended up happier with Smith Freights compared to their previous service providers.

She classified some of the more difficult prospective clients as laggards with whom there was a lot of back and forth trying to convince them, and the non-starters who consumed a lot of her time but remained uncommitted, never saying yes or no to her sales pitch. By the time she would realise the non-starters were wasting her time, a month would be gone, yet she had targets to fulfil.

Her lesson from all this was never to lose sight of the nonstarters, as they often revealed the reasons they preferred Smith Freights' competitors. This, surprisingly, also led her to potential clients who would be more willing to take up her company's services.

LEONNE CALLED MISS MORGAN to let her know that he was in Nairobi. She invited him to dinner. Her heart was thumping when they met. She had missed his French kiss and wanted it, except that they were too much in the open. Public kissing was not common in Kenya and was looked down upon. Instead, she gave him a sensuous hug. Words were stuck in her throat.

“I’ve missed you, Miss Morgan,” he said tenderly.

“Thank you, Leonne!”

“How have you been, beautiful?”

“I have been well...” she hadn’t finished the sentence before Leonne’s lips locked onto hers, his body trembling with want as he entered her car.

Once they reached her house, his presence filled her space. As she prepared dinner, she could feel his eyes following her as she walked about in the open-plan kitchen. But she too had missed his company, which distracted her. The distraction was such that utensils seemed not to be in their right place as she knocked over things looking for items in the wrong places. She was not used to a man in her house. The only man to have ever entered the house before Leonne was Grandpa Smith, who didn’t have the patience to be cooked for, being a great a good chef himself.

Thinking of her impatient grandfather, she thought it was just as well she was cooking for this other man who might make her his “Mrs”. But she doubted whether she would sustain wifehood if taking over her space was the sacrifice it took.

Soon the diner was ready, and Leonne rose to assist her in the kitchen and lay out the table. Seeing this, Miss Morgan thought he was not too bad in the kitchen. She thought that this was either because he was the firstborn in his family or an only child. Being either of those two found one being forced to cook for themselves or for others, giving them good experience in the kitchen.

As they sat to eat, they suddenly forgot about the food as he urgently undid the top button of her blouse and she puffed her chest to undo the remaining three, which easily unbuttoned. He had already scanned the house and knew where the bedroom was.

They were soon asleep with contentment. When they got out of bed, they were twice hungry and had to warm the food they had left on the table.

Miss Morgan, however, had a secret. She did not want to tell him yet that she was expectant. The pregnancy was an accident, and she had never been sure whether he had taken seriously what they had together from day one.

Leone looked like a young sexy boy not ready to have strings attached to somebody just yet.

She didn't get to reveal the secret as he was in a hurry to catch his flight back to Bujumbura. She did not ask him what he had come to Nairobi to do. She thought that he probably had not been able to figure out who the elite lady – her Miss Morgan, was. To him, it must have seemed she was a truck driver or a cargo logistics manager. He would yet come to know her. But his performance was on point, which is all that mattered to her. He left early with a promise to come back soon.

GRANDPA SMITH WAS NOT AMUSED that Miss Morgan had been only seven months in the job and wanted to take a break. She didn't know how to explain to him that it had something to do with a particular experience in the short time she was out in the field with the truck. Her pregnancy was also not something she wanted to discuss, especially because she was involved with the young man responsible for it just for fun. The young man was nowhere close to her dream husband, no matter how much she was determined to become somebody's wife. She was, however, going to keep and raise the baby alone and didn't mind juggling between work and the infant. In any case, her grandpa was ageing and would need her care, making marriage not a priority to her.

Even so, she sometimes wondered whether it was a husband she wanted, or somebody loaded with money. If it was a husband, the father of her child, Leonne, would be quite fine. She liked that he had been calling her every day to check on her, perhaps believing that she was at work on the road. He didn't know she was heir apparent to Smith Freights. She really did not want him to find out. After all, she thought, what harm was there and there were no strings attached between them? All they had was the beautiful fling that happened every other time. Each time she visited Burundi, he was the only one she took to bed. He was warm, young and handsome, but was nothing close to the calibre of man she wanted to tie the knot with. She thought that her grandpa might even think Leonne a gold digger. With her grandpa, she didn't think she stood chance with her handsome boy.

Her grandpa's type of man was Powell, a former boyfriend who tended to irritate her with his arrogance. He often humiliated her to her face. If he saw a woman he fancied, he would openly get her contact number in Miss Morgan's presence, telling the lady not to mind her as she was his sister. Despite this,

Miss Morgan knew that Powell loved her a whole lot, despite of his mischievous behaviour. He was also a prayerful man. Each time they parted company when they were together, he always insisted they make a prayer no matter how drunk he might be.

A typical prayer of his would go like this:

*Thank you, dear God, for your mercy,
Thank you for your Grace, and more so, I am thankful for Joy,
now I have Faith...*

Miss Morgan wasn't sure she liked it.

Powell was Miss Morgan's first love, but his love for her tended to manifest as emotional abuse by the way he belittled her. She didn't think he would ever be her first choice to be her husband. As for his prayer, she wasn't sure whether he was dating a Joy or a Faith or both. *Yes, he loves me, but his wandering eye is always the problem.*

She recalled a time they went dancing during a visit to the United Kingdom when Powell whispered to her ear to allow him to dance with a lady he said he had always wanted to give a swing. Miss Morgan didn't know the lady or anybody in London. So she didn't know whether they worked together, or whether they had been in college together. She allowed him and calmly remained seated like a nice lady. Their dancing began well, and they showed good moves like people who had danced together before. But within no time she saw Powell's hands seductively digging into the girl's behind, which the girl resisted.

The next moment, she saw Powell falling backwards from a slap, as another one landed him on a table.

As Miss Morgan tried to understand what had happened, she heard Powell shout rudely at the slim man who was the source of the slap, "Who do you think you are, mosquito man? She is my girl, and I do not know what you are trying to prove hitting me."

Powell, who was well-built, seemed to belittle the man's slimness. The man did not reply but grabbed Powell by the neck showing incredible strength as he pulled Powell out of the bar.

People watching the drama followed them outside, closely followed by Miss Morgan. *I have to find a way to save Powell from this man's anger.*

She stepped in front of the man, as the lady stood by Powell looking shocked.

“Please spare my brother, forgive him for what he has done to you,” Miss Morgan pleaded. “He is drunk and behaved foolishly. I promise you this shall not happen again,” she added.

Powell in the meantime, seemed to have gone crazy and was busy forcing kisses on the lady who was now screaming and moving away from him. Some drunk patrons who had followed them outside tried to cheer him on.

The next thing Miss Morgan saw was Powell on the floor with blood dripping from a cut on his forehead. The hotel staff helped her call an ambulance, which arrived a few minutes later. She called his parents, who joined them at the hospital.

“You did all that in front of Miss Morgan, Powell,” his mother asked disbelievingly after Powell explained to them what had happened. “How disrespectful of you! You had your woman, and you went fighting others for their women? And you don’t seem one bit sorry for it,” the mother added in shock.

Miss Morgan felt that neither could she be sorry for him. She excused herself and left him with his parents, who seemed better able to handle the situation.

He can marry a goat if he likes. With this thought, she hailed a taxi to the airport where she boarded the next available flight to Kenya never to be seen again in the UK.

Powell, however, never gave up on Miss Morgan. His parents and Grandpa Smith were close friends and often spoke on the phone. The parents visited his farm once a year and were usually accompanied by Powell.

Whenever Miss Morgan was at the farm, she would be with them though she was away working most of the time.

“When people don’t appreciate you, sometimes it is best to leave them alone,” Grandpa Smith had said after she had opened up to him about Powell, who he referred to as his grandson. “You should never make excuses for them, Miss Morgan. Always follow your heart. It is you who should show others how to treat you. I am happy you have always said no to abusive relationships. First, you quit your mom, and now Powell.”

Miss Morgan was eager to replace Powell. She wanted to have another man in her life, if only to show him off to Powell.

A possible replacement for Powell was a man called Jaquel, who she had met while in the company of Stella and friends just before she had joined Smith Freights.

Jaquel was a flashy dresser, but it was his good command of the English language and his caring heart that made it hard for many to ignore him. He also had a great body which bulged with muscles. One might have thought he owned a gym to have such a great physique. Miss Morgan imagined every woman wanting him.

The night they met, he served her a glass of wine and introduced her to some of his classy acquaintances and she was sold. He talked of big things, making her wonder whether he would be of the calibre her grandpa would have liked for his grandchild's future husband. The next few months saw him often visiting their home, which was an indication that Grandpa Smith may have approved of him.

One time, she accompanied Jaquel to his bank and watched him confidently walk to a particular counter in the nearly empty banking hall.

"Meet my wife, Jeff," he said to the cashier, who must be the one that served him often. "How are you keeping?"

The cashier pleasantly returned the greeting and told Miss Morgan to feel welcome.

"Kindly give me my monthly statement," Jaquel requested.

This surprised Miss Morgan. *What century is this Jaquel guy living to request a hard copy bank statement in this age of smartphones and bank apps?*

As he was being handed the statement it accidentally slipped to the floor. As Miss Morgan bent down to pick it up for him, a thought crossed her mind to steal a glance at it to see the figures displayed.

The figure she saw shocked her. She just turned around and left the bank without a word to Jeff. She left the statement on the floor where it had fallen for her boyfriend to pick it up.

Jaquel's account had only ten dollars, which to her was unbelievable. *Had he requested a friend to put in money that day to impress me but failed to do so? I am disappointed. Or is it that the ten dollars reflected his true worth? I do not know what to think seeing that his account was in the red. Unfortunately, I have no time for gold diggers. I am too young to take in a broke guy. No romance without finance. I have a lifestyle to sustain. I follow the money. Show me what you have, and you can enjoy what I have—*

what a deflating bastard. How could he be this broke? No wonder I have been the one paying the petty bills. I suspect he had a scheme to cheat me of some substantial amount, being so close to him as to almost be his wife, as he had introduced me to the cashier. Does he take me for Santa Claus?

She drove like a mad woman back to her house to pack his belongings. She wanted to do it as quickly as possible and dump them at the door to his house.

As she packed, she discovered he had forgotten his phone in the house. By the time she was done packing his bag, she had already responded to three women looking for him.

“Any message for Mr. Jaquel, dear?” she asked one of them.

“*Mwambie aniite back pliz,*” the caller replied in sheng, the street language in Kenya.

It pained her to think of all these women he must have been dating. She was angry that she must have been something of his trophy to show off to other people. She realised he had little respect for her. His was a life of adventure with little responsibility. She had heard some women say how hard it was to know whether a man was married or single. They all wore the same smile and looked well-fed by their attentive wives. Jaquel looked like those men, only that it was her who fed him.

I am done with being his mistress!

She wondered why she so badly wanted to be called “Mrs” as if it was a beauty title like Miss USA or Miss World.

She called her security guard to pick up Jaquel's bag and take it to his house. She was too disappointed and angry to have the energy to drop it off at his furnished apartment, which she was not sure whether he had rented it for a time to win her. She threw his phone into the bag.

As the guard was knocking at her door, so was Jaquel.

She shoved the bag into his hands and slammed the door before he could enter. She instructed the security guard to see him out the gate and never to allow him back into the compound.

“What became of you, Miss Morgan, to rush out and leave me in the bank without explaining, and now you have packed my bag and thrown me out of your house?” he tried to say through the closed door, confused. “What did I do to you?”

She didn't feel sorry for him. *I am the one who is the victim here with everything about you – from your women to your brokenness. Maybe he has other bank accounts full of money, but I really do not care. I have to move on before I regret keeping this guy.*

“Let us not cross paths again, Jaquel. Your phone is in the bag,” she told him and blocked his number on her phone.

After this, all she wanted was to leave the house and find Stella, the only person who could offer her a shoulder to cry on.

“That is how I lost my darling Jaquel,” she explained to Stella after she had calmed down. “How dare he ask me to accompany him to his empty account? He can go to hell. We shall meet there when I am done with this good life on earth. Just like most men fear, I am sure he must be worried about what I must have come across on the phone. I am sure he has tried many times to call me to reconcile. But no chance; I won't unblock his number.”

Only years later would she learn that he had married and had three children. In his community, a man could marry three wives. She hoped it was a wife he had married and not wives. *Tafadhali!* (Please!).

She, however, wondered whether she was placing him too much in her world where married men didn't have anything like a wife but a mate. She nonetheless told herself that she must learn the trick of those who got married. *But I am determined. I need to make up my mind and get a partner to replace Jaquel once and for all. Not so sure how, but I am in the field looking for a match.*

CHAPTER EIGHT

Mother To Be

*I love tiny hands;
how wonderful they are
wandering around
making the world a happy place*

MISS MORGAN WAS IN TIMAU to spend some time with her Grandpa Smith. A lot had been happening lately and she was there to get peace of mind. She also wanted someone to talk to. Her grandpa asked her to first take it easy and they would talk later.

She decided to call her stepsister Stella, whom she considered her confidant, to find out whether she was home for the weekend. She was. Miss Morgan requested they take a drive to Nanyuki the following day. She had a lot on her mind to offload.

She woke up early and had breakfast with her grandpa. But she soon excused herself, explaining that she would be away for the day, which the grandpa didn't mind even though he might have wanted her company, which he missed. He was nonetheless busy with the season's activities at the farm. His wheat was being harvested and needed his supervision.

Miss Morgan kissed him on the forehead as she went to her car. From the rearview mirror, she could see him following the car with his eyes until she disappeared around the corner.

She wondered what was on his mind: *Was it loneliness, or pride in me that I often check on him as he is aging? Maybe he is worried I have become lazy to have taken*

leave after only six months on the job. Maybe he is trying to compare me with my mom, probably wondering whether I took after her or after my grandma, his late wife. Not to worry, Grandpa, life shall put me in my place soon. I am just trying to find myself.

In another moment Miss Morgan was driving into her dad Mwangangi's compound. Everyone else was busy at the farm, except for Stella who stood by the gate waiting for her. She could not see her dad, Mwangangi, but would speak with him in the evening when she dropped off Stella.

"How have you been, Madam Lost?" said Stella as she entered the car. "It has been a while, Miss Morgan. Every time I try to reach you, you are somewhere out of the country or on the road somewhere."

"I know Stella. I have been missing in action a lot trying to fit into Smith's business ventures. There is so much to learn, it is unbelievable. The CEO of Smith Freights, Alastair, has introduced a working method called Kaizen that is new to me. It is not like in your company where the business owner takes everything home. This Kaizen system has made everyone a salesperson, even the office messenger. Everyone, including the uneducated, has been trained in what Smith Freights is about, its values and its goals. This involvement of everybody despite their position in the company has made sales shoot up. I have come to realise that people, even those we perceive as ignorant or uneducated are smarter than some of us who went to school might think. Once the 'D' students understand the business and its products, they become the teachers, as I was humbled to learn. And soon, if it won't be the 'D' students, it will be the robots to take over our jobs. My friend, you need to *changamka* (style up). The world will not wait for you. The disruption is real, dear sister. The 'D' students are learning from the internet, gaining the necessary skills. It appears to me that those of us who studied up to university become too relaxed thinking we are educated, unlike those 'D' students who are motivated to earn more to feed their needy families. For the likes of you and me, the job we are in is not a matter of life and death, especially those of us brought up with a silver spoon in our mouths."

"I hear you, Miss Morgan. These street-smart employees have been brought up in abject poverty and have nothing to lose to catch up with people like us. They learn from a young age that if they don't work hard, they may never succeed in life. As for me, I was never hungry. My parent ensured I had breakfast, a tea break, lunch, a four o'clock snack, and dinner. The poorer kids

of employees in the servant quarters likely only had one meal a day. I imagined the kids surrounding a single plate of food and competing to eat from it, whereby should one of them be slow in eating, he might sleep hungry. When called home to have lunch or tea with snacks when I was younger, I usually put aside half of my meal to take to the gardeners' children. In any case, it was always too much food for me to finish. No wonder there are those lifestyle diseases that only seem to affect the rich like hypertension, diabetes, and arthritis. Cancer seems to knock on the door of the rich people more often than the poor. The only disease the poor usually have is hunger. Most of them, by the way, are usually 'A' students. Lack of equal employment opportunity is often the reason some of them become watchmen and maids."

"That is precisely what I came to discover at Smith Freights," said Miss Morgan. "I would be with a driver on the road for a week, only to discover some of them are university graduates. Even the most uneducated know everyone and everything that happens on the road, for example what to say when you don't want to pay a bribe to a hungry cop, and when to tip them. It doesn't matter if your truck is roadworthy, the cops will find fault with it. You can't ignore those *askaris*, so you learn how to deal with them. However, some have a genuine need. One might approach you saying, '*Habari boss, njaa mingi bwana, tuachie kacha?*' (How are you, boss? There's too much hunger. Leave us some money for tea.) It can't be bribery to give such a cop who asks with some humility if his need is real.

"And yet if you don't give the tea, the policeman will ask for your driving license and hold on to it for thirty minutes to waste your time, as you watch those who have parted with a bribe drive on. Or the cop may examine the truck tyres that, though almost worn out but still usable, may ask you to change them there while the place to buy a tyre is 100km away. And should the cop give you a ticket for the tyre offence, you might be shocked to discover a list of other offences like being drunk and disorderly to answer for in court that could cost you jail time or a heavy fine. And so, you have to pay the bribe at every police check point you find on the road. These are some of the little encounters that make you road-smart if you are to survive in the industry. Other lessons you learn come, for example, at a stopover in the town you park the truck to take a rest. A member of a cartel in the town may pose like a security guard who does not give you the option to agree to his services or not to look after the truck. A fee to look after it must be paid, whether there is a need to guard the

truck or not. Before I encountered this, I thought the drivers were exaggerating when they requested cash float to help them survive the journey. One time, after getting a puncture, I refused to pay one of those people connected to the cartels to help change the wheel. This denying them I realised usually resulted in insults, which over time I developed a thick skin for the vulgar language they attacked me with. After we had changed the wheel, we discovered the left side mirror was missing. We had to beg to buy it back from the person who had taken it. The 50 bob I wasn't willing to pay cost me 3,500 shillings. It was a lesson learned the hard way. I have since never hesitated to pay them."

"Oh my God," said Stella amused. "It makes me want to take a road trip with one of your trucks to witness all these dramas. We have been leading too comfortable lives. I am sure your driver was very sad about your big-headedness, Miss Morgan. Had Musembi asked you for a thousand bob to solve an issue before you learnt your lesson, I am sure you would have seen it as a rip-off."

"That is precisely what happened," replied Miss Morgan. "I however had told off the guys to the point we almost did not get back the side mirror. Musembi had to pay with his own money and claim it back from me. Maybe he exaggerated the amount a bit, but it was better than the hell I had put myself through."

"Before this, however, I had left him to deal with the thief to return it, as I went to where there was a small crowd. I wanted to see what the crowd was about, just to get a change of scene from that side mirror incident. I found the crowd listening to a preacher. With nothing to do, I decided to listen to him. 'So we put our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal,' the preacher was saying."

"I thought of the thief who had taken the side mirror and wondered whether he ever listened to preachers. Sometimes even thieves come to listen to the word of God. I hoped he did, so that the word of God might touch him and change his thieving ways."

"The preacher continued with a reading from 2 Corinthians 4:18: 'Every obstacle in your life is subject to change. It doesn't matter what you may be facing. There is an answer. The unseen is the spiritual realm where God's promises exist. When you are fixed on something, you can't be moved. There's a determination that fuels your focus. When you fix your eyes on the unseen—God's promises—your faith will not be moved by your circumstances, and

you'll eventually see his promises come to pass. My name is Pastor Mudi. Bring forth your offerings to God.'

"After the sermon, I prayed that the thief returns the mirror. However, the mention of money by the preacher reminded me about the much I had already cost Smith Freights, and now there was this preacher who wanted me to dig deeper into the company pocket to support his evangelism. I almost left without giving an offering. Being somehow different because of my very light half-caste skin, everybody seemed to watch me to see whether I had respect for God. I wasn't sure I was, as He had already failed me when I needed him to spare me the cartel guards and the thief. I finally pulled a banknote from my pocket without checking the denomination. It felt like the eyes were intently on me more than on the hands of the pastor receiving the offering. I hoped my offering would persuade God to soften the thief's heart and return the mirror. After the closing prayer by the preacher, I went back to Musembi to see how he had dealt with it. And true to the preacher's reading, Musembi had fixed the mirror and was looking for me. Maybe it was my offering that helped its return, or maybe God wanted to prove to me He was still the God who oversaw everything from His Holy Throne to dispel setbacks like mine.

"Maybe Musembi wanted to prove to you that never again should you ignore the small stuff," observed Stella. "They can cost you more, even your own life because these boys have nothing to lose. Your experience reminds me that when you go to a new place you should be open to change and learning new things. These kids have no other means of earning a living, yet they have families to feed, which can be enough motivation for them to kill you if they have to, Miss Morgan. Everyone is a boss in their work. Respect them and always do the needful. Oh, I didn't realise we have been so taken in by your interesting road dramas, and now we are in Nanyuki already."

Stella looked about the town as they drove onto the main street and thought about her childhood with her family enjoying all sorts of goodies from ice cream to cakes and juices. She was also eager to see where Miss Morgan used to hang out with her Grandpa Smith.

She noticed that Miss Morgan was driving in the direction of Mt. Kenya Safari Club and thought it was not a bad idea. It was the best hotel on that side of Mt Kenya and offered a great buffet.

"I missed my breakfast, and now I am almost fainting from hunger," Stella said.

They found the buffet ready, even at that early hour as it was not 11 o'clock yet. They went to join the queue.

Miss Morgan was thinking: *I am not a veggie girl, but now that I am expectant, I need more of them, including fish and some starch. A good diet is what I need now that I am a mother-to-be.*

She had not told anyone about this bit of news, not even Stella, who, on her part, was thinking to herself: *I look forward to spoiling myself with the full menu on offer, beginning with the starter all the way to the dessert.*

As they waited in the queue, they saw their dad Mwangangi ahead of them. They joined him briefly at the table he had sat after serving themselves. He told them he was from a meeting and that this was the only opportunity he had to grab a bite as he was about to get into another long meeting. He introduced the team he had come to meet. They were two ladies, but one of them seemed quite intimate with Dad Mwangangi putting a morsel of food in his mouth now and then. This made Miss Morgan uncomfortable. Stella could not see them as she had her back towards her dad and his team.

“What are you thinking about, Miss Morgan?” Stella said searching her face, which looked disturbed. “I hope it is not about your trips from border to border.”

Miss Morgan didn't tell her what she was thinking about, but it was about what she was seeing of their dad and the lady client of his. She was seeing her father in a new light and now seemed to her like other married men who could be such players and liars. She imagined her mom finding them and angrily striding towards her dad Mwangangi to stop the funny lady from so suggestively feeding her dad.

Then she dropped the bombshell. “I have some news,” Miss Morgan said suddenly. “I am pregnant. There is new life growing inside me, Stella. I am not alone in this world anymore. We shall be two of us now. Some people get what they deserve, but some people don't. I fear marriage as much as I desperately want to be called ‘Mrs Somebody’. But marriage can wait. All I care most about is ensuring my grandpa's comfort.”

“Pregnant?” Stella was surprised. “How could it be, given how men are never on your radar. Or is the pregnancy by the Holy Ghost, or is it by the devil himself?”

“None of the above, Stella. It is by a guy I met. We were just caught up in the moment, and here I am, pregnant. I am not sure I want to let him be the father of my child, let alone be my hubby. And yet I am in love with the man. He is from Burundi and his name is Leonne. Just thinking about him makes my emotions boil. Unfortunately, I don’t know what this man does for a living, or why I trust him with my body so much. Whenever I want him, whether I am in Kenya or Uganda, he doesn’t hesitate to come. I suspect he is either not very busy, or he is a man madly in love. The surprising thing is that he thinks I am a truck driver because that is how we met. But it doesn’t matter to him that that is my job. The big question is, do you think Grandpa Smith would allow me to marry such a man, Stella?”

Stella said nothing and appeared to be thinking about whether Grandpa Smith would be for it or not.

“The thought of being someone’s wife makes me think I might need tutorials in a workshop and books or get lessons from experienced elderly married women. But when I think of a man’s need to be looked after every day being his wife, a feeling of exhaustion immediately kicks in. I prepare him for work as it is taught in the housewife workshop and set breakfast for him that we eat together. I would kiss and wish him a productive day and carry his office bag to the car. I would call him during the day to check on him and wait to receive him in the evening with a hot bath, a clean set of pyjamas, and hot dinner with him. When he said he would be late from work to be in time for dinner, I’d ask for his permission to eat in his absence and wake up to serve him when he got home. This proved tiresome, making me wonder whether it was the life for me. Maybe I need some inspiration to become one and I think a friend of mine called Gena who I met at a Naivasha hotel is the one to help me with it.”

“Who is this Gena that she should be the one to inspire you?” asked Stella.

“Gena is a married business lady who enjoys a life full of adventure. She is not like my mom Mina who became a housewife despite her brilliant mind.”

“Not a bad thing for a mother to be a housewife when her man can provide for her,” said Stella. “My mom has been a housewife since I was born, and I loved finding her at home waiting for my brother and me coming from school when we were young. When I get married, I shall quit my job to give my kids full attention, just like my mom. I do not know how I would have turned out without her being there every day of our lives to give us guidance. Even today,

I am happy to know that I will find her home. and when I am sad, in pain, exhausted or unhappy with life, she knows what to do or what advice to give to ease life. She is my second God.”

“You are the lucky one. While your mom is your second God, my mom was like a witch to me. Being like her to sacrifice her daughter for a new love interest is not something I would dream of doing to my daughter. I have made the mistake of premarital pregnancy just like her, but our life choices differ about being a housewife. Let me be a working mother. Working keeps me sane. Besides, my grandpa and I still have so much to accomplish before I take over from him to grow his legacy and our family's wealth. You are lucky to have a dad and mom who care, and a brother with whom to share your burdens. I am all alone, and the only one Grandpa can rely on as her daughter and her husband Morgan make merry in France.

“I appreciate that our paths are different, but the needs are the same to bring up our families the best we can. This reminds me that I need to change my surname from Morgan, who doesn't care about me and wouldn't care about my child. I should legally change my name to Naila Mwangangi, or Naila Smith.”

The idea of her changing her name tickled them.

“Oh my God, you've said so much. First of all, congrats to you, mother-to-be. About Leonne, I do not know what to say, but I do not think he would follow you everywhere without him being already in love with you. What is important at this moment is having a plan in place to welcome the newborn. And there's no need to bother about the name Morgan, it shall automatically fall by the wayside. The moment you get a husband, the name Morgan will automatically go. What of the baby? What name shall she be given? Smith, Morgan or Leonne.”

“I can't say at the moment whether I will name her after Leonne, but I would like to name her Smith after my grandpa. He, too, ought to be honoured. No one carries his name, not even Mom, who took her husband's surname, Morgan. My daughter's surname shall be Smith.”

“Oh! You even know it is going to be a girl! What's your plan, Miss Morgan? I have a suggestion. Remember that we are both named after our father's mother, Naila. If it is a girl, why not honour your late grandma, Calda?”

“You are right, Stella. I almost forgot we share the name Naila. And I agree with you. My daughter shall be named Calda Smith. I am sure this will make Grandpa Smith very happy.”

“Yes, Naila. The confidence in which you say it makes me believe it will be a girl,” said Stella.

“It reminds me that, despite feeling unwanted by my mother after she got other kids in her marriage, I was generally a happy kid and never judged her until the discrimination became unbearable,” said Miss Morgan. “I will always treasure my mother-daughter relationship with her before she married Morgan and I hope my Calda shall lead a happy life despite her mother – me – having to work 24/7. I will try to always be there for her. I think it is time we started shopping for the best prenatal clinic for me. I would like to give birth here in Nanyuki. I’ll be working from Grandpa’s farmhouse.”

“Let’s get going then, Miss Morgan. We have a lot of shopping to do for this firstborn of ours. And I’ll take the bill and call it an early baby shower since you are the mother-to-be.”

“Thanks, Stella. I am determined to be a good mother. I am beginning my second semester, my dear,” as Miss Morgan was saying this, the waiter who had been serving them came to let them know that their bill had been paid by Dad Mwangangi. When they turned to thank him, they found that he and his team had already left. So deeply were they engaged in their discussion that they didn’t notice them leave. Miss Morgan thought it was because he had least expected to meet his daughters at the hotel. She imagined that they must have spoiled his plans with the lady client giving him bites of food and must have headed straight home to cover for himself before the girls were back.

“I think I shall settle on the Cottage Hospital. No need to stress myself looking for a hospital. It has been my hospital since I was a baby and is only fitting that my baby be born there. Let’s head there before we go shopping so that I first register with them to begin my journey of motherhood.”

The nurses were very welcoming, and they were quickly ushered to the hospital matron’s office. The matron ran them through what to expect in the next four months of the pregnancy before it came to term. According to her, Miss Morgan had overcome the most challenging part of the pregnancy journey, the first semester.

“We need to scan your womb to see how the little one is faring, Miss Morgan,” she said. “Your sister can come with you if you so wish to. What's her name again?”

“Call me Naila, please!” stressed Stella.

“Have you ever been pregnant, Naila?” the matron asked.

“Not yet, but I look forward to it, Madam.”

“You are most welcome. This is what to expect: The hardships you will experience will make you determined to protect your offspring. You will get nauseated, have digestion disorders, feel tense and moody, have shortness of breath, get tremors and twitches, and numbness of hands and feet. The list is endless. I am not telling you all this to scare you but to prepare you for the most incredible journey a woman ever travels alone.”

“Thank you, madam Matron. I am not in any way intimidated by it. It is a worthwhile cause. I admire Miss Morgan for starting ahead of me.”

“All is well with the baby, Miss Morgan,” the matron said after the pregnancy scan. “You are also healthy. Keep with a good diet and we shall see you in a month. Here is the list of recommended foods until the baby is born. Take a lot of rest and take a walk at least once a day. Not a twenty-kilometre walk, but a short and comfortable distance.”

With this advice, they left the hospital. But by then it was too late for shopping.

“Thank you, Stella, dear, for spending the day with me. It has been one of my most important days, especially because you were there to hold my hand as I worried about what the scan would reveal about the baby. Let me drop you off at home and say hello to your mom. I haven't seen her in a while.”

They found their dad already home and it looked like he and Stella's mom had a fight, which Miss Morgan already knew was normal. Couples fight all the time, sometimes for no reason. They still share a lot, even if they may solve their issues, each their own way. The woman of the homestead is often the winner. The man accepts this and heads to the shopping centre to be with other men.

Miss Morgan missed having a man by her side. It was probably okay as she still had her grandpa.

CHAPTER NINE

Incubation

Nice deeds echo through time

MISS MORGAN FOUND Grandpa Smith on the phone when she got home. With the manner he was speaking, she immediately knew who he was talking to. It was her mom Mina at the other end of the line. They were having a heated argument, and her parting shot was that she was not interested in any of Grandpa Smith's wealth. This seemed to surprise him, but it did not matter because neither did he plan to bequeath her anything. Grandpa Smith suspected it was her husband Morgan who was forcing Mina to get some money from her loaded dad.

Smith was in such agony from the talk with her daughter that he had so much to tell his granddaughter.

Seeing this, Miss Morgan sat next to him and kissed his forehead to assure him that he was not alone, and that she would always be there for him in whatever he may want her to do.

“I guessed it was Mom you were talking to.”

“It is for the disappointment with my daughter that I want you to be in charge of the Smith estate,” he said finally. “I shall transfer all my wealth to you. And when your mother shall come making inheritance demands, use your wisdom and give shares to your siblings. But just in case the law should arm-twist you, I want us to start accumulating some wealth just for you, Miss

Morgan. Like the Kikuyu people say, *Utakua ni athiaga ugeni*. I may not die as the saying goes, but I might once find myself away from you, just like your mom Mina has been away.”

“It is nothing to worry about, Grandpa. So long as I have the strength and the ability to create wealth, I can start all over again should Mom Mina ever challenge my inheritance from you. But you should consider leaving some inheritance to Mom, she remains your only child, Grandpa!”

“I hope you had a great day, Miss Morgan,” the grandpa said changing the subject. “I was just about to have coffee, to which you are welcome,” he offered.

Miss Morgan understood that he did not want any further discussion about Mina, perhaps because he was still disappointed by her meanness.

Her mind turned to her pregnancy: *The baby is on the way and that cannot be wished away. What I wouldn't want is for the baby to suffer as I did with Mom. I owe my daughter all my love. I must shelve my longtime desire to get married and live in the present. I don't want Grandpa to panic that he will have no heir should I get married like Mom did. I will keep by his side through thick and thin.*

“Thank you, Grandpa, for inviting me to have coffee,” she said. “I’ll skip it but would love to have that fruit on table that you have been ignoring since morning.” She sat down and cut the orange she was referring to. “And, yes, I had a great day, Grandpa. Are you done with harvesting the wheat?”

“Not yet, dear, three more days to go. How is work at Smith Freights treating you? I am curious to know how you feel about the organization. What has been your experience so far? Is it an exciting venture, or what is your take, my dear? I want you to warm up to the company as you take over from me. I am now old and need to pass the baton to you, my girl, eventually. Another thing, Miss Morgan, I don’t understand why you need a break after working for just six months. I wonder whether it is because you have failed in your work at the office. If that is the case, that sense of failure means you made your first attempt at learning because we all must learn from our failures. It is the best way to start on anything and the only path to excel. You start by recognising your failures to begin to learn. It is what success is about. You must have believed in Smith Freights hence the reason you joined to help shape its future. I am glad you have said what you want is a break, and not quitting. This must mean you aim to continue working to better the company. If this is so, you

have said no to any failures that may hold you back. This makes you determined to succeed and take risks with the business. You have the ability for it, including taking the risk with a dream of success, which is what motivates investors. I hope I've got this right about you, Miss Morgan?"

"It is great working at Smith Freights, Grandpa. It is fun on some days and challenging in others. I try to follow Kaizen principles which have helped me better fit in the organisation. Inclusivity is one of the things I've learnt. Information about the organization and its business activities is open to every member of staff, which has made each of them have a sense of ownership and want to contribute to its success. Because of this, each member – from the messenger to the security guard to the managers – has utilised their uniqueness and brought more business to the company. Fortunately for me, I am of the millennial generation and have grown up with the digital technology, knowledge of which I have tried to apply in the office. One has to align with the digital age we are living, or we may not survive the big sharks in the sea of business we are all in. I am now keenly aware that each shark – big and small – knows the art of branding; they have to look attractive to their customers, but above all keep their promise of affordable and top-notch service. We have to be ahead of the game. Thank you, Grandpa, for giving me a chance to be an entrepreneur and better the company."

"Let me give you a story, Miss Morgan," said Grandpa Smith.

"There was once a traveller who went and booked himself in an inn. He paid 30 dollars for the night. As the room was being prepared for him, he went to the dining room to have dinner. The inn keeper took the 30 dollars and paid the butcher for his supply of meat at the hotel. The butcher paid the owner of the goat he had slaughtered with the 30 dollars. The goat owner paid the 30 dollars to the grocery shop for groceries his wife had collected to be paid later. The shopkeeper took the 30 dollars to his landlord. The landlord paid the 30 dollars to the inn keeper for entertainment he had for his guests at the inn. All these transactions took place in a span of 30 minutes.

"Just before the guest checked into his room after finishing his dinner, he received a phone call from his boss instructing him to be in the next town without delay. He begged the innkeeper to refund him the money explaining that he had to leave immediately to attend to a work emergency and won't be using the room as planned.

“It so happened that the innkeeper had just received the 30 dollars from the landlord, which he refunded the traveller with much gratitude. He thanked the traveller for choosing his inn and requested him to refer other travellers to the inn.

By the time the traveller was getting his money back, it had liberated five people from debt: The owner of the hotel, the butcher, the farmer, the grocery storekeeper and the landlord. The traveller had come to set people free. Is money an illusion, Miss Morgan? Trading makes money, moving it from one pocket to another and everybody is happy. The idea is not to keep the money but to use it to make more.”

“Wow, it is amazing how a single payment can do so much for the people who received it in the village,” said Miss Morgan. “But I guess it is only possible within a small circle of people.”

“Not really,” replied the grandpa. “That is how money circulation works for millions of people in a country. However, had the innkeeper delayed and kept the money to himself, he would have denied those in the village who received it the opportunity to earn and pay their debt that day. From the 30 dollars that circulated in just 30 minutes in the village, at least 120 dollars entered people’s pockets that day showing how wealth is created. It goes to show that should everybody in the world be allowed to earn from their talents rather than concentrating it in the hands of only a few who become fabulously rich, the world would be a better place. When you become a CEO, Miss Morgan, I expect you to bring out the best from the employees below you. You should not take all the credit and outshine everybody. Being already at the top, you are already handsomely rewarded with a big salary and annual dividends as the company gains success. Therefore, why not prepare others to take after you when you retire? Make everyone wish to be the Smith company CEO, which pays off for everybody.”

“I now better understand the essence of trade, Grandpa. I used to be irritated when hawkers pushed items to my face to buy, but I now realise that it is about trade in which everyone must survive and feed their family. I will consider buying stuff I don’t need and give them out so as to have the coins I pay for them circulating in the economy.”

“I am glad to hear that. The money you receive from another person's pocket is yours to create wealth, Miss Morgan.”

“Thanks, Grandpa. That story of the traveller has been so enlightening. I am sure you are curious why I’ve taken leave after only six months. I am a pregnant, Grandpa. I am not planning to get married, however. So it is solely my baby. She is a girl, and I will name her after Grandma Calda and give her the surname Smith, your name. Someone should keep the Smith name alive. After all, Mom is a Morgan, and because of this I am also a Morgan. For this reason, my daughter shall carry the Smith name.”

“Congrats, Miss Morgan. Such good news on what might have been a hopeless day. Thank you for bringing my wife back to me. I am so proud and thank you for letting me know. I now understand why you are taking the leave. It would have been a struggle working while pregnant. I was a bit mad at you to think that you would skip office for six months. I even considered dismissing you from Smith Freights. I now see you are a focused girl and shall go places. This is the best time to get a baby. I married your grandma at your age. It is your choice to get a baby, but I will not stop you from getting married if you choose to.”

“Not to worry, Grandpa. The pregnancy was unexpected, and I want some time to put my life in order before I think of marriage. I want to finish what I started with you, but, for now, I don’t want anything to bother me except nurturing the coming baby.”

“You have become a whole new person,” the grandpa said with pride. “Nothing is wrong with you, my dear. You are of age and pregnancy is inevitable. No one is static. We keep changing into new beings each new day although change can be confusing and overwhelming sometimes. Stay the course, my dear. It shall soon be over. I like the mature woman you have become – beautiful and responsible. I look forward to that child, who I would like to take your place in this big house. Since you went to Nairobi, I have felt alone having no one to sit at the dining table to eat with. Thank you for keeping the baby. I hear a lot of your age mates are aborting them every day cheating themselves that they will remain young. They forget a day shall come when they cannot have a baby. Aside from work, I will focus on the coming baby.”

“Thanks for understanding, Grandpa. On my part, as the baby will be growing inside me, I will be happy to teach Kaizen to your farm workers.”

Miss Morgan thought of her crash on the sweet-talking Leonne. She thought of his tall, handsome body, how he kept himself neat with trendy shoes and haircut, how his cologne perfumes made heads turn, his dark skin colour and

perfect milk-white teeth revealed by his beautiful smile, the seductive eyes. *Why now should I see all these in him after he has made me pregnant?*

Before now, she only liked Leonne's prowess in bed. Now she felt a bit more appreciative of the father of her child. She remembered him once saying, "Urge is a complicated word, especially when you crave sex. No one understands that urge you feel but you." This made her believe she was the only woman in his life, and she was now beginning to think sex was better when a couple made a deliberate decision to have a baby together. For now, however, she decided not to talk to him until the baby came. *I least want him to know I am pregnant. I asked Musembi to block his number, being the only other number of a Smith Freights employee he has other than mine. I also lied to him that I'd be out of the country for four months.*

Grandpa Smith interrupted her thoughts, replying to her offer to teach Kaizen to staff at the farm. It made her wonder why he had taken so long to say it, and whether it had something to do with his advancing age. She knew some old people who took time before replying to something, though Grandpa Smith was not always like that.

"We already use Kaizen at the farm, hence its success," he said. "The farm embraced Kaizen principles before Smith Freights. I think it was easier at the farm, where workers are quick to take up instructions and the results have been tremendous. I did it myself. It seemed a bother to bring Smith Freights staff all the way here to teach them. And because of the workers' input, 20 per cent of farm profit goes to them. They are now able to afford to install electricity and water, and many of their kids have finished school. Walter, your manager at Smith Freights, is the son of one of our workers here. If you visit their farm, you will not tell that his parents are labourers on the farm. The cybercafé at Timau belongs to another of our worker's daughter, and the agroveter shop we buy animal feeds belongs to the son of another of our workers. Smith Gardens has been a sanctuary of excellence for those who pay attention to detail. I have no time for mediocrity. Hence the reason why I clash with my daughter – your mother, Mina."

"Wow! How come, Grandpa, you never shared this with me earlier?"

"You were too young to understand some of these things. Being at Smith Freights has shaped you. Even though you involve the workers in Kaizen, you don't tell them everything. Some details remain secret and only known by the

organisational leaders in management about how you run the office including the employees. Now you are not too young, or naïve to understand these things. Thanks to those who had taught you some of these things.”

“That is true, grandpa. Life is the best teacher. We need to get into the house. It is getting chilly out here. I can see the chef has already lit a fire in the barroom.”

CHAPTER TEN

Disguise

*Despite the stresses of life stay centred.
A smile shall help you glide through with grace and ease.*

MISS MORGAN HAD TAKEN to working online to keep up with the office while on leave. “Please, let’s have a comprehensive field report from the team on their findings about the market. It should keep me updated before I lose myself in the village. And cheers everyone for your entrepreneurial spirit,” she said in conclusion to the latest of their online company meetings.

Much of the time, however, she was mostly concerned with her pregnancy, as betrayed by this thought: *It makes my mind feel spongy and unable to care much about what is happening outside my body. It has to do with the movements of the baby growing inside me, an experience I find quite interesting. I will ask Stella to come here instead of me going to our dad Mwangangi’s home. Or maybe, Stella’s mom might think I will be a bad influence on her daughter now that I am pregnant. The pregnancy has been the talk of the village, which must be the reason my dad summoned me to see him. I ignored him, the first I had ever done so. I did not want to be bombarded with questions about the man responsible for the pregnancy. I can’t speak to him about the poor guy Leonne who I don’t care much about or tell him that I have decided to raise the baby without her father.*

Even as she was thinking this, she was already two weeks to term and just come from the prenatal clinic with the family driver. Her phone rang. It was Musembi.

“Hello, Miss Morgan. Are you at the Timau home?”

“Hi Musembi, I am in Nanyuki town. I had come to the clinic. How are you keeping, my dear and why do you care whether I am in the farm?”

Musembi laughed at the question. “I am in Nanyuki, too. Where can we hook up?” he replied.

“You had a Nanyuki consignment? What a happy coincidence! Meet me at the Sportsman's Arms Hotel I buy you lunch. It has been a while. I want to hear what you have been up to since our last trip together.”

To Miss Morgan's surprise, Musembi came accompanied by Leonne. Seeing Leonne after such a long time so excited her that it must have triggered the birth contractions that took over her body.

“Oh my God!” she told Leonne between laboured breaths, “I guess your arriving unannounced must have triggered my labour pains. We need to rush to the hospital.”

They quickly helped Miss Morgan to her car and were at the hospital within minutes.

In another short while, she delivered a bouncing baby girl. There must be power in reunions, she thought.

“I am so sorry, Miss Morgan dear, for hastening our daughter's birth. Why did you keep it a secret from me?”

“Nice to see you, Leonne. How did you trace me and why? You have never shown any desire to marry me.”

“I've missed you, Miss Morgan. I've all this time waited for your call in vain. Your heart touches mine. You are a pure and selfless being. Where did I go wrong for you to ditch me? I had to find you and thought of coming to Smiths Freights to look for their driver, Miss Morgan. That is when I discovered you are not a driver. And when I came knocking at your Nairobi home, all the guards knew was that you had been away for a while and didn't say where you went. But however far you were, I was determined to find you. I wanted to hear it from you where I must have messed with this beauty – you. It was after I had gone back to the office to try and get more information that I met Musembi at the gate. And here we are. He is the one who informed me you are on maternity leave. The question is why you didn't tell me you were carrying my baby. Were you afraid our relationship was not solid enough? Or do I look like such a poor and irresponsible man to you, Miss Morgan? The answer doesn't matter. All I can say is thank you for giving me a daughter. What are her names?”

“I love you so much, Leonne, but I am from a very fragmented family, dear. I never reached the point of giving you my background, and neither have you. My girl is called Calda Smith, after my late grandma.”

“Does that mean you have a blood relationship with Smiths Freight, Miss Morgan?” he asked, surprised.

“Yes, I am. I was brought up by my grandpa Smith after my mother Mina got married to Morgan, hence my name Miss Morgan. I could not fit in in her new marriage and that is how my grandpa brought me up. I am now the seating Director at Smith Freights. When I met you, I was in the field and had been posing as a driver so as not to attract a lot of unnecessary attention from clients as I familiarised myself with the market. I never corrected that impression with you.”

She then went on to explain who his real father was.

“Why Miss Morgan, and you are not Morgan’s daughter?”

“He gave me the nickname himself in the short period I stayed with him and my mom before they got their children. I was born out of wedlock and fell out of their wedlock. That is how I belong to my Grandpa Smith. The nickname stuck with me, and I have no issues with it either.”

“Maybe it is time for me to also make a confession. You may not know that I am one of your happy clients. My company is called The Glass Wine Experts, and it was introduced to Smiths Freight by one of your office messengers by the name of John, a very intelligent young man. And then when I met you, your professionalism – aside from being someone I love – made me never want to lose Smiths Freight. I am now in eight countries, and five of those are serviced by Smiths Freights. I also kept a low profile so as not to scare my newfound love, the purported truck driver.” They laughed.

“Oh my God,” she said with great surprise showing on her face. “Glass Wine is our eighth biggest client at Smiths Freight. How come I never came across your name in our files, Leonne?”

“I have a team of professionals who do the day-to-day stuff. I am permanently on the move. I have two more markets to conquer, but I had to take a break to look for you, my love. I have sacrificed a lot trying to track your movements from town to town. All Smith truck drivers must be familiar with me by now for asking them the same question: Who knows where Miss Morgan is? None of them was ready to answer that question. Now I understand why. But you mean so much to me. Maybe you took me for granted

and assumed I had a lot of free time at my disposal. I did all that out of love, Miss Morgan.”

“That is awesome, Leonne! It is what I craved. I feel loved that you didn’t care I was a lowly truck driver. But as you appreciate the professionalism, I braved the insecure roads to make Smiths Freights a company to reckon with. I am now torn between family and work.”

“The problem with people like you is underestimating your power: Having a family shouldn’t stop your ambitions. If anything, it should give you more reason to work harder. Your intelligence always betrayed you. I knew you were more than just a driver, which is why I have come for you. We build our future together, Miss Morgan.”

“What I have shared with you about Morgan is just a snapshot of my life. The whole story is yet to be told. There is a lot going on behind the scenes and I do not want to drag you into it. At the moment, everything is about my grandpa, who has placed many responsibilities on my shoulders. I fear that marriage may come in between those responsibilities derailing them and I do not want to disappoint him. I don’t know, but maybe it is something we can work out, Leonne.”

“Yes, maybe we should work it out. But I cannot accept that fulfilling your family obligations should come before our love, Miss Morgan. My mind and soul are determined to support you and our baby. It is not by accident that I met and loved you and always tried to be by your side. Was I alone in this love for you to keep me away from the knowledge of my baby? And should tomorrow never come with marriage, does it mean I will never get to enjoy being with my baby?”

“Leonne, you deserve my love as much as you deserve our daughter Calda. I desire to be with you, but please understand my circumstances at the moment. I was scared of needing you. That is why I pushed you away.”

“Should you be the sole architect of our dreams and destiny, Miss Morgan, or we should sail together however rough the sea shall be? Don’t you think it is better to marry than die with unfulfilled passion? A woman is a unique flower that God made to make a man complete. I am not complete, hence why I am here to seek completion with you, my dear. I have for months been lovesick and lost looking for you. But here you are stuck with the fear of losing your familiar comfort zone near your grandpa. Family can give you everything you may want except a husband. Tell me to my face that you do not love me and

you shall never see this face again, even though I shall never give up on little Calda.”

Hearing the challenge to declare her love, Miss Morgan broke into tears.

She was still crying when a short time later her grandpa made a surprise visit to welcome the baby. He was accompanied by Stella, who had brought with her a bouquet of flowers and clothes for the newborn.

The appearance of Smith, whose freight company he admired, threw Leonne off a bit. As for Smith, he saw a very handsome young man on whose face he could see the love he had for his granddaughter and her baby. If this was the young man in Miss Morgan’s eye, he wondered why she should be shy to marry him.

He held his great-grandchild with such tenderness and love that made Leonne, an orphan who grew up without his parents, experience first-hand what it meant to have a family as shown by the great-grandfather for his great-granddaughter Leonne’s own daughter. Seeing this brought tears to his eyes as he wondered how to introduce himself to this dignified and aristocratic-looking old man. For the first time in his adult life as a well-to-do man, Leonne felt insignificant in the presence of the dignified old man and his granddaughter Miss Morgan adoring the newborn. Feeling out of place, he almost walked out of the room.

He followed their adoring talk and their laughter before he decided that he too needed recognition, both as someone who deeply loved Miss Morgan and as the father of their newborn child. He reasoned that Smith may be rich and aristocratic, but he could never be the husband to his own granddaughter.

Leonne’s brief sense of insecurity reminded him of a story he once heard about a rock, a paper, and a pair of scissors. The rock, in the story, feels that nothing can break it because it believes it is the strongest thing in the world. But it knows that a simple paper can cover it and make it invisible to anyone. On the other hand, the paper feels it has the guts to tackle a hard rock but is vulnerable to being cut to pieces by a pair of scissors. The scissors may be superior to paper, but it can do nothing to a rock, which can smash it to pieces. The rock, the paper and the pair of scissors each have their strength, intelligence and skill. It would therefore be a big mistake to use one measure for all of them. Everything has its purpose that cannot be replaced by the other.

Leonne reassured himself that, in any case, he had already made his mark in the Smith family by siring its newest member, baby Calda. He was not there to compete with Grandpa Smith, but to complement him.

He was surprised to realise Grandpa Smith was talking to him. “Oh, I am so sorry young man, for seeming not to notice you,” said the grandpa apologetically, “It must be the excitement of welcoming this new member to my family. My name is Smith, Naila’s grandpa. It is a pleasure to meet you and thank you for visiting my girls.”

“My pleasure, Sir. My name is...”

“Leonne,” Miss Morgan said it for him, cutting him short. “Grandpa meet Leonne. He is a Smith Freights client who chanced to be in Nanyuki and was accompanied by our staff member Musembi, who has just stepped out to answer a phone call.”

“That was so kind of you, young man. Thanks a million for believing in Smiths Freights and giving us business. How has the company been treating you, Leonne?”

“I love Smiths Freights’ services. This is my third year with you, and I intend to be with the company for as long as I am in business. I thank God for Calda too. Congrats grandpa. I am the dad to Calda. I wonder why Miss Morgan has been shy to introduce me!”

Leonne felt he had to come out with it the way he did. He was not going to leave Nanyuki without asserting his love and his fatherhood.

There followed a tense moment as Grandpa Smith glanced questioningly at Miss Morgan. Even as he looked at his granddaughter, he wondered whether she feared he might reject Leonne the way he and his wife Calda had done with Naila’s dad Mwangangi.

“So you are the lucky man who won Naila’s heart and gave me a great-granddaughter in the bargain? Thank you very much for introducing yourself so forthrightly. There’s no fight, and no one will force you to be together or apart. When you guys are ready for each other, let me know.”

“I am ready, but my Naila is not. I’ll give her all the time she needs to decide whether she will take my hand in marriage. All I would request is to be allowed to be visiting my daughter.”

“That I will guarantee you, young man. Calda is your daughter, and my doors will be open for you whenever you feel like coming over, my son Leonne. You loved me before I knew you, being such a faithful Smiths Freight client. I will

open the doors to my home very wide for you. What are your plans for today, seeing that it is already late in the day? Would you mind spending the night with us, then you travel tomorrow?"

What Grandpa Smith had just said including the invitation made both Leonne and Miss Morgan a bit emotional for his understanding of both their predicament.

"Thank you, Grandpa Smith. If you will not mind, I would like to leave you to enjoy this special moment together with your great-grandchild. I will take up on your offer to spend the night with you some other time. I have already booked a place in town and will be around for some days. I'll be back later now that I have a baby and her mom to take care of before they leave the hospital."

"You are most welcome, Leonne. You can enjoy your rest," replied Grandpa Smith. "I shall cover for you the evening, have a good night."

Stella, who had been quiet all this time, stood up. "Allow me to walk you out, Leonne, as I get some fresh air," she said. "My name is Stella. I am Miss Morgan's stepsister." They walked out without properly bidding Miss Morgan goodbye.

Musembi had remained outside waiting patiently as he went through his social media feed. He was taken by the beauty of the girl walking alongside Leanne towards him. So taken was he by the girl that he became short of breath. Words stuck in his throat as they were getting introduced.

Stella also seemed taken by Musembi. She wasn't able to talk much but got Musembi's phone number. She remembered Miss Morgan narrating ghost story to her about Musembi. She thought him a smart guy who was lost in the wilderness of loneliness searching for love, which she was anxious to offer.

Musembi spoke well and asked the right questions, making Stella want to meet him again. She requested them to spend the night at Smiths, but Musembi was not comfortable spending a night at his bosses' home. They rented a cottage for three days.

It was a night for Leonne to celebrate, though he was not sure the guarantee he was given by Grandpa Smith earned him membership in the Smith family, but neither did it push him away from the family.

He remembered someone he respected once telling him that if one got their child in their twenties, they became friends with the child. If they got a child in their thirties, they become a parent to the child, and if they got the child in their fifties, they become the child's grandparent. Many parents in their fifties find

it difficult to be assertive with their child, he remembered the friend saying. *I am at an age I can be a friend with Calda, and I do not want to lose that opportunity. I am not sure whether I am the first man to have ever loved her mother so passionately, or the first man to have ever given her goosebumps, or the first man who made her realise her hidden treasures. For me, I am guilty as charged. I unreservedly love Miss Morgan. She needs to understand a loyal person is often better than the royal person she is seeking to be.*

Miss Morgan did not hold any further discussion about Leonne with her grandpa during the time he spent with her. Smith left the hospital late with Stella, promising to see her and the new one again at daybreak.

Smith had tried finding out about Miss Morgan's plans with Leonne, but she evaded it. Stella, who was there listening, could not betray her friend, Miss Morgan. He requested Leonne's number, which Stella was happy to give him.

"Kindly keep an eye on that young man for me, Stella," he requested her. "I have liked him a lot, and I hope he shall not give up on his family-to-be. I watched my daughter Mina become a ghost of herself after losing her first love due to my ignorance. I wouldn't want the same to happen to my granny, Miss Morgan. I know her taking over my place at work might derail her, but it should not stop her from following her heart. I am not good at reading signs, but I can tell that she and Leonne are greatly in love. For Miss Morgan to have started birth contractions upon sighting the young man, as the nurses explained to me, she must be truly in love. There is no hurry, but time waits for no one. She should always remember that. Thank you for helping me shop for my wife Calda and for knowing where the maternity bag was stored," he said smiling. "You have been such a wonderful granddaughter, Stella. Kindly thank your parents for me. They have made my life easy by managing Miss Morgan for me. Being her grandpa, I was not able to understand or even meet her needs as a girl.

"You are most welcome, Grandpa. We are a family, and we love Miss Morgan very much. She has taught me enough lessons too. I am sure her being there growing up with me eased my parents' burden raising me. We have been joined at the hip since we got to know each other as children. Good night, Grandpa. See you tomorrow at the hospital. I shall leave early and ask dad to accompany me to visit Miss Morgan and Calda."

“Give them my love in the morning when you visit them. I will not make the visit to her and baby Calda tomorrow. I have a board meeting at the farm which will take the whole day. Cheers, dear!”

“MISS MORGAN HAD a normal delivery, and the baby looks fine,” the doctor explained as he discharged them, bowing to pressure from Miss Morgan to release them after Grandpa Smith and Stella had left. She felt well enough and didn’t want to spend another day in the hospital, especially because she didn’t want to endure Leonne’s pressure to marry him and move in with him together with the baby.

Leonne was surprised to discover that she had already been discharged. But he kept his cool to learn that it was at her insistence. Stella and her father Mwangangi were as surprised and had nothing to say. They admired Leonne that he didn’t look angry, thinking to themselves that he must know his woman and must be in love to look so calm.

“I want to know the home that will house my family so that I may be visiting them,” he said.

Dad Mwangangi said nothing, but he could resonate with the young man’s anxiety. He lost Mina to that white man Morgan and did not wish Leonne to suffer a similar fate losing his love to another man.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Stella Finds a Suitor

Love does not just make the world go 'round.

Love is what makes the ride worthwhile.

- Franklin P. Jones

“I GUESS WE ARE ALL INSTRUMENTS of nature in the way we responsibly interrelate with each other and our environments, giving and taking from one another to the extent of our talents and abilities,” Miss Morgan was saying. “I have discovered that we don't get emotional because we are rich or poor but because it is part of life. It is the little things we do for each other that make life worth living, Grandpa. This I have learnt from you and try to emulate you, your kindness to others. Your employees seem to have taken from you,” she added, before illustrating what she meant with the example of Musembi's promotion.

Musembi got the promotion after a vacancy suitable to his qualifications opened in the engineering department. His work in machine repairs in the department so impressed the Smith Freights managing director that he recommended him to Coca-Cola Bottlers, where he got employed as the engineer overseeing its industrial boilers. This was the kindness Miss Morgan was talking about because the managing director would have opted to keep Musembi to benefit the company but instead helped him upon realising his potential, which was not fully utilised at Smith Freights.

Miss Morgan could not have been happier for him and invited Stella to accompany her to the Musembi's farewell. She wanted Stella to get an idea of

what Kaizen was all about, which Musembi's dedication at work was an example.

"Oh boy," said Miss Morgan to Musembi where they were seated at the hired hall in a swanky hotel. "I will always remember the days we travelled from border to border as your co-driver, and the driving lessons you gave me on how to overtake the slow trucks. Those memories I will treasure, including the farm-fresh food you and Wafula would order to be prepared and wait for us in the small towns we drove through. I hope you will find favour at your new employment," she said hugging him.

"Thanks a million, Miss Morgan," he said after the long hug. "You are such a lovely lady. I hope you will also settle down well in your new post at Smith Freights." He then turned and asked, "And who is this gorgeous lady with you?"

"Oh my God. I forgot to introduce you to my sister Stella. Stella, this is my colleague Musembi. He is the guy I gave you a thousand stories about. I call him Musembi the Great."

"Stories that I am a Casanova or a single guy looking to mingle?" Musembi said taking Stella's hand and kissing it. "Hello Stella, I am Musembi, the great Engineer. I love your hair, and the dress makes you look like a rose-flower, with your hair crowing it all. I am breathless. May I hug you, beautiful?"

"Sure, you can, Musembi," she said with a huge and welcoming smile. "No one has dared look at me, let alone offer a hug since I came into this hall."

To Miss Morgan, who was watching them with some excitement, it looked like they had hit it off the moment Musembi had kissed the hand.

Musembi could avoid catching Stella's expensive fragrance. He thought she smelled really good.

To Stella, Musembi looked familiar and a stranger at the same time.

"Where have you been all this time, handsome?" She said as they embraced in a hug. "You are such a knockout. Oh boy, what a warm chest!"

"I emit heat to those I love. You must be one of those, Stella – you and my mom. You might replace her soon," Musembi sighed with pleasure as he pulled Stella close to him. "You can rest on that chest as long as you want."

"I can see chemistry starting right there, guys," Miss Morgan observed smiling.

“Nice feeling,” replied Musembi. “I can't remember the last I felt such affection. You must be a very special girl Stella to get me to such a state. Thank you for coming. Can I dance with you, if you don't mind?”

“As you guys sway a leg, I will be catching up with Wafula.” Miss Morgan excused herself. She would join them later.

Wafula was scheduled to leave the following morning for Germany and there was a presentation she wanted to discuss with him together with Walter.

As they prepared to leave the hotel for the office, she noticed that Walter was distracted. She was not sure he was following what she was saying. She saw his eyes on a tall, beautifully dressed lady headed to a table with other good-looking ladies.

“What are you looking at, Walter? Your wife is in the house?”

“No offence, Miss Morgan! I haven't seen such a tall pussy in a long time. I bet that woman is taller than almost every man in this house.”

He was clearly taken by the lady. “It would be exciting to have her, Miss Morgan,” he said with a hungry look on his face.

Oh my God. Is every woman something to sample for these men? How come I don't see men salivating over me nowadays? No wonder I am still single. Being a mother has made me lose touch with dating. It must be the work keeping me too busy to find the time to be on the dating scene.

“Concentrate, Walter,” she said, dismissing the thought that had briefly occupied her. “We need to prepare for Wafula. After that, you can have all the pussy you wish.”

“Are you sure that is possible, Miss Morgan, with my wife keeping an eye on me the whole night? I wish I had not invited her to come. It looks like a singles night, and I must be the only one who came tied to his wife. Next time I shall come solo. Let's go, Madam, we need to hurry and come back to enjoy the party like everyone else.”

“We are just picking up the documents,” said Miss Morgan. “Wafula is already in the office waiting.”

MISS MORGAN DID NOT go back to the party. She needed to rest and prepare for the flight, as she was to accompany Wafula to Germany at Grandpa Smith's insistence. There were prospective clients for Smith Gardens that he

wanted to follow up and she was the only one he trusted to close the sale with them.

Upon reaching the door to her house, she found Leonne waiting. He wanted to know whether she was going to marry him or not.

“You deserve to know the truth,” she told him. “But I don’t have the answer you are looking for, Leonne. I am lost in my space trying to balance my life with Smith's businesses. I have to finish what I started with Grandpa.”

“All at the expense of our relationship, Miss Morgan?”

“That's your interpretation, not mine, Leonne. First things first, dear.”

Leonne did not say another word and just turned and left.

Miss Morgan felt relieved that he had left. Marriage would have to wait. Her focus was to stabilise the family businesses and she was running out of time. Grandpa was fast ageing, and she didn’t want to keep looking up to him. She wanted everything in order the soonest possible so that she may take charge.

Leonne had, however, not left. By the time Miss Morgan was realising this, she was already in his sensuous embrace and being smothered with a lot of kisses. In the next minute, all her clothes were on the floor. She was hungry for Leonne. She also wanted to compensate for the sexual drought she would face in Europe.

“You always look for a way to shut me out of your life, Miss Morgan. For once, try not to fault me and let’s find a way to build on what we started. There is a baby involved now. No matter your heartbreaks, Miss Morgan, I always find myself waiting for you. Baby Calda is the more reason I must fight for your love, no matter the competition for your attention between the three of us – me, your Grandpa Smith and your work. It deeply hurts to live without the certainty that you will be there for me, Miss Morgan. Should the sky of my dreams with you fall on me, I will always be there waiting for you, my love.”

“All I urge you is to be a bit more patient, Leonne. I love you more than you can imagine. Timing is everything, dear.”

MEANWHILE, AT THE FAREWELL PARTY, two souls were feeling out for one another. Musembi was in love with Stella. They agreed to meet again soon.

When they parted, Musembi had a tough time wondering whether he had the courage to date again after the ghost incident with Biazu. Yet he ached for Stella. He knew he could do nothing about it unless he was certain Biazu had

liberated him from whatever had brought the ghost to him. He slept without arriving at a solution.

The next day, a Saturday, he called Stella. “What are you up to this evening? Can I buy you dinner?” he offered.

“Hello Musembi. How are you keeping? “It was nice meeting you yesterday. I am easy, where do we meet? Traffic is a nightmare coming from my end. I hope you do not mind if we have the dinner in Lovington.”

“That is a nice place. Meet you there at 8 pm. Cheers!”

“Cheers Stella.”

Musembi was absent-minded the whole day. He was a man in love. And, despite his concerns about Biazu, he wanted to seize the moment before time snatched the new love from him. He went to find a gift to buy Stella. He didn’t think African men like him were too romantic, but it didn’t matter. He walked into a jewellery shop and ordered a ring. He remembered that offering a ring meant that he was either sealing their engagement or making a marriage proposal, in which case it would be too early to propose. He walked out of the jewellery shop and entered a clothes shop. There he found a nice top and a matching pair of trousers and sweater. He realised he did not know Stella’s size as he approached the till to pay for them. He could have asked Miss Morgan but thought against it fearing Stella might reject him for wanting to know too much about her. He left the clothes in the basket on a counter and left the shop.

He entered a hotel and sat facing the door to scrutinise what ladies walking in wore. It might give him an idea of what to buy Stella. He was born into a family of boys and no sisters, and he rarely paid much attention to his mother who cared little for fashion, anyway. Anything that fitted her big body was good enough for her.

For the first time, he noticed ladies wore necklaces and earrings, and some wore scarves. He has never paid attention to such. He also noticed the women walking in carrying nice bags of all sizes. Some seemed big enough to fit an infant, even as others carried tiny ones the size of a phone. They wore all manner of hairstyles that he hadn’t noticed before. Some wore wigs that he imagined must have been uncomfortable in hot weather. Others tied huge headscarves that looked to him more than twice the weight of the heads wearing them. Some wore simple braids as others wore short or long, well-groomed natural hair.

He could not remember what hairstyle Stella had worn the previous day. But time was running out. He quickly paid his bill and went back to the jewellery shop.

“Hello, madam,” he greeted the shop attendant. “I’d like to buy a gift, but I have no idea what to buy a lady for our first date.”

“Hello, sir. Not to worry, I shall guide you. These sets of earrings and necklaces do wonders for a first date. Make your pick depending on your budget.”

Musembi was a bit confused. They all looked made of gold or silver. “Why are some of them more expensive than others?” he asked.

“The cheaper the product is, the fewer the carats of gold or silver used to make them. Some just have a coating of silver or gold which will wear off at some point.”

“Thank you for the explanation, young lady. In your opinion, which is the best I can choose that is not too expensive?” he hoped for something flashy to impress his date.

“I suggest this set if it is not too expensive for you. Silver is beautiful and keeps its glitter for a long time.”

“I will trust your choice, madam, and hope my date is happy with it.”

“You can also buy her flowers, sir. A bouquet speaks a thousand beautiful words.”

“I will skip the flowers. I have no idea which one is for love or which one for the sick or the dead. To me, they all look the same, madam.”

“Not to worry. They will guide you on which is the best for a date at the flower shop. I like your honesty. Your date is a lucky woman. I envy her already. Here is your gift. Are you paying in cash or through Visa?”

“Do you not take M-Pesa?”

“We do. Here is the till number on the cash machine.”

“Thank you for being so kind. I shall come again if I win her. Keep me in your prayers.”

“I always pray for my clients to win their love. They are the ones that keep these doors open. May love prevail!” They laughed at this as Musembi completed his payment and headed to the flower shop.

He found it was a man attending the shop. This made him shy to ask for flowers as a gift of love. His eyes fell on a bouquet with a mix of blue flowers,

which he quickly bought and placed on the back seat of his car. Then he drove to meet his date.

In the meantime, Stella had freshened up in the office bathroom before leaving and was ready for Musembi. He hoped he would be a better catch than the elusive Dan, the guy she had been dating. Dan owned a tour company and was always on the move to pay her the attention she craved. It seemed to her he moved around more than his client because he was never found whenever she needed him. He also loved his bottle, which worried Stella because the days he was drunk appeared more than the days he stayed sober. He loved to be around people, even those he didn't know very well, and his house was more of a restaurant than a place of refuge for lovers to relax.

As she looked forward to meeting Musembi, she enjoyed the quiet ambience of the leafy hotel environment. All sorts of birds kept flying to and from strategically placed bird feeders, making it a very nice scene to watch. She enjoyed their beautiful chirps and melodies.

She felt someone tap her shoulder. It was Musembi.

The first thing he did was open the gifts. He helped her tie the necklace. She was very delighted that Musembi should bring a gift on their first date. They enjoyed a special meal and spent the night together.

The following day, he found the flowers he had bought withered from the hot sun that had beat down on the car where he had forgotten them on the back seat.

Stella knew they must have been meant for her. But Musembi said nothing about them or apologise for forgetting them in the car.

Flowers and African men are not cousins, thought Stella.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Market Landslide

*Nothing splendid has ever been achieved
except by those who dared believe that
something inside them was superior to circumstances*

- Bruce Barton

The father of my child is in Nairobi to see me. He looks as young and radiant as always. I am hungry for him as he is for me. But we have to wait until I finish my mission with Grandpa. I hate leaving my grandpa feeling lonely like he did after his late wife Calda died and after my mom, her daughter, got married. I am all he has – me and my daughter Calda. Should I marry Leonne, Calda must come with us. That will leave my grandpa the loneliest person in the world. Besides, marrying Leonne would mean doing what he says, and not follow my grandpa's wishes. I cannot serve two masters at the same time. I will have to choose one between them, and it can only be Grandpa at the moment.

These thoughts went through Miss Morgan's mind as she sat opposite Leonne at a hotel.

Leonne said, "I have spent all these years wishing not to feel like a fraud. I need to live a normal life like other people, Miss Morgan. I love you too damn much. It hurts to see you and my daughter living away from me. What must I do to be with you? I am dying of loneliness, my love."

"I hear you, Leonne! Just a little more time, dear, until I finish what I started with grandpa."

She felt like she owed her grandpa too much to leave him living alone by himself. She didn't think he could manage it without her. Leonne's wishes to marry her were stuck in this reality.

“I need to meet a client, if you excuse me. We can meet next time you are in Nairobi. Here is the key to my house. I do not want you getting stranded whenever you are around and I am away,” she said and left Leone feeling more rejected than before. He might have been the only man in Miss Morgan’s life, but she wasn’t ready to tie the knot with him yet. She escorted him to the airport before proceeding to the office. They agreed to have a serious discussion next time he visited, and this time she would involve Grandpa Smith in the discussion.

“THE TRADITIONAL FREIGHT BUSINESS has been disrupted,” said Miss Morgan at the sales meeting. “We need to find out why. We need to understand the current market situation and interview a few of the clients we have lost to know why they left us. It will help us reposition ourselves. The time is now. We cannot wait. We need to compile the names of the clients we lost, beginning with last year to where we are now. It is unbelievable that we have lost a number of our long-term clients. Some sales teams do not remember clients they brought on board after handing them over to the sales desk. They are busy looking for new ones, which is okay. But most of the business is not with the new clients but the existing ones.”

“Madam,” said Walter in response, “To avoid the sales team depending too much on existing clients, the company pays them a commission and owns the accounts. This gives our sales staff reason to look for more clients.”

“Where are is customer care team and the sales representatives for these regions?” she asked pointing at a map on the wall.

The authoritative and demanding tone in which she asked made the meeting fall silent. None of the staff wanted to say something and face her wrath. She had become as authoritative as her grandpa, who remained the chairman of the board.

The customer care staff and sales team of the regions she had pointed out stood up together to face whatever pain it was the new director was going to give them.

“I want to explain something here,” she said, “and I want everyone to pay keen attention to this directive. Every client you bring to this company will remain your client. Whether you are a messenger or a salesperson, it is your responsibility to follow up on that client and ensure he is happy with our service for as long as you work with Smith Freights. This will earn you a 20 per

cent commission of the 100 per cent you received the first time you handed over the client to Smith Freights. Just to be clear, the 20 per cent commission will come from every business the client gives us. This means that that client will remain your business, as you are the one who understands him best. I apologise to the management for not coming clear out on this. Sales are the fuel of any business, and we are no exception. The more you help the company reap, the more you will better your life. Your commissions shall be revised upwards each year you remain with Smiths. The company policy was clear on this, I wonder when it changed.”

Everyone stood up clapping in applause at Miss Morgan’s directive. This included the management employees as earning the commission was for every employee who closed a sale.

“Thank you very much, Miss Morgan,” the managing director who agreed with the directive but sought to make a clarification. “The Board of Directors changed the policy in board minutes though the company remuneration policy says exactly what you have directed today.”

“Thank you, Alastair, for the clarification. I shall follow up with the board. I am the eye of the company now, and any changes that may affect sales I have the mandate to reverse.” There followed more claps at her decisiveness. She continued, as the list of lost clients was shared with everyone at the meeting, “I suggest we divide this list among ourselves. I, together with Walter and driver George, will follow up with the top three clients in the list. The rest of you can check the accounts you will be able to bring back to Smith Freights. We will exchange notes after a week. This should give you ample time. Alastair and the accounts office, look into our commissions. It is mid-month, and we are broke. Do not keep us to the end of the month, please.”

This directive seemed to energise everyone as each began scrutinising the clientele list to see who to follow up on.

“Becky, you are in charge of customer care,” Miss Morgan said. “I want the current report on findings about clients we have lost and the mitigations that have been in place. I will look at it together with previous reports to get as realistic a picture as possible. This is not to fault you but to help you manage your docket better. Let us be on the move, guys, my team, Walter and George.”

After the meeting had adjourned, Miss Morgan led her team to their task with George at the wheel of the company vehicle. The first Client on their list was Mr. Fred. He ran a mitumba second-hand clothes business at the Gikomba

market in Nairobi. He used to import ten trucks worth of second-hand items a week, which Smith Freights used to transport. They now handled not even one of his trucks, yet the market looked vibrant as they drove into the expansive business hub that operated twenty-four hours. It was a beehive of activity with traders selling second-hand clothes, shoes, sports items, and kitchen and household appliances. Others sold timber and curios. Billions of shillings exchanged hands there every day in the informal sector, greatly adding to the national economy. It was not a sector to be ignored, whether by companies like Smith Freights or banks, insurance and other business institutions.

The greatest challenge as they drove through was the heavy human and vehicle traffic in the narrow roads. This was made worse by *mkokoteni* hand carts that clogged up the roads and lanes. Walkways on the pavements had been taken over by stalls which were packed with throngs of customers. The place looked chaotic and was full of noise by traders shouting the quality and cheapness of their products to attract customers.

George explained how the place was full of pick pockets. “When buying from this market,” he advised with a laugh, “you dress in three layers of clothes. The inner one has the money pocket, the second layer the phone and the outer layer is like a protective gown to make it difficult for the pick pockets to reach the other two. The top layer is also to protect you from dirt as porters move stuff in soiled bags in and out of the market. When done you remove it, leaving you looking neat in the clean inner layers.”

He didn’t need to explain how it was a nightmare to move around on foot or by car. Finally, they got to Fred’s store and found it stocked with all manner of second-hand items. It appeared his store attracted the largest number of customers around with the people crowding the place.

They couldn’t find Fred and asked around for him. The phone number they had of him wasn’t going through. They discovered that the big, crowded store was no longer his and had relocated. They found him in small store only big enough for a small pick-up truck worth of cargo. It surprised Miss Morgan and her team how diminished his previously major business had become in the year he had left Smith Freights.

After they had exchanged their greetings, the team waited to hear what had befallen his business.

“Now we are just surviving,” he explained. “Cheap Chinese goods have entered the market, running us out of business. There is no way we can get back to the giants we were. These Chinese have penetrated the retail market, killing our business. We used to bring in mutumba used cloths in huge quantities of bales. We could earn up ten thousand shillings per bale after paying taxes. The Chinese are selling the same bale for only three thousand shillings. They have taken over the business – the clothes, the shoes, the utensils, name it. They don’t even need wholesalers, they have opened their own shops and advertised them in fliers they have distributed everywhere to attract walk-in customers. This has denied us business. I have had to quickly consolidate my finances to pay back outstanding loans, but I am still in very bad books with the banks. Two of them have already listed me as uncreditworthy under the Credit Regulatory Bureau. Now no lender will touch me. Whatever I am making in this business is just enough to sustain my family. It will be difficult to recoup what I have lost. I am sorry to have failed you, too. My last consignment delivery is yet to be cleared with you.”

“I am so sorry, Fred,” sympathised Miss Morgan as Walter and George nodded in agreement. “It is not what I expected to hear, but life has a way of giving back what we have lost. I hope you find your bearing soon. Thank God, you still have your business even though you have had to downscale it. You are a smart guy, and simply because this rain of business disruption has left you soaked, it doesn’t make the lion in you a pussy cat. Keep looking and keep working to get up again. All shall be well, my brother. Where you will need our support, the doors will be open for you. Debt is not the end; dreams are built on losses. I shall write off your debt with Smith Freights. Keep walking, my friend. And Fred, come for your cargo that remains uncleared at Smiths. It shall boost your morale and business.”

Miss Morgan stood up from the stool she was sitting and gave Fred a warm hug. Her eyes were wet as she did so. Fred was a shadow of the vibrant man she had known the previous three years.

She said a short prayer, “Please God has mercy on Fred. Open his eyes to see opportunities in this sea of red or take to him to a new blue sea.”

“Amen,” they all said in unison. Then he accepted a gift hamper from Smith Freights that Walter handed him.

“Thank you so very much miss Morgan. The two containers in your stores shall help me pay off my debt and restructure my business. I am so glad you

paid me a visit,” he said. “You found me at my lowest. Your visit has made feel a bit better. And yes, I will work to rise up to the giant I have always been. I may not get the twenty ship containers I used to bring in then, but I am sure if I do my research well in this red sea, there is space for me to prosper.”

“That is the spirit, my dear Fred,” said Miss Morgan, “We shall be rooting for you too. Where you shall need us, just call and we shall come running.”

“Thank you for telling us your story,” added Walter. “The hardships, my dear Fred, should make you stronger and your example will set the pace for the next generation.”

“I concur with you guys. I hope you shall see a better version of me soon. My regards to the Smith family.”

“It was such a moving experience meeting Fred,” Miss Morgan said as they reached their car. “We are however on a recovery mission. We want our three clients to return, although Fred is a bit down at the moment. We may or may not see him return in the future. It makes me sad to imagine he may never return. When my brother is in trouble, so am I. Smith Freight’s fuel is its clients. Without their business, we risk shutting our doors, too. Something has to be done for clients like Fred. I don’t know what and how for now, but it is something to keep in mind.”

They drove to Kamukunji to meet their second client Julius. The markets border one another, and while Gikomba may be described as serving a mixed grill of mostly second-hand items, Kamukunji specialised in new items. Julius imported shoes but as they approached his stall, what they could see of it were basins and all manner of stuff hanging from the awnings that overhang the businesses. His shop had new owners, just like Fred’s. Luckily, Julius still worked from the premises. They were directed to his office on the first floor of the building. It was a tiny office that could only fit two people at a time. She and Walter went in, leaving George outside.

“Hello Julius. Long time,” she said warmly. “We have come to look for our friend who got swallowed by this city. How have you been, big boy?”

He was an open and talkative man who showed great spirit in everything he did. He was radiant and handsome and looked like one who nothing negative could much move.

“Come here, Miss Morgan,” he said in a charming voice and gave Miss Morgan a warm hug. He then took a lollipop that was on the table and gave it her. “I saw you on Facebook. I saw you got a daughter and I see you are now

back in shape. No one can tell you are a mother. Even the boobs look like they have not been suckled by that pretty baby girl. What's her name? You found a husband, or should I be planning for a second wife?" He laughed at his own joke, more than Miss Morgan and Walter did.

"Thanks to technology, Julius. Boobs shall remain firm forever, even for suckling women. They are what every man desires to look at and fondle though the boobs carry food for infants. Her name is Calda Smith, no present dad at the moment, but I am hoping to get her one soon. Thank you for asking. Holding one husband is already a challenge, and having one I will have to share with another woman is even worse. So just be my good friend, not a husband, Julius." This added to the laughter.

"Hi Walter," he said extending his hand. "Do you still go to the railway golf club? *Nilisota bwana* - I became broke. I lost my membership," he added with a laugh. "Now I am just a simple landlord. I let out my space to the vendors. Serious business disruption happened here. These Chinese fellows are riding on a poor man's shoulders like me. We are the ones with the shops and therefore pay the rent, licenses, taxes, and the workers. All they do is deliver to you the stock you need without paying anything and they come back at the end of the day to collect the money you have sold. They just show up before closing time to count the remaining stock as you pay them what you have sold. Nothing is sold on credit anymore. All we seem to have now are the up-country customers, who come with ready cash. I do not import the utensils, shoes, and bags anymore. The Chinese are five times cheaper than I was. I am now reduced to being a landlord. I am paid daily, so I have to be here every day. Otherwise, it will be difficult to recover the rent for the day missed. Things are thick, my friend," he said laughing again. "Anyway, we need to hang in there and hope the government shall do something about the Chinese takeover. Do you guys mind a cup of tea from our *mtaa* (neighbourhood)?"

"We miss tea already," said Miss Morgan. "Let them bring it with *mandazi* (fried cake). I miss the treat." They could not refuse tea by a friend who was also a client.

She enjoyed the tea, which she took with two mandazi.

Julius, Like Fred, had seen his business go bust. He used to offload five trucks daily. Now he gave Smith Freights zero business.

Looking at him, Miss Morgan thought: *At least Julius is a jolly guy and has a positive outlook towards life as he waits for things to shape up. This is unlike Fred, who did not seem as vibrant. Julius is alert. It is, however, sad that our chain of clients has started to disintegrate, yet we have been cozy seated at Smith Freight unaware of what is going to hit us.*

“How are you coping at Smith's with the standard gauge railway taking up truck business from Mombasa to Nairobi and Naivasha and soon to Kisumu?” Julius asked.

“It is challenging,” replied Walter. “We are trying to figure out what other avenues can supplement our income. Things are changing fast and in such a way that we are almost unable to move with the change. What you have shared with us shall go a long way in informing how our company responds to the downturn in the business environment.”

“We have a gift for you, dear,” said Miss Morgan, “and we trust you shall find your grip again and bring us business, big boy. We miss you a lot.”

“I miss you too, guys. I shall forever be a Smith Freights member. It is the warmest company I have ever worked with, and I hope we shall bounce back soon to work with you again. I am pleased that you reached out to me, guys. Keep rooting for us. There are still many opportunities out there, but our scarcity mentality has blocked our imagination. Help us tap into some that might be more rewarding if you come across any Miss Morgan. We need to spread our wings again.”

“Maybe you need to find out what the real issue is,” said Miss Morgan. “It also seems you guys are fighting this battle of the Chinese takeover separately; everyone is fighting it alone. I think you might have a better chance if you guys unite and fight from one front.”

“These people invaded our market without a fight. I shall do my research, too, and *ng'ang'ana na hawa watu* (tussle with these people). It will be hard, but it will be worth our effort. Thanks, Miss Morgan.”

“You could also change and sell something different from what the Chinese are offering and create a niche somewhere else. Remember, though overtaken by the Chinese, the hawkers don't seem to struggle that much to earn their daily bread. It might be hard to imagine but put your heads together as Kamukunji businessmen and be the change you want. I love you, Julius. Stay focused, dear.”

“Thank you. That was a good surprise, and I thank you from the bottom of my heart, guys. I feel rejuvenated. Things will change, I guarantee you—my love, to the bigger Smith family. I salute you and wish you well too.”

They left Julius and walked around Kamukunji to see the changes he had spoken about. Every shop seemed to sell similar products as the next one. Some were quality and affordable products.

“A travelling box that cost me 150 dollars one year ago is now going for only 50 dollars here,” observed Miss Morgan. “I had bought some cooking pots from town for USD220; now they are costing 70 USD. No wonder Julius is complaining. No business can survive with such undercut prices. The Chinese would still get business because, though many people do not find it comfortable shopping in such a densely populated marketplaces, they are happy to add a few coins to the item they want to buy and have it delivered at their doorstep.”

“These things are so cheap that one can end up spending on things one had not budgeted for,” said Walter.

They also realised there were online traders who came to buy the cheap products for resale on the internet. “They are like the Chinese Julius was talking about,” explained Walter. “They have no physical stores except for a camera they take pictures of the items. They advertise the pictured items and when they get a buyer all they have to do is send a *boda boda* motorcycle taxi to buy the item and deliver it to the internet client. Such an internet seller can take home as little as 10 per cent on the item cost price but that it okay, as he is paying no taxes, and they can sell very many items through the internet and social media. It has enabled many youths to be traders. It is not capital intensive, and it is in real-time.”

They found another trader who bought the cheap items that she went around offices in the city centre to vend. Even with her markup, the items were cheap enough to be tempting to busy office workers. One such vendor who had happened to walk by Julius's office when they were visiting him was selling a set of seven quality knives for ten dollars. Miss Morgan had snapped up the set. All she knew was that one of the knives was for bread, another for beef, vegetables, and didn't know what the other knives were for. She recognized this as a case of impulse buying because of the cheap quality stuff.

“We need to rethink our business,” said Miss Morgan as they headed to the third client on their list. “We may think we are fine, but the business drought in our industry is real.”

“There is a shift and that’s why we need to train our team how to navigate the new tide, Walter, starting with you. All this has happened under your watch.”

This took Walter by surprise, making him go silent for a moment, before replying, “Guilty as charged, Miss Morgan.”

They reached the shop of the third client. Miguel was his name, and he imported from Dubai all types of vehicle tyres, from bicycle tyres to huge lorry tyres. His business was located at the busy Nyamakima area in downtown Nairobi and Smith Freights would clear up to 50 trucks of his trucks every month. The area the business was located along Kirinyaga Road could be found any kind of car spare parts for any kind of vehicle model. There were mechanics everywhere, whom Walter cautioned should not always be trusted as not all of them were honest.

“There are also thieves good at swiping vehicle insignias, whether for a Benz, a Toyota, Hyundai or whatever vehicle model.” Walter had not finished explaining this than George noticed that their car symbol had already been swiped by a thief.

They found Miguel's shop well-stocked but found no one attending it.

A young man with a big smile soon walked into the shop. He warmly greeted them and explained that he was the attendant but had briefly stepped out. He was confident and looked like the kind of person who served every client with equal respect, whether one was a CEO or a messenger.

“We are here to see Mr Miguel,” said Walter.

“Oh!” the young man seemed surprised. “And who are you guys?”

“We are Miguel's friends from Smith Freights,” replied Walter.

Miss Morgan wondered whether the young man was Miguel's personal assistant and why it should matter to him who they were. She wanted to remind him that usually when one walked into a shop there were no procedures if one wanted to see Miguel, contrary to what the young man seemed to suggest. One simply asked for Miguel, his name was shouted by whoever you found at the shop, and the shopkeeper would emerge from the privacy of wherever they he was having his lunch or tallying the day’s takings from digital bank transfers or mobile money. Few used cash to transact in the digital age.

“Ooh, I remember you,” said the young man. “You have delivered tyres and other spare parts to us. It has been a while.”

Miss Morgan was beginning to feel impatient with him. *Why does he seem to want to be the centre of attention, yet he is not the one we are here to see?*

“Where is Mr Miguel, young man?” she asked sounding authoritative. She was tired of the conversation that seemed heading nowhere.

“I am Miguel’s son. My name is Hussein,” he replied. “My dad passed away six months ago. He just collapsed while serving a customer here and died. The postmortem indicated it was a cardiac arrest.” Tears clouded the boy’s eyes as he explained the death.

Miss Morgan felt like she too might shed a tear. Miguel was one of the clients she liked best. He was the one client who always had great ideas. She looked forward to hearing his reasons, which had to be thoughtful, why he no longer used Smith Freights. She also wanted to hear from his perspective what was happening at Kamukunji and Gikomba market. Miss Morgan was not aware Nyamakima had been invaded too.

Things he had advised or cautioned her about sprung to her mind:

Dive head-on into a new business and imitate the gurus until you become one
Miss Morgan

Always keep away from ventures that you have no facts about and that demand a bomb to start. These include businesses a valued friend could be advising you how to run, yet she is penniless.

Never give up on what you believe in no matter the difficulties you will encounter to realise your dream.

Remember, Miss Morgan, as you are busy doubting yourself, someone else could be admiring your strengths. Always pause and think how far you have come, what you have achieved that you may not see but others can.

Life should be simple, no need complicating it

The advice kept going through her mind and she could not believe how Miguel, a great mind, now lay in a grave, a hero whose race was now over. She opened her phone and found a selfie she had taken with him when he was alive.

How could life not hold on to you, my mentor Miguel? Rest in peace, my friend. I will share with you tales of what you shall have missed out on in this world should we ever meet again.

She remembered him being generous sharing with her his business contacts. He at one time had introduced her to six clients who were still with Smith Freights. He had given her thirteen loyal clients, him being the fourteenth.

Pregnancy manenos (dramas) having and raising a baby took me over. In my mind, I thought I last saw Miguel only a few months ago. My baby is three years old now, meaning the I must have last seen him almost three years ago.

Tears of sadness started rolling down her cheeks. She also wept out of guilt that no one at Smith Freights had known of his death nor bothered to check on Miguel in those last six months of his life. *Biashara ni mwenyewe* (a business is the owner). *If you do not care how your business operates, do not blame anyone when it fails.*

Miss Morgan soon composed herself.

“Meet my mom,” She was surprised to hear Hussein addressing her. She didn’t notice Mrs Miguel enter the shop. “Mom, these guys are from the Smith Freights company. The ones who used to clear our cargo from Dubai.”

“Hello mom, I am Miss Morgan, and these are my colleagues, Walter and George. I am so sorry about Miguel. He was a dear friend of mine and of our company. We talked at the beginning of this year, and he did not mention to me anything that may have caused him to quit our services.”

“Miguel did not quit!” Mrs Miguel quickly put in, before realising she hadn’t even said hello. “Sorry, good people,” she went on, “it is a pleasure to meet you.” She shook their hands and led them to a dusty gazebo in a backyard behind the shop where they usually had their lunch. There were activities going on by other businesses around the yard. She excused herself and returned with a cloth to dust the seats.

After they had taken their seats, a jumpy, gap-toothed waiter came to take their orders. He wore no mask and showered them with saliva as he said hello to them. He also made unnecessary jokes that only he could understand and laughed to. Miss Morgan gave him a disgusted look and for a moment forgot her sorrow discovering Miguel was gone.

She quickly recovered, even as these thoughts went through her mind: *I realise that nothing in life is permanent. Even our surroundings change every day. People, businesses, this country, our habits, our friends, our colleagues, name it; nothing remains the same forever. My grandpa's furniture has just been refurbished and it doesn't feel like the old home I am used to with all the pimping up of the house. The makeover took with*

it part of my childhood memories. Smith Freights loss of clients says the same thing. And now this place with Miguel dead feels deserted to me. But I need to order something not to appear rude to his windowed wife.

“Give me a Fanta, please,” she said to the waiter, still thinking about the wave of change that, along with what had befallen Fred and Julius, had claimed a person she considered her father-figure, Miguel.

“The cafeteria does very delicious samosa that they stash between a *mahamri*,” said Mrs Miguel cutting her thoughts. “You can try them, Miss Morgan. And instead of a Fanta, they have lovely goat soup. You can try it too.”

“That would be exciting, Mrs Miguel. Let me taste your hotel delicacies. Thank you for helping me choose.”

“We can try the same,” Walter suggested, both for himself and for George.

Suddenly, Miss Morgan found her mind occupied by thoughts about the driver: *I wonder why George does not usually fight for himself. Or, being a driver, he is afraid of the cost, in case the bill falls on him? Cost cannot be the reason. He is not a poor driver and is the only son of a rich farmer with 100 acres on the outskirts of the city. An acre today goes for 60,000 dollars while his dad has enough investments in his village town. He owns three flats that he collects rent, but poor George lives in his father's house in the village. George is in Nairobi Tuesdays to Friday, then packs his stuff for the village for the weekend. He, however, is such a good driver, but a follower. I wonder when he shall learn he is an eagle to fly with the other eagles than waste his life here as a driver.*

Her thoughts were interrupted by Mrs Miguel.

“Miguel left us six months ago from a cardiac arrest, as my son must have told you,” the widow explained. “It may have also been from stress of work. This has taught me that I must take a rest when my mind and body are asking for a break and to have a moment by myself from time to time. I discovered this after losing my darling husband. Just before the tragedy he had been a very disturbed man as the market deteriorated. The last consignment you cleared for us was also the last order we placed from Dubai. Selling stock from the last consignment was a struggle because of cheaper products, which have brought us to our knees. We had to sell our tyres at a loss, just to clear the stock. Our Somali brothers have teamed up and messed it for everyone in this sector. They buy tires in bulk and sell them to us for nothing. A tyre that we used to sell for 80 dollars is now going for only 30 dollars. Some traders have come to

an arrangement that the Somali deliver stock for a day for which they collect the money sold at the end of the day after their prayers at the mosque, then they take stock of the remaining unsold stock. It seems like our work is only to balance sales figures for them. We are left to slave to meet our bills running the shop.”

Mrs Miguel paused and looked thoughtful before resuming. “The shops we used to sell wholesale to have now been taken by these merchants who seem to have zero liability on their investments. Some of us are only able to keep the business afloat by supplementing with income from rental properties we had earlier invested in. From our collections we pay rent for this shop so that we have a place to work although we are not getting much from it anymore. I have been looking for something better paying that is less capital-intensive. We are slowly quitting this tyre business. That is why you see the shop stocked with other items.”

“That is so sad, my dear Mrs Miguel,” sympathised Miss Morgan. “We are soon opening a business arm that will require distribution points. When things are ready, we shall talk and see how to help each other. You are a strong woman and a fighter too. You are perfectly fitting in Miguel's shoe. The shoe may be a bit bigger, but I am sure you will keep growing into the business until it fits. It must be a big shift for you, but we must be equal to the challenges we face. Having said that, I really am enjoying this *tumbukiza* sandwich-like thing of *samosa mahamri*. It is very sweet, and I shall definitely come to have some of them again. Here is a gift I had brought for Miguel, my dear lady. I am sure he is still here somewhere watching over us and is happy that we have reached out.”

“Thank you so much, Miss Morgan, for your kind words. I look forward to the new venture when Smith Freights is ready. I am hungry for change. Thank you, gentlemen, for showing up. I feel honoured. I hope you won't desert me now that your friend Miguel is gone to be with the Lord.”

“You shall be in our thoughts, Mrs Miguel,” said Miss Morgan. “Kindly share your phone number with me. I shall be communicating with you directly. May God guide you in all your endeavours.”

“Thank you, Miss Morgan. But let's pray for each other's wellness. As the Kikuyu say, *gūtirĩ yuraga na ndĩkē* (There is no rainstorm that doesn't come to an end).”

After they left Mrs Miguel, they decided to look around and see how other businesses were doing. They discovered that, unlike before when someone looking for something like a tyre would enter a shop to buy it, they instead saw brokers running after cars and negotiating a price before taking the buyer to a shop prearranged by the broker.

“Everyone is at the mercy of these brokers,” observed Walter, as they left Kamukunji for the office. “A shop has to rely on clientele brought by the brokers in addition to the walk-in customers who bring themselves.”

It had been a tiring and informative day out in the field.

Alastair was still in the office waiting for them. He did not want to leave the office before hearing what they had found in the field. Impatient after waiting for so long, he called Miss Morgan just as Walter and George were dropping her off at her home.

“Hello Mr Boss,” she said after picking up the call. “How was your day? I was just having a small conversation with my sales team before I was to call you.”

“Okay, I have been waiting forever for your feedback. How did it go, guys?”

“All is good, Alastair. We shall compile our report and send it in tomorrow. We are too tired to talk. It is also late.”

“Did you get the lost accounts back, Miss Morgan?”

“More than that, Alastair. Let us defer it to tomorrow's meeting, that would be best. We cannot wait for next week.”

“That is great, Miss Morgan. I shall confirm the time for the meeting. Well done, great team. See you guys tomorrow.”

“Thank you, Alastair. See you tomorrow.”

“Excuse me, Miss Morgan,” asked Walter with surprise. “Why did you give Alastair such contradictory information? We know all is not well with our lost clients.”

“Yes, we know there is a huge problem, and we may not recover the clients we had gone to win back. But I didn't want to give Alastair a sleepless night because it will not change the situation. Giving him the actual market report at this would not have changed the situation. What we have learnt today means that we understand what is going on and can come up with a plan to save the situation. Let us sleep on it. We shall have a clearer view tomorrow.”

“If you ask me,” replied Walter, “We need a lot of think tanks.”

“Yes,” agreed Miss Morgan. “Things are worse than we thought. Our cash flow is down 40 per cent. But I am hopeful we shall find a way. Have a good night, boys. Come with ideas tomorrow. You are ahead of your colleague with what you now already know about how the market is behaving.”

As Miss Morgan finally sat down to relax in her house, she wondered whether the three clients on their list may have exaggerated the market trends they said had ruined their business. If this was true, she must fight and not let Smith Freights to sink. She was afraid she may not manage it but was determined that things must work.

She saw some leverage in agriculture through Smith Gardens and in enhancing Smith Freights’ services which were its strength.

Triumph comes from the effort put in the area one believes in. It shall be challenging, but that's the thrill of working hard. It shall require clarity of purpose and stakeholder commitment if Smith Freights is to succeed.

Her phone rang, interrupting her thoughts. It was John, the messenger.

“Hello Miss Morgan. Today is my saddest day. I have just realised that Smith Freights must have been very kind to keep our jobs despite the challenges the company is going through losing clients in a challenging industry. Thanks to the senior management for keeping us afloat.”

“In God, we trust John. All shall be well. I am keen to hear your thoughts tomorrow. Cheers!”

‘It is never over until it is over,’ Grandpa used to tell me any time I felt like I had hit a dead end. ‘There is always a solution to everything. We are born to craft our destiny, those of us who don’t surrender to our fate.’

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Belgium

*Cultivate the ability to find invisible opportunities
and the vision to solve the impossible*

THE PHONE RANG on the sitting room table where it was charging. It was Belgium. It was a while since Miss Morgan had met him. They had met at the golf club, the first time since primary school. The phone went silent before she could pick it up. She could not get through when she tried calling back. She concluded it was a network problem. But the missed call brought memories of her primary school days in Timau. Two of her schoolmates had always remained on her mind. The first one was Belgium who was born into a white family. The other was Muregi, from a black family. They were the playground kings at school. They were also bullies, always picking on other kids. If they said you were not to step into the playground, that was it. There were five Indians in the school, and the two bullies had made them their punching bags. Miss Morgan remembered her Indian schoolmates having a sharp tongue, but they hated physical confrontations. Being half-caste, some people confused her for an Indian. And, for some reason, she liked the Indians. Two of them were girls, but it was the boys who had it rough with the bullies than the girls.

One day, Miss Morgan decided she was done with the two bullies and confronted them on behalf of her Indian friends. She found them on the ground being kicked by Belgium and Muregi.

We did not choose to be born white or black. What colour we are born is up to our creator. Science hasn't reached there yet to create humans. Had it been, I imagine we

would all be equal with nothing to fear about fingers being pointed at us for the colour of our skins. But wait...I think even then there would still arise a reason for racial discrimination. I hate these bullies. I mean, why worry from such in the 21st century when we have all the facts...? Not to worry, I am a proud and authentic African girl.

With these thoughts, she demanded of the bullies, “Excuse me, guys, who made you the masters of other students. Why do you think you are superior to us? Your bad behaviour should stop now. Do not dare touch my brothers again,” she had shouted. “Get up, boys,” she asked the two Indians as she helped them up.

The two bullies pounced on her. Belgium went for her hair to pull it as Muregi stepped on her shoes. Miss Morgan tried to fight back. She moved her hand from behind and grabbed Belgium's balls. He let out such a cry that a startled Muregi step off her feet, but this was not before she had planted her teeth on his forehead.

They tried to jump her, but the Indian boys gathered some courage and came to her rescue. This attracted other students, who gathered to watch the fight. Overpowered, the bullies scampered to the school staff room to find safety. The teachers understood what had happened as other students shouted what they had seen.

However, the bullies could not admit they had been beaten by a girl. That brought the end to their bullying.

The bullies got caned for their behaviour. Caning was normal in schools. It was the same at home in those days, where one could be caned for minor reasons – many of the reasons hilarious, such as crying too long after being beaten or not crying after being beaten, keeping standing while elders are seated or sitting while elders are standing, or walking around aimlessly where elders are seated, refusing to eat or coming back home after sunset, being moody or excited for no reason, losing a fight with someone younger than you or winning a fight with a younger child, eating too slowly, too quickly, too much, not finishing your food, or scraping your plate, stumbling and falling while walking, not washing your dish after eating, breaking utensils or biting nails, failure to take a bath, or for being punished in school for misbehaving, not answering when spoken to or answering back when spoken to, borrowing shoes or clothes from friends.

Looking back, Miss Morgan thought that corporal punishment as happened in those days may appear harsh today, but it helped children as they grew up.

Belgium grew up to be a responsible man and became good friends with Miss Morgan. He had once tried to cultivate their relationship wanting it to lead to marriage, but she had declined.

The two may have become friends, but their families had not been the best of friends. His dad and her grandpa were stepsiblings. They did not like each other. This, however, didn't matter to Miss Morgan and Belgium so long as they remained friends – strictly friends, as Miss Morgan would have put it.

Not sure whether I want to make the mistake getting sexual with a man I can never own. I now know that sex is like a flooding river. When you want sex, it is unstoppable, whether in the car, in a garage, the bush, the office – it will happen anywhere provided the players are present. I have been a lost soul on this one. I needed a fling. Things were hard on me, and sex made me focus better. This is despite not knowing whether Belgium would be a life partner or not. We drain each other a lot emotionally. I listen to him talking about himself and I take what I want to hear and trash the rest. It is exhausting being a friend to a self-centred person. He is an only child and has been pampered throughout his life. Only his opinion matters. Belgium doesn't like anybody taking the spotlight from him. Only where he shines do things move. He doesn't like to be crossed, making everyone tread carefully around him.

Thinking about Belgium made her feel exhausted and thought that her baby Calda might have cheered her up had she been living with her. Calda now lived with Grandpa Smith on the farm. He had refused to let her live with the mother so that Miss Morgan could concentrate at work in Nairobi. He, however, also wanted to live with the great-granddaughter to keep him company. The name Calda Smith made him proud and very attached to the girl. Being with her felt like his wife had reincarnated. The grandfather and the great-granddaughter gelled a lot with each other. The girl already owned the house and knew where everything was kept, yet she was only three years old.

Instead of returning the call for my good for nothing friend, Belgium I better call grandpa I talk to my girl as I sulk about the market visit event.

She wanted to call her grandpa Smith but instead picked her phone and dialled Belgium's number. There was no response. She felt her cat rub herself around her legs as she prepared to go to the shower, after which she planned to call Grandpa Smith. Petting the cat when she got home gave her some

comfort and made her not feel so alone. On this day, Miss Morgan was feeling a bit lazy and dragged herself to the bathroom. As usual, the cat ran ahead of her but this time it suddenly came to a stop. Miss Morgan nearly stepped on it and wondered why it should stand in front of her striking a strange pose. Then she felt something cold and squishy underfoot. She jumped stepping away screaming. She turned to see what it was. It was a dead lizard. Maybe it was a snack the cat brought home for their dinner.

Animals can be kind. If you are good to them, they may surprise you with a gift. It is like that mother dog I heard about that had gone looking for food at a garbage site and came across a baby crying in a paper bag. The dog carried the paper bag in her mouth and took it home to her mistress. It placed the paper bag at her mistress's kitchen door as she was preparing breakfast. The mistress was shocked to discover the baby in it and immediately took the baby for her own. The mistress must love giving birth, just like her dog, except that the dog brought her a baby this year, sparing her the 9-month incubation period.

"Today you brought a lizard for Mommy. Yesterday you packed a rat in my bag for me. Tomorrow it might be a snake! Yes, a snake. I know it is a cat delicacy. I leave the window open for you to go out and pee, not to bring your catches into the house. This is my house, not our house, Mr cat. I shall be locking you outside if you surprise me like that another day. Keep your snacks out of the house. I will only be letting you into the house when I get back from work, but always leave your catch outside the door. I hope I am clear on that, Mr Pussy Cat," she said yelling at the cat. The cat was all meows, seeming to persuade Miss Morgan to share its lizard meal with it.

What an offer! This bobtail cat is too much. The only thing I like about him is taking every care to do its business in the garden. He is clean and precise. If I tell him to stop shedding fur on my seats, he understands it and rests in his basket. He once in a while likes to bask on the patch of sun falling on the desk near the sitting room window. On other days, he insists on sharing my bedroom with me. His favourite place is the pouffe I like to sit on a lazy morning in the bedroom. I have put a cushion on it so that I can be changing it instead of fighting every day with my cat.

After her shower, she changed into an easy evening gown.

Belgium called, determined to hang out with Miss Morgan.

“Hello madam lost, thank you for returning my call. I was engaged with some home *manenos* (issues). Where are you, I am back in town. Can I buy you one somewhere before the night ages?”

When did I return his call? It is a great idea hanging out with him, especially now that I can't get him out of my head.

“Hello Belgium welcome back. I can't complain and yes it would be fun seeing you after so long.”

It had been a while since they last met. She left the house immediately as she was already dressed. She hoped she looked her best because she did not want to look beaten with the setback she had been going through with the unfriendly market.

When they met, she thought he had a deceptively young look, like he was in his twenties. His fingers looked so sensual that it made her think they would paralyse her with pleasure at their touch on her skin. Now all Miss Morgan could think about was what lay below his belt. They got into a room, and both fell hungrily on each other. It took them an intense thirty minutes. After a short while, they were onto each other for another thirty minutes.

“Ooh man! That was fun!” she couldn't help exclaiming. “It has been a while since I had such a good fling. How have you been, dear? How is the IT industry unfolding?”

“IT is such a vast industry. For us, we specialise in branding and profiling organisations and produce their marketing materials for print, radio, TV and the internet. Marketing has to be well rounded, Miss Morgan. We were forced to learn more than what we were trained to do. But competition is high.” Belgium paused, then said,

“I once read about how Coca-Cola began. I imagined how its founder never realised the business potential of his drink before selling the company just before his death. If he woke up from his grave today and see what his brand has become, he would probably die for the second time from shock at how elaborate it has become. But that is the nature of business, some people don't get rich with businesses they started, others fold them and are forgotten, while small entities might grow to become big brands and the cycle continues. Right now, with everything online, competition is intense in markets around the world. Big companies have gone burst, which only goes to show that wealth is dated, Miss Morgan. And when you become rich, enjoy it when you still have

it before it is squandered by heirs with no idea of your sleepless nights to amass the wealth.”

“I hear you, Belgium. It is a new world, and not the one we lived in a few years ago. We need to rebrand ourselves even as we rebrand our organisations to fit the digital times.”

“That is true, Miss Morgan. We have to adapt to the times or miss the boat. Some people don’t like change, including some employees who may resist learning new ways of working. As an employer, you can’t allow that if you want to stay in business. They adapt or you get new employees and move forward. Change is constant and inevitable.”

“I know that thing, Belgium. It is so hard to scale down, but as you put it, we have no choice. We must carry only the weight the structure can support. We are thinking of restructuring, but I don’t know where to begin. A breather from work shall allow me time to think. I plan to go to the village tomorrow. My grandpa Smith usually has answers to some of the mysteries I can’t handle.”

“You are lucky, Miss Morgan. You have someone to bounce off ideas. Some of us swim alone with the sharks all around. I wonder how I have survived this long without anyone to guide me. I guess it has to do with doing what I must despite the sharks and doing what must be done immediately, never postponing today's work to tomorrow. When you meet a rainstorm, you must also deal with the mud. But the thing is we have to overcome obstacles and create the change we desire in our organisations. If you have ideas to improve the business, pursue them and use any adverse situation you encounter as a stepping stone to bigger things. After all, everything in life, good or bad, shapes the future us. The thing is to learn from the bad outcomes to bring out the best in us.”

“Thanks a million for your time today. Let’s keep in touch. Thanks for the drink too.” She hugged him. “Enjoy your sleep, dear.”

“I am also on my way out, Miss Morgan. I got myself a wife after you refused to marry me. We have two kids. It has been a wonderful experience despite my busy schedule.”

“Oh, congrats, my dear. I am so happy for you. I am also a mother of one though I am not married yet, and almost becoming dated. I must be the only one single, seeing that you are already taken, including a number of my friends. In life, we participate in the race of buying comfort for ourselves and those we

love, but sometimes when our loved ones suffer discomfort, we don't find time to listen to their hurts. We might feel we are providing for them the best, but their opinion about that might be different. So my dear, treasure in that woman that has given you the next generation. Listen to her more and she shall protect you with her soul."

"Nothing can replace the time you give to someone; to listen and understand them, Miss Morgan. I have learned this the hard way as you know me. When people feel low in life, a heartfelt conversation can bring comfort to their hearts. All it takes is your presence and time, as you did today with me my dear." He mischievously winked at her, bringing her memories of Leonne.

"Always give time to those who you love, Miss Morgan. It is the most valuable gift you can ever give ... compassion. Why are you in tears, Miss Morgan? Did I hurt you by confessing my marriage, dear?"

"Not at all, Belgium. I feel overwhelmed for not having agreed to my own marriage. I have a man, the father of my child, who loves me. But I am still torn between being single and saying, '*I do*'."

"The biggest prison people can find themselves is when they do anything according to what other people think of them, Miss Morgan. I imagine your situation has also been delicate because of your grandpa who worships you. You are too comfortable to want to submit to any other man. Willpower can get you out of the situation and set you free from that cage. As long as your grandpa lives, you two will remain joined at the hip. You will never be able to give your heart to another man other than him."

"That sounds so mean, Belgium, but that is the actual situation of my life. I fear hurting my grandpa, and he fears losing me, or his great-grandchild Calda, my daughter. They are best of friends, with my presence deepening their relationship. I don't know how to break from Grandpa."

"All in God's time, you will one day. Get the young man you had Calda with to give you another baby. He shall be seeing the babies as he waits for you to free yourself from your grandpa."

They laughed at this, but for Miss Morgan it was a joke because she could not see herself walking maternity corridors anytime soon. Belgium turned and gave her a tight hug.

"I love you, Miss Morgan," he said, "and I hope you won't refuse me hanging out with you."

“On the phone maybe, Belgium. I do not want to continue messing you up. You are a father of two. I might end up giving you a third child, and that would ground me with Grandpa forever for having different fathers for my children. Let me stick to my Leonne.”

“Leonne? Leonne! Is it that... the Burundi guy?”

“You know him?” she asked, shocked.

“Yes, I do! Oh my God, it is a small world. They are only two in their family. Orphaned at age four and the sister at five. Brought up by a childless aunt. The sister Teo is my wife, what a mess, Miss Morgan. I am messing with my brother-in-law’s wife-to-be! At least we are a family again, united by siblings,” he said and burst of into such an amused laughter that Miss Morgan could help laughing.

She did not say another word.

She just excused herself and left. She was not too drunk to drive, though there were enough drunkards on the road as the cars stuck in ditches by the side of the road showed.

What Belgium had had just revealed made her feel so bad enough that she decided to put off everything and won’t go to work the following day. She called Alastair.

“Hello Alastair. Sorry for calling you at this hour. Call off the meeting we had planned for tomorrow. Let’s stick to Wednesday, our sales meeting day. I’ve got an urgent matter to attend to.”

“Okay, Miss Morgan, shall be done. Have a good night.”

She thought he sounded like one who was struggling with sleep though already in bed. *Sleep doesn’t come easy to people of an advanced age like him.*

Neither did she sleep a wink. It was all too much for her to bear with everything from the depressed market to her unfaithfulness. Belgium’s revelation made her life feel twisted. She felt helpless about it and everything that was happening. She buried herself in the blankets trying to calm her mind.

I thought Belgium was my village boy away from Leonne and his Burundi clan. What a small world!

On top of this personal tragedy, as she saw it, was her worry about making Smith Freights sustainable and maintain its considerable market share locally and abroad. She needed to meet with Grandpa Smith before the Wednesday meeting for his advice on how to strengthen the company.

By the time she was getting into bed she was already physically exhausted from worry and thoughts of what her future held. The wine must have added to this as she drifted into a deep slumber. She did not dream that night.

The sun was already high when she woke up and too late to catch the birds that usually welcomed her day with their chirpy songs. Yet she could hear the birds, though their chirps sounded alarmed. She would discover it for a game of hide and seek going on outside between her cat and the birds.

She wanted to make a surprise visit to Calda and Grandpa Smith. She did some shopping for them and headed home. *Timau here I come after messing up with bad boy Belgium.* She was relaxed, though convinced that the worst was yet to come. Or how would she have known that Belgium was likely his would-be brother-in-law?

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

The 'Mrs' Title

*There are times when a problem
is too big to miss
yet too small to solve*

BEFORE MISS MORGAN LEFT the office that morning to go to Nanyuki, she bumped into Wafula. She thought that he looked a ghost of himself. She wondered what could have happened to him, but she was in a hurry to beat the jam on the narrow single-lane road to Nanyuki. She decided not to speak to him and find out what had happened later.

“Hello Miss Morgan, can I buy you a cup?” It was Wafula.

“I have no time, handsome boy. I won't lie to you, Wafula, that I can make time for you today, or any time soon. I am on a safari to the village to see my baby, and midday is almost here. If it won't inconvenience you, you can accompany me and spend the night in Nanyuki. You come back tomorrow so that we can catch up as we drive there. Deal?”

“I need to unwind my mind a bit and that sounds like a good deal. Give me the wheel I drive you, Miss Morgan.”

He took the bag Miss Morgan was holding that contained items she had picked up from the office and placed it in the car.

They found a traffic snarl-up on the road emerging from Nairobi's Industrial Area but were soon speeding on Thika highway.

“Is it just my marriage that does not seem to work, Miss Morgan? My wife has been nice but has of late been something else. I suspect she has been unfaithful. Being on the road all the time is like having a long-distance

relationship, and they usually don't work for young couples. Sometimes when I arrive home unannounced, I often don't find her in the house. A neighbour told me she was seeing a pilot guy. Why does it feel like one is locked in a cage the moment we marry? Romance seems to end, with life for the couple seeming only about bills and no intimacy. Maybe that is why my wife has been unfaithful."

"Who is your wife, by the way? I don't remember meeting her."

"Yes, you have met her. Her name is Gradah. She works in the same company as Stella, your stepsister. We have a daughter together. Do you remember Sassy, the one who turned out to be ghost? Her sister. That is Gradah. She got half-caste-looking twins three years ago, whom she told me they looked that way because of a white grandma in her family line, which I doubted. A week ago, I took them for a DNA test and discovered that our babies, Will and Hope, were not mine. I want to get a divorce and move on. I have become the laughingstock of my community"

"That is tragic, Wafula. I have no advice to give you on that. I am still single and was brought up by a loving grandpa. I have no idea about couples' fights as I left my parents when I was still very young. I can just listen if it gives you comfort, my dear brother."

"I did not want to tell you that I knew Gradah before that Sassy incident, but now you know. Only that I did not know her family until when I met her in the streets, and she confessed she had my daughter but had no idea where I had disappeared to after college. Maybe her late sister sassy was trying to communicate to me that her sister Gradah was still available for me. And maybe she was hovering around me to make sure I reunited with the sister. But not anymore. I am thoroughly done with her *maisha ya wanaume!* (dating while still married)"

As Wafula drove consumed with jealousy and anger at his wife, Miss Morgan withdrew into her own thoughts recalling details of an incident that touched on him and Gradah:

I had just left the village. I tried to locate where Stella was seated. I guess they were not yet in the club house, but I couldn't wait for them to start having a drink. I had missed my glass of wine. It was a while since I had taken a window seat to enjoy the sights outside. I also needed to zone out thoughts of the disrupted market.

I scanned the bar room, and realised how people derived their happiness from different things. As the music and beer took toll on them, some couples fought over irrelevant issues but left the joint together like nothing had happened. I saw some divorce each other in the chaos right before my eyes even as I watched others find love.

That was how, to my shock, I noticed Gradah on the dance floor with none other than my stepdad Morgan. He must have been the pilot guy who had taken my good friend Gradah, Wafula's wife. I don't remember seeing them leave the dance floor. But there were some women exchanging bitter words on the table next to the one I occupied and could not help overhearing the entertaining exchange between them. One of them kept calling herself Mrs Belgium. The other one was Gradah. They were both very drunk. It seemed Gradah was now in another relationship after she had ditched Belgium a while before this night. Gradah was always a hawk, waiting to devour any unguarded good-looking man.

Then I heard Gradah, who was determined to outdo Mrs Belgium, say, 'I beg your pardon, Mrs. Belgium. You have forgotten to tell your audience here that you had taken my ex-husband Wafula to bed to revenge against me. Your revenge did not make your act any holier. You, too, are as guilty as I am.'

Mrs. Belgium fell into tears, and their men, Morgan and Belgium came back to their table to console them. Realising the two men I despised the most were with the two women, I turned my face in case either of them recognised me and I immediately relocated to another table, almost crawling under the tables. I was shocked to realise that my mom already had a co-wife, Madam Gradah. I took my drink and disappeared into a dark corner to better observe the romance between my stepdad Morgan and his new love Gradah.

I felt someone touch my back. It was Stella. She was as shocked as I was to witness what I was seeing.

Belgium was our schoolmate and former boyfriend, making this an awkward moment to see him in the company of my stepdad Morgan.' I needed to put my act together before I kissed another frog and get caught up in marriage as Belgium had tried after we shared a bed a while ago. He was married to none other than my sister-in-law Teo. I felt sorry for sharing a bed with her husband without knowing, but she was as crazy as

her husband Belgium with matters of the bed, as I came to learn. She had even been to bed with Wafula, who is playing the victim here.

My dad Morgan might still recall how I look like, though I left his house a young girl.

‘Gradah is a stunning woman and doesn’t behave like a married woman,’ I remember saying to Stella. ‘She rarely went out with Wafula, and it was hard to hear her mention her family. Her smooth skin gives her the look of a very young woman, confusing one about how old she might be. She has a soft voice that men find seductive.’

‘There was a time when your MD Alastair was all over her,’ recalled Stella, ‘but it didn’t last. Maybe someone tipped him that she was Wafula’s wife and should let go of her. Alastair has never dared to be with a black woman again in case it turns out to be someone’s wife,’ and we chuckled at this.

Stella got curious about the whole thing and arranged a date with Gradah. When she went to Gradah’s house there was a portrait of her and Morgan hung on the wall that looked recently taken. She confessed to Stella that she had separated from Wafula and was now married to Morgan. They already had twins who were three years old.

When I learnt this, I was very sad that my poor mom had to sacrifice everything to make Morgan happy. Now my mom keeps bugging Grandpa for upkeep, now that Morgan is unable to support them because of the increased financial demands with the new family.

It was unfortunate catching dad Morgan red handed. I wish he hadn’t hated me. I would not have ducked and instead would have gone to him to say hi. But since we have never been the best of friends and he has not been up to any good, I would best avoid him. Let him be. He shall know who Mina is when the chickens come home to roost.

Gradah doesn’t know me at all, as she joined the company I worked with Stella after I had left for Smith Freights. I hope Wafula’s daughter will not be badly treated by Morgan the way he did with me. He is a schemer with no respect for children he has not fathered. Fortunately for Wafula’s daughter Yenna, she is already in college and rarely stays home. I felt sorry for my mom Mina, more so because she hasn’t had the courage to inform us that her husband was not able to cater for their upkeep. She is happy taking care of her children in France as Morgan travels the world dating.

After this encounter, I just wanted to be alone at home and left without even wishing Stella a good night. This Morgan guy had deflated my spirit.

“What’s your plan now that Gradah has broken up with you?” Miss Morgan asked Wafula finally.

“I have twins out there, too, Miss Morgan, with another woman. I am going to marry her. Gradah can go to her pilot guy as he is already the father of most of the children in our marriage. My newfound love is sister to Musembi. He has been loudly complaining that I messed his sister. She is a lovely girl, and I love her a lot. Even after I marry her, I’ll still be supporting my daughter with Gradah. My family wants nothing to do with Gradah. Not that I care about her, either.”

“If there’s something you need to let go, it is people that don’t respect you like Gradah. It is good you already have a plan B. Now you can settle down, especially because this is your third attempt. This is your opportunity. Otherwise, you might get a ghost in your fourth attempt.”

They laughed at this, but Miss Morgan kept to herself what she knew about Gradah.

“You already know, my third attempt; it’s Nelly, our procurement manager at Smith Freights.”

“Oh my God. Do you mean Musembi and Nelly are siblings? I must be the only one who doesn’t know. Why didn’t anyone ever tell me?”

“Musembi was always out in the field in his truck, while his sister was always tied in the office. An opportunity has rarely arisen to see them together to introduce them. But they are both great workers. Musembi is now another of your in-laws. So am I now by extension.”

“What do you mean he is my in-law?”

“He proposed to your stepsister Stella. They have been dating for some time now.”

“What’s with Stella? Is she ashamed of Musembi, or why the secret?”

“Musembi became very afraid of you after you ditched the father of your child. He was afraid you might discourage Stella from marrying him so that you both remain single for life.”

“What nonsense...Why on earth would I wish Stella the loneliness I experience every day without a man by my side? I would never dare do that. People should be free to love who they wish. That is what I believe, Wafula.”

Time seemed to have flown by and by the time Miss Morgan realised it, they were already in Nanyuki and past the famous spot where the equator line passes. She picked her phone to call her grandpa and tell him to expect an extra guest. However, Wafula declined the invitation and boarded a matatu back to Nairobi just before they reached Nanyuki.

As Miss Morgan drove into the town, it occurred to her that the beautiful European colonial-era buildings were fading, with many of them being replaced by both modern high-rise buildings and shanties in some sections of the town. It didn't feel the same town anymore. The coffee shops she used to frequent were being taken over by all sorts of franchises ranging from clothes and electronic shops to general merchants selling all kinds of stuff.

The one place she stopped upon arriving was at a favourite coffee shop for her and Grandpa Smith, which was still standing. She wanted to have breakfast, having declined Wafula's offer to buy her coffee before they left Nairobi. She also wanted her “me time” before heading to the farm. She still had a lot on her mind that needed sorting out before meeting the family.

“Hello Miss Morgan, many days,” she was surprised at who was greeting her with such familiarity at the very moment she had taken her seat.

“Hello Jay, what's up with you here?”

“I bought this hotel. I got bored at the farm; this is my refuge. I was told you became a city girl. I wonder what it takes to open a business there. My relatives have not been of much help with advice about it. The only other person I would have consulted is my ambitious dad, and we lost him.”

“Oh no, that's very sad, Jay. What happened to the great man?”

“He had gone to India to visit his family. He got involved in an accident while there and died. That happened a few months ago.”

“I am so sorry, my dear Jay. How is your mom coping?”

“She is still in mourning. My wife and children are keeping her company, but she is getting out of it. My sister got married, so Mom is in an empty nest now. I would like you to taste my wife's recipes when she is back, maybe later this morning. Oh, and I took my two children to the school we went in Timau. I wanted them around to keep Mom company.”

“Very wise to bring them around. It is still among the best schools, my baby Calda joined the baby class this year. Maybe she is in the same class with one of your children. That aside, I remember you used to be a business strategist, Jay. Are you still as passionate as I remember I give you work in my company? I will give you two years' contract to help me rethink my business model. Too many disruptions have hit the market.”

“I would love that, Miss Morgan. India is the mother of such solutions and that's where I went to college. They have cottage industries everywhere and are connected enough to know what is happening in the world and about what business is trending. Unlike in Kenya, Indian professionals are cheaper to employ and bring with them great minds. Once I understand your business needs, we could recruit one or two with your permission.”

“That sounds like a great plan. I shall call to pick you up on my way back to the city. Being there will allow you to scout for business opportunities in the city for your wife's hotel. I should also house you to help you settle down quickly.”

“Thank you very much, Miss Morgan. The farm got run down after we lost our grandpa. My father was too inexperienced to run it profitably. I wish your grandpa would agree to a partnership with my mom to revive the place. It is a beautiful piece of land.”

“There was a time Grandpa had mentioned something like that. I just need to remind him, and it shall be done. Thank you, Jay for the breakfast and your business card. Let's see what we can do together. Cheers!”

It was good bumping into him, I've gotten another trailblazer like me to learn from my mistakes with as I shape Smith Freights.

With this thought, she took out her phone and called home.

“Hello big boy, how is your little wife Calda?” she greeted Grandpa Smith after he picked up the call. She was just getting into the car.

“Hello, Miss Morgan. We went to the farm on my bicycle, and now my little wife Calda is demanding I give her a ride around the farm, and I am not yet done with the work we came to do. I've handed her to one of the workers and they are busy at the fishpond.”

“Wow, that is a good way to keep her distracted. Now she knows that fish is farmed and not made in a supermarket. I am on my way home to see you guys.”

“You are most welcome. Fish shall be waiting for you if the size allows. I am yet to see what the catch of the day will be. I hope the pond has some mature ones ready.”

“No worries, Grandpa. I will eat whatever there will be with the people I love most. Catch up soon, Grandpa.”

As soon as she hung up, her phone rang. It was the father of her child, Leonne.

“Miss Morgan, I decided not to stop until I get my dream, the woman I love and care about more than anything else in the world. You are my symbol of hope now that you have given me a baby girl. Just know you are my only flower in a farm full of weeds. I will never give you up.”

“I hope my indecisiveness shall not make you say goodbye, Leonne. I am just overwhelmed. Just give me a little more time, and it shall be fine, dear. There is nothing I desire more than having you by my side.”

Miss Morgan said this with a lot of emotion, much to the happy relief of Leonne. Both of them started sobbing while still on the phone. This made Miss Morgan stop the car by the side of the road as she tried to assure Leonne of the heaven that awaited him. She was scared of losing him. She had come to appreciate how their baby had bonded her to him. She wondered whether the feelings she now had for Leonne and her fear of losing him were because of her discovery that Belgium was already taken.

“I hope we shall not have to wait too long,” he said. “I have walked in your shadow for far too long, Miss Morgan. I am well able to give you a fulfilled life. Our love was long cemented by little Calda. Troubles will never end, work will never end, and your next project to find fulfilment will never be enough. Life must be lived as it comes, but with our love to sweeten it. Sometimes it feels like I only feel you when you are vulnerable, Miss Morgan. You do not treat me like a man who can complete your life. Get serious and make a decision about what you want with your life.”

“I appreciate your calling, Leonne. I need your advice. Smith Freights has been facing market bumps. I am not sure how to restructure it or what should be the way forward. At Smiths, the dynamics are so different from what I am used to.”

“But cheer up, Miss Morgan. Some principles that guide businesses are standard; Unused money devalues, unused talent diminishes, and unused time and potential decay just like machines disintegrate with disuse. These principles

are not new to you, and I am sure you are using them to change Smith Freights world. If the business we are used to is shifting, we need to build on what we have and summon new skills to keep on top of things in the changing market, even if it might mean scaling down.”

“I am not about to scale down. How do I do that, Leonne? I am supposed to grow the business no matter what obstacles lie on my way, dear.”

“In that case, involve all the departments and take them through your new mission so that everyone is on board with you and your vision. Everyone has the potential to find new financial streams into Smith Freights. Let them explore together with you the opportunities available to the company. In business, no matter how any of them may feel they are employees, they are also self-employed. That is why they give their services as individuals. They have to find a marketable service and offer it so well that clients shall queue at Smith Freights for your services. This is the era of artificial intelligence. Disruptions are everywhere. We have to adapt. Miss Morgan, you are results oriented, so let everyone pull their weight and add value to the company.

“I agree Leonne, everyone should leave their comfort zone and work hard to get the desired outcome. I have resolved to be the best and I aim to overcome the chaos that has invaded our market.”

“You have developed a reputation of toughness in the industry, Miss Morgan. You are a trailblazer and can turn moments into movements. The sooner you put your act together, the better it will be for the company. Feed yourself with fresh information, not the outdated way of getting results that your staff have been reporting at sales meetings. Captivate them with the vision you have for the company and let them believe in it. Some things might work, and others might not. Do not hesitate to change if you must.”

“I might consider using a slogan like, ‘If it is about excellence, Smith Freights is guilty as charged. I may not have been at the top of my class but ensuring Smith Freights becomes the top company shall be my default position, Leonne.”

“Precisely, my lady! Use your energy to believe, to create, to learn, to think, and to grow the business to the next level. We have a tendency to over-complicate our lives and forget what’s important and what’s not.”

“You said it right my love, Leonne, when you once told me that we tend to mistake movement for achievements. If we have resources and have the ability to profitably utilise them, we should utilise them; it would be tragic not to.”

“Precisely my dear. You should use every resource at your disposal for the advantage it gives. Never get trapped in the graveyard of fear, Mama. What isn't used might amount to abuse if one has the ability to utilise it but doesn't.”

“You have motivated me, Leonne, and I will share this at the sales meeting next week. I have to be on the move as I was on my way to see our daughter Calda and Grandpa. I had to stop the car to speak with you. Would you mind passing by to say hi to them when next you are in the city?”

“That's a great invitation. I will give every excuse to be away from business meetings and be there in two days. See you then.”

As he hung up, this thought passed through his mind: *After so many refusals in this relationship, one victory won. And now, I get to see my daughter.*

The roads were more chaotic than she remembered them with careless motorists not observing traffic rules. There were small traders in stalls by the roadside selling fruits and vegetables from the Timau farms. Everywhere was a beehive of activity as she drove, right up to the moment she was entering into the Smith compound.

She found Grandpa Smith and Calda at the pavilion and could hear her daughter excitedly calling her “Mom! Mom!” as she parked the car.

“Hello, grandpa and Madam Calda.”

Calda was all over her, excited to see her absent mom. In another moment all the home-themed toys she had brought her were on the floor being arranged into a lovely home. Soon the dolls were on their third change of clothes.

“Grandpa, things are thick in the office,” she said even before she had settled down. “The market is changing too fast. I have lost most of our clients to new players, as others have lost their business to disruptions in the market.”

“Miss Morgan, thinking big takes the same effort as thinking small,” replied the grandpa. “I know I threw you into the deep end, and I knew you would be swimming with the sharks. Time has never been on our side, my poor girl. But you are the only one capable of taking over our businesses as your mom long decided there were other things more important to her than business. You are a good leader, and I am sure you have gained some experience. I am glad you have assessed the market and have an idea where the problem is. Now you must do what leaders do, which is to find solutions. Be thankful for the setbacks you and the company are facing when things seem to be falling apart. Those setbacks have taught you something and are the best teacher you will ever have. Keep fighting and know that I am on your side.”

“That is very true, Grandpa. But filling your boots is not easy. It has been very frustrating for everyone waiting for my guidance and leadership even though at times I feel more lost than they are.”

“Miss Morgan, I hear your predicament. You are a hard-working girl, but hard work cannot be enough, dear. If it was, donkeys would long have been rich, should they have known better than become people’s beasts of burden. Once you decide what you want to achieve, don’t get distracted; stick to your objective and everything shall work towards achieving your goal. The people you will need to achieve what you want will just appear. The doors you want open shall unlock. But this will not be until you truly and sincerely decide on what you want to achieve. Miracles are real. They surprise us every day.”

“Grandpa, this field is a nightmare. There is not a day that comes without its obstacles, obstacles that seem beyond me. It is the Smith Freights workers who sometimes bail me out. How am I the leader here? I sometimes feel like a rookie. I wish I had your skills and experience, Grandpa.”

“Experience comes with age. You gain it little by little with the problems you solve or fail to solve and try again. That way you gain experience as you grow older. Remember that my time is not your time. Your challenges are, therefore, different from mine. I know you will manage it. That is why I passed the baton to you, my girl. When your old shoes and people begin to hurt you, just know they are not your size anymore. You need to give them up and move to the next stage. Also, always remember that your goals must always be anchored on the reality of the situation and will require that you obey one rule: never lie to yourself. Change is inevitable, my dear. I am sure you have an action plan in mind. To realise the plan, you have in mind will require you to remain consistent, whether things are working or not. Your struggles will not be in vain; your pain will birth great achievements. The difficulties you feel are because the change you are trying to effect has been forced by the new situations you are facing, which feels awful because you have to start something new. This is because it is difficult to give up the methods you applied in the past, which you still cling to. So what plan do you have in mind to turn things around, Miss Morgan?”

“I know this is urgent, Grandpa. But I shall answer that question after our sales meeting in Nairobi on Wednesday. Having to wait is why we are the billionaires of tomorrow, as the minority holds the wealth keys and has therefore postponed the decisions we have to make for the majority of us.”

Grandpa Smith gently disagreed and said, “The one holding the wealth keys is a three-in-one guy: Time, season and action.” This made them laugh, as he was referring to himself and his long experience.

“In that case, I have to swiftly fill the gap you have left at Smith Freights despite my inexperienced youthfulness. After I unravel business myths and overcome challenges lying ahead, I am sure I, too, will win my triumphs. If I do not manage to turn things around and make the business prosper, I might have to come to you through the back door and request my share of earned profit and leave the company to the next generation to grow it.”

The manner Miss Morgan added to their laughter.

“Okay. I can wait until your Wednesday meeting. All I ask you is to keep striving. Let us now put work aside. Me and Calda just want to enjoy your company. You are more important to us than the milestones you aim to achieve at Smith Freights.”

“I have missed Calda so much. But I can’t have everything I want if I also have to work. But it doesn’t matter, I love my daughter even when miles away from home. Sacrifices have to be made and here I am to make up for the time I have been missing from home.”

She kissed her daughter on the cheek and amused herself that Grandpa must be jealous to see her kiss Calda. So she kissed him on his forehead.

“Before I forget, I met Jay at the coffee house in Nanyuki. That’s the boy I once bullied in school making fun of his shorter leg. He lost his dad, our neighbour on Fourth Street and I remembered you had a discussion with his mother about reviving their farm in a partnership.”

“Oh no, sorry to hear about my friend’s death. Jay is a smart young man, just like his grandfather. He is Wendy’s grandson. I have been in discussions with his mother and the grandma for a while. That is why I was often with Wendy when you were pregnant with my wife Calda. We have reached an agreement that I will buy a portion of the five-hundred-acre land to ease their financial situation. I would have expected they have already let Jay know about it. I put the money in the family account last week. May his dad rest in peace.”

“Does Ms. Wendy and Jay’s mother share the stupidity gene?”

“Where money is involved, they both seem to lose their ability to reason. You should notify Jay because I do not trust Wendy where money is concerned.”

“Right away Grandpa,” she said and immediately called her classmate, Jay.

Banks were already open and with the help of Jay's sister who was a banker, they managed to trace the account their mother and grandma Wendy had deposited the amount and stopped further transactions until the family agreed on the way forward.

"I bought the land for my wife Calda and the first consignment of snow peas is almost ready. I planted them on the very first day we completed the sales agreement some months ago. I am sorry we had not discussed this. I wanted it to be a surprise gift to my wife Calda."

"Wow... thank you grandpa. If for nothing else, my daughter will house me should your daughter Mina come knocking and take everything." This was an exaggeration, to which they laughed.

"The land is in your names as my young wife Calda is still a minor."

Thank you, Grandpa. You are a star."

"By the way, I have three tickets for you, Calda and me. We are going to Japan, the land of Kaizen, this Christmas. "It will make a great trip for you, Miss Morgan. Japan is highly developed and has some of the best roads, highways, railroads, subways, airports, harbours, warehouses, and telecommunications, making their freight services some of the best. If you succeed in Japan, you can succeed anywhere. It means you will have developed a product of high international standards because the Japanese market is among the most sophisticated and demands the best. The Japan tour should give you insight into why some freight businesses fail and others succeed. Learning their business tricks will be good for Smiths Gardens and Freights, my dear girl."

"I have always wanted to visit the land of Kaizen and I look forward to learning from the source. It shall be the best holiday for me combining learning a method I deeply care about and spending quality time with my two most important people in the world. Will I be asking for too much if I request Leonne to accompany me?"

"That will be perfect. Calda will keep me company when you two will be away looking for new business opportunities.

"Thank you, Grandpa. You are the best."

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Gray Horizon. RIP Grandpa

Don't forget: Beautiful sunsets need cloudy skies.
- Paul Coelho

SHE FELT A SOFT KISS on her right cheek. It was Musembi. Before she could say anything, he pulled her to the private boardroom at Smith Freights where she was surprised to find Stella seated in wait.

“Hello dear sister. When did you decide I should be one person to be kept in the dark about your affair? You decided I am a bad influence now that I am the only one left single after you’ve found yourself a man to marry?”

“Oh my God, where is all that coming from, Miss Morgan? What’s with you today. How many times have I tried to call you in vain? I even came twice to your office, but you were nowhere to be seen. Only yesterday I learned you had been in Japan with your family.”

“You had come to see me or to see Musembi, Stella?”

“Let’s make the boundaries clear, Miss Morgan. You are my sister and the only sister I have. Musembi is my man. So do not mix the two and confuse the situation. Are you not happy I am taken after all the struggles I have been through dating? Come on dear sister.” She hugged her, even as Miss Morgan started to cry on her shoulder.

“My life sucks, Stella,” she said after wiping her tears. “Too much to deal with, and everything demanding immediate solutions. It is true we have been

in Japan, but it was more work than holiday. It has been tough, but Jay will get some of the load off me. I am now feeling back on track. Much of the weight is because Grandpa has handed me both Smith Freights and Smith Gardens to run. The Japan trip was an orientation for the Smith businesses. I underestimated my ability. But for the last six months I have been working eighteen hours a day to meet Grandpa's expectations. Hence the reason I have been missing in our social circles."

"I am happy you have found your bearing, dear."

"The Japan trip with him changed my thinking. A CEO is not a title for the ill-prepared. Our companies have grown 500-fold, courtesy of my grandpa putting a fire under my seat. I have spotted my first grey hair already, Stella."

"Why do you then say your life sucks with all those victories, my dear sister?"

"Because I have not being able to say 'I do' to Leonne. I love him so much, but I am a workaholic girl. No time for him, no time for my daughter... just work, work, work."

"Poor guy... he loves you so much."

"All these things are important, but I have not been able to balance family life and work because of the load on my in-tray."

"Grandpa Smith tells me he would love to die empty-handed after crowning himself in you," said Stella. "I am sure that is the marathon he is taking you through as he is aging by the day and fears he might go anytime, now that he has been ailing. Now I understand you. Smith feels you are the only family left on his side and should you fail, so shall his descendants."

"I know, Stella. I don't want him to get too overwhelmed. So I am working to responsibly manage both companies so that I may not regret one day that I failed to do the right thing. Both companies are doing well. I hope Leone understands. He has been helping me a lot with the companies. They held lengthy discussions with my grandpa while we were in Japan, as most of the time I was busy with Calda when they were together. Neither of them has been willing to tell me what they discussed."

"I am sure they will in due course. Just stay focused on what you are doing. I am sure Grandpa Smith is very impressed with your ability to juggle the two demanding companies."

“For sure, he is. He is glad that I broke the company ceiling, and especially for making the businesses do well again. Sorry I did not seem to bother with your affair. I am so happy for you and Musembi. Where did he go?”

He had left without excusing himself to catch up with his former colleagues. He wanted to give the sisters time together.

Soon Stella emptied herself to Miss Morgan about how she fell in love with Musembi the moment they met three years before at the hospital in Nanyuki. Miss Morgan gave birth to Calda. Just like Miss Morgan she had been slow in accepting she was ready for marriage, especially when she recalled the ghost of Biazu who Musembi had told her about. She was now pregnant and ready to give up her youthful life and settle in marriage.

Musembi returned to tell them that he had booked them a meal at a joint they all loved. They all left the office for an afternoon together.

MISS MORGAN’S PHONE RANG, and she wondered who’s the strange number was.

“I am calling from Nanyuki Hospital, I am the matron,” said the female voice at the other end. “Your grandpa Mr. Smith was admitted to our hospital yesterday, and he requests you to come and visit him, Miss Morgan.”

“Thank you for letting me know. I shall be there tonight dear,” she replied, trying to keep calm, though she took it with great shock and fear about what it meant.

She immediately called Grandpa Smith. She was surprised and relieved to hear him sound like his normal healthy self. He told her he was at the hospital for his regular checkup and that there was nothing to worry about.

The thought of him in hospital scared her and she did not sleep well that night. She was out of the house before dawn the following morning.

“Hello, Grandpa,” she greeted him cheerfully after arriving at the hospital. “How are you feeling today, big boy? I am sorry I could not make it yesterday as I had promised. I needed to finish with a few things at Smith Freights because I plan to be with you for a while. I will go back to the office after you feel better, Grandpa.” She turned and took a fake cough to hide her tears which she quickly wiped off. It broke her heart to see her grandpa looking so weak.

“Thank you, Miss Morgan. I am not feeling too good, but I am coping. Your mother, Mina, is finally home and brought her children Clement and Specu with her. They came here at the hospital to see me.”

“Oh my God, finally! Mom and family here to see you, that is great! She should have called me to accompany them here. But maybe she could not because she doesn’t even have my phone number.”

“The children are now all grown up and look wonderful, though they are strangers to me,” he said. “They are at home now. Morgan was to come and see me today, but I was moved from the room they found me in yesterday. I hope he is not lost in the corridors, or he may have joined his family and shall find me up here.”

“Has your appetite improved, Grandpa?” She changed the subject because the last person she wanted to discuss was her stepdad, Morgan.

“Yes, dear, my appetite is not too bad. I know that eating healthy is how you stay healthy, depending on how your body is conditioned by the amount of food you take. My uncle Scotts died at age 98 and usually had only a meal a day. He took nothing but water the rest of the day and see how long he lived. I have been eating like a pig all my life but have no regrets, Miss Morgan. I chose to enjoy my life. After all, it has been hard work massing all the wealth we have today. A little reward to myself is no harm given the many health issues I have to deal with nowadays. You do what you have to do.” He forced a laughter that seemed to get stuck in his chest, which made Miss Morgan worried.

“But I think it is best to be moderate in all that we do, Grandpa dear,” she replied looking at the uneaten fruits on the side table. “I am not going to help myself to your fruits today. Enjoy a bite, my dear!” He happily obliged as she started feeding him the fruits.

“There is always hope even when the odds are against you, Miss Morgan. Your mom coming to see me reminds me of the saying charity begins at home because apart from you and Calda, she is the only other closest family member I have. It gives me strength and happiness. I would not have liked to leave this world before seeing my daughter Mina. I never expected her to come home after all the bitterness between us. But let the past remain in the past. Even for you, Miss Morgan, whatever may have happened between you and your mom, let it remain in the past. Let's live in the present. Forgive her and be together again as mother and daughter. Life is too short to hold grudges, Miss Morgan.”

Grandpa Morgan paused then said, “Just for your information, in case something happened to me, I left my will with Smith Freights lawyer Jackson. My wealth is split between you and your mom Mina. I consider you a daughter

to me, having brought you up like a daughter and not as a granddaughter. I will leave my home to Calda, my little wife. I believe you and your mom are already comfortable wherever you are. I somehow feel alive and, for once, I feel appreciated by all of you. But I have something to tell you about your mom. I tend to believe that what prevents her from being a success in life is fear of failure. I have come to believe that we – your grandmother and I – might have been too strict with her as she was growing up. We probably never allowed her room to be herself. After we refused her to marry your dad Mwangangi, she withdrew into herself before she found Morgan and married him. She wanted to be as far as she could from your grandma Calda and me. Our fear of losing her made us lose her. What you fear the most is sometimes what you attract to yourself. It is worth keeping that in mind, Miss Morgan.”

“You were only being a parent, Grandpa, trying to shield your only child from the pains of this world,” said Miss Morgan nodding like one who had learnt something she didn’t expect. “You forgot that sometimes even a child should be left to fight their own battles. I am sure she understands that by now.”

“My daughter cried a lot yesterday, apologising for missing out on our relationship for so long. Finding me ill and bedridden seemed to have shocked her. She seemed to have thought I had not changed with age and had this beautiful image of me as the strong dad she knew before she left those many years ago. As for her husband Mr. Morgan, I don’t trust him. But it is not my place to judge. It has been years since I saw him and maybe he is now a changed man.”

He paused to take another bite of fruit, before continuing.

“I remember your mother as a sweet, beautiful girl who was full of life. She only seemed to change after we stopped her marrying your dad Mwangangi. She became defiant and married that pilot, Morgan. This time we did not discourage her. We let her be. We had two cargo planes I had inherited from my dad Scotts, which I gifted your mom and Morgan on your grandma Calda’s insistence. In any case, the truck business was taking much of my time, and I wasn’t fully utilising the planes. It, therefore, made sense to give them to the pilot and my daughter. I would learn later that Morgan had sold them, which is disappointing because he and his wife have nothing to show for it.”

“I didn’t know you had a history with Morgan. Was he our family pilot?”

“Morgan worked with our family for five years. That is why I have had my reservations about him. I find him very manipulative and a gold digger. My daughter has never been herself since she married him. That is why I am not keen to leave them much. I left you 55 per cent of Smith Freights and Smith Gardens because you played a role making the businesses grow and stand out. I also considered you might need to make business decisions for the companies without your mom's interference if given controlling shares. She is not as business minded as you. Sorry to say, she may be naturally stupid. But as I was saying, forgive her and do not take revenge on her. Rotten fruits usually fall by themselves. And remember that hatred of the rotten fruit only leaves you unhappy. It is easier to let it be even though between you and Morgan's family there will be bad days. The secret is in managing your emotions all the time, Miss Morgan.”

“Why are you talking to me like someone going on an extended safari, Grandpa?”

“You are the only confidant I have. We have shared responsibilities and have made the family fortune together. I do not want gold-diggers to come and claim what we have toiled for, my dear. Having put your passion in it, you deserve what you have worked for and not the opportunist who may come to take advantage of it. It isn't hard work that comes first - it is believing in yourself first that made you work hard, while the gold diggers were wherever they were. I passed the baton to you a long time ago, and nothing has changed.”

He coughed a bit and sat up. Miss Morgan was attentive to read his body language and gauge whether he was alright.

“You remain my best bet and will keep a spiritual eye on you even after I am departed. I also advise you to marry Leonne, the father of my wife, Calda. I have been in contact with him, and I know he loves you very much. He is a hard worker too. I visited him last year in Burundi. He is not the joker I thought he was. One should never judge people by their looks.

“The best you can hope for is a caring heart, which Leonne is. Such men as him are very rare. In our busy lifestyles, we sometimes get lost in our work and forget to make time for those who mean so much to us. Leonne will be there for you. But he understands if you are not ready for him yet. He has waited long enough. Do not make him wait much longer. Do not postpone further to say, ‘I do’, to this lovely man.”

Her face lightened up hearing this about Leonne.

“I would not have done it without your approval, Grandpa, but I have always been ready to marry Leonne. He is a good and responsible man. He likes you a lot, too, and I did not know you guys could meet behind my back. What I know is that he spent a week with you and Calda while I was in Europe. We were to come and meet you together for your blessings.”

“I talked to Leonne a while ago dear, and all that is done. You have my blessings. He has been doing something important for me and will be offering you some guidance going forward. I begged him to give you a chance, though it came at a high price. Leonne has waited for you for a whole five years with no clear indication whether you shall ever marry him, Miss Morgan, I mean Naila.”

Calling her Naila, as if correcting himself, sounded funny and they laughed.

“Naila is my name, Grandpa. I should use it more because I might soon be called Naila Leonne. I feel so sorry for my poor man. I shall definitely marry him, now that I have your blessings.”

Grandpa gave her an approving smile. But she noticed that he wasn’t finished speaking and seemed to have much to say.

I think I have kept away from him for far too long. He clearly must have missed a heart-to-heart with his confidant, this granddaughter of his.

“I am all ears, Grandpa. Take your time and tell me all that is on your mind. I know you have also been compiling a diary of everything you’ve wanted to tell me.”

“I have not been using my diary of late, Miss Morgan. I have instead been recording short audio and video clips on my phone of things I want to say or show. They are for you to keep and refer to for anything I may not have already told you, my dear.”

“Wow, short clips! Now that is new, but I promise to refer to them when the time comes, Grandpa. I promise. For now, try and get well so that we go home and do the makeover of the Smith Gardens that you have always wanted. We have postponed it for too long, yet the time to finish with it has been with us for years now.”

“You are right, Miss Morgan. It is unlike me to procrastinate, which I hate. But better late than never.”

Grandpa Smith rose weakly from his bed and struggled with the few steps he had to take to a seat opposite her so that they could face each other. He was

panting by the time he sat down, causing Miss Morgan to panic. To her relief, he quickly regained his breath and was his jolly self.

After telling Miss Morgan where he had saved his recorded thoughts on his phone, he suddenly seemed lost in thought. She wondered whether he might be thinking about the return of his prodigal daughter, Mina. He looked calm and seemed to smile to whatever thoughts they were that went through his mind.

As much as I would like to be with Grandpa Smith for eternity, he is already gnarled with age and sickness has caught up with him though he looks strong enough for a few more years. I have never accepted that one day he will be gone. Everything I do revolves around him. I wonder whether I will be able to centre myself when he is gone. Even at his most feeble, I still need his guidance. I hope I am not overthinking it, but I will cross that bridge when I get there. Everything is in God's hands.

“I want to lie down again,” said Grandpa Smith suddenly. “I am tired of sitting.”

Miss Morgan stood up and helped him back onto the bed. The exertion made him pant a little. But he felt light lifting him onto the bed, suggesting to Miss Morgan that he must have lost a lot of weight. This worried her. But he looked comfortable stretched out on the bed. This lifted her worry. The panting had stopped. He was never one to discuss his health but this time he did.

“As much as I look OK, my dear girl, it doesn’t feel like I might last long. This is to remind you to always trust your instincts. Read the times and don’t take things too personally, my poor girl. Follow your dreams and don’t pay too much attention to others' opinions and actions that may discourage you. It may only lead to suffering and derailing you. Also, do yourself a favour and stop going the extra mile for those who may not deserve it. Your world is waiting, Miss Morgan. Leone and Calda will be enough of a responsibility, if you understand what I mean.”

After saying this he sat on the bed and gave Miss Morgan a tight hug.

“Always remember, I will always be close though not physically. When you see Leone, look for me in his eyes,” he said and smiled at his granddaughter.

It had not dawned on Miss Morgan that Grandpa might be bidding her farewell. She was used to receiving this kind of advice from him and somehow missed the strong hints that he might be saying goodbye. The only new thing

she heard from him was her go-ahead with Leonne, which he had never spoken as clearly as he did that day. The other new thing was the return of her mom. She wasn't sure whether it was a return home to stay, or she was just visiting. Either way, they were welcome, and she would accommodate them.

Before she could reply to Grandpa Smith about what he had just said about looking for him in Leonne's eyes, her mother, Mina, and her other children walked into the room with Morgan right behind them. She hadn't set her eyes on her mom since Grandpa Smith had collected her from their home in Mombasa to live with her when she was still a girl.

She watched as Mina held baby Calda. The baby did not want to be held by her grandmother. She disengaged herself and ran to hug Miss Morgan and the great grandpa. She got into bed to sleep with her husband, Great-grandpa Smith.

Miss Morgan hugged her mom and her siblings. The mom seemed to inspect Miss Morgan as if to ascertain she was the daughter she knew. They talked for a while before turning to Grandpa and Calda. They discovered that both were already sound asleep.

They sat down and waited for Grandpa and Calda to wake up. All Mina seemed to talk about was how proud she was of Miss Morgan. She credited her daughter for the improvements she had found. The farm was now a major horticultural business exporting all sorts of vegetables and flowers to many parts of the world. This was beyond anything she might have imagined. The export figures and income were interpreted to her by Morgan and her son Clement. When she heard of the equal success for Smith Freights, she could not believe that she had left a goldmine in the shares she owned to be a mere housewife for Morgan, now retired and probably looking to rip Miss Morgan off.

The nurse came in to check Grandpa Smith's blood pressure. She asked them to pick baby Calda from the bed and give her room to make checks on the grandfather.

Miss Morgan suspected her grandpa may already have passed on even before the nurse had mentioned it after examining him.

Miss Morgan bent to feel if any breath was coming from his nostrils. She touched his arm and it felt cold and looked strangely motionless.

Then she started screaming, with her mom joining in.

Her daughter Calda was still dead asleep. She imagined Calda in a spiritual world escorting her husband, Great-grandpa Smith. When she was picking her up from him, her tiny hands were still around his neck as she had slept on his left shoulder.

The nurse took a photograph of them saying she had never witnessed something like that before.

There was a smile on Grandpa Smith's face like one who was contented with what he had left behind and with where he was going.

Miss Morgan left the room to call Leonne. He was now the only family member she felt she could trust. She could already see greed in the eyes of Morgan and his family and thought it a bit scary. They had already expressed their wish to stay in Kenya and never leave. They had just been on time.

Had they delayed one more day, they would have found Grandpa Smith long gone. Naila thought.

“Hello Leonne, I feel very lonely, dear. Are you in Nairobi? I need to see you urgently.”

“I am not in Nairobi, Miss Morgan, but I can be there by tomorrow. What’s up? You can’t be alone in this world when me and our daughter Calda care so much about you. Take it easy, dear.”

“I have lost my grandpa,” she told him and started sobbing. “I feel so alone. He was all I had.”

“Oh no! I spoke to him only a while ago and he assured me that he was getting better. He also mentioned that your mom Mina and her family were back in Kenya to see him. I am so sorry, my lady. I’ll be there first thing tomorrow. I am taking the next flight. Just stay strong for Calda and me. You have me Naila, and you always will. All shall be well. See you soon.”

Leonne hung up and these thoughts passed through his mind: *Even with the mourning in the Smith family, this is the time I must assert myself. I hope the one thing that I really want – to marry Miss Morgan – goes well. She is the woman of my dreams and I love Naila very much. During my last conversation with her grandpa, he gave his blessings for the marriage, now that Mina is back. Even as I am thinking of you, Miss Morgan, I know that I am on your mind as well.*

“ALWAYS REMEMBER, I will always be closer though not physically. When you see Leonne, look for me in his eyes.” Miss Morgan would always remember those last words by Grandpa Smith:

I have been loved by the best. Thank you, Leonne, I shall be waiting. Before you came, I wasn't sure I would get myself a husband. Yet in my dreams, I was always married. I was afraid of Grandpa rejecting my spouse as he did with Mwangangi and Mom. Sometimes I think that I must have inherited Mom's fears and pains she had to endure in her parents' refusal that she should marry her first love, Mwangangi. Now that I have Grandpa's blessings to marry you, I need nobody else's approval.

As she was walking back into the waiting room to take Calda from Mina so that they may leave, she overheard Morgan explaining to his wife how they were now the sole owners of Smith's property. He was advising her to sell everything and settle in France. This did not surprise Miss Morgan, as she had already seen the greed in their eyes earlier. Morgan did not care whether Naila and her daughter Calda inherited anything. She was surprised at her mom's conformity with her husband's advice. All that mattered to her was “Morgan, may they will be done.”

I have to leave my daughter Calda her great-grandfather's legacy and protect my mom from Morgan's extortion. I am the one to set the records straight for her. She deserves a chance at being herself. She is my mother, after all. She needs to understand that even an inherited business requires hard work and is not a rental income. A business has a life and requires fuelling every day by clocking many hours to keep Smith Freights and Gardens being the reputed companies they are. It is something she has no idea about, or what it took to see them thrive. If I allowed her to take over the company, the two blue chip companies will go to the grave with Grandpa.

I need to persuade everyone in the family to be careful how we handle the transition, otherwise it would kill Grandpa's dream and pride for the Smiths. Managing client and financial accounts is not something Mina would know. Loan management would be Greek to her. I made freight management a top-notch service by managing all its liabilities. If the business should fail, all would be lost. The same for Smith Gardens, which is likewise profitable with its wings now extending globally. And Morgan can come out of nowhere and think it will be a walk in the park taking over all that?

Miss Morgan pretended she had not overheard their conversation.

Mina had a good life in France until her nest became empty with the children gone. Before her son Clement could settle down in Singapore and daughter Speca in Canada, she requested them to accompany her to Africa to see her elderly father. Mina was not aware she was a grandma to one Calda. Naila had never kept in touch with her mom to let her know she had attained grandmother status. Neither did Mina know her father, Smith, had been ailing. She only discovered it the very day she arrived in Timau. Only for him to die the following morning. And now with her husband's encouragement, Miss Morgan thought she had become greedy and wanted to go back to France a rich woman. But Miss Morgan knew better, having been mentored by one of the best entrepreneurs, her Grandpa Smith.

I need to position myself firmly as the leader of Smiths Businesses before I am replaced by Morgan's family. "I am sorry I was not around to take care of my dad, Miss Morgan," she heard her mother say, interrupting her thoughts. "I had always promised myself to visit my dad. It never occurred to me he had so little time left. I lost my chance. I do not think I even deserve to cry for the loss after neglecting my only remaining parent. I lost my chance to be a good daughter to him. He always wanted to see me and my family and looking at his beaming face at our reunion yesterday said it all. Little did I know his soul was headed to the skies!" Mina regretted, sobbing even harder.

"Try and keep calm, Mom," urged Miss Morgan, "Regrets will only give you misery. Live a happy life. That is all grandpa wished for you. So long as we live up to his wishes, it does not matter what you did or did not do. Also living up to his wishes, he will never really be gone. Also, just know that he at no time thought it your responsibility to look after him, Mom. He died happy that you came and brought his grandchildren Clement and Speca with you to meet him. He went a contented man."

They left the waiting room and sat at a gazebo in the hospital garden. Miss Morgan called Alastair to inform him about the company chairman's death. She was not sure what usually happened when a company chairman passed on. She was relieved Alastair knew what to do and would organise everything pertaining transition for both companies. He told her he was immediately starting the journey to Nanyuki to discuss the way forward.

In the meantime, Miss Morgan called her dad Mwangangi about the news. They had become buddies with Grandpa Smith after Mina got married. He

even had been at the hospital the day before. The news, therefore, hit him hard. Being a community leader, He informed their village friends that Smith was no more.

By the time Miss Morgan and her mom's family got home, the compound was full of mourners. It was a sad sight, unlike the celebrations in the happier times she was used to. But it would be a fitting farewell ceremony to a parent, friend, and guardian she had known all her life.

To ease her mind a little from the sad proceedings, she asked her brother Clement to accompany her to the Timau shopping centre to buy kitchen stuff for the chefs. The market always had its dramatic goings on as the usually drunk layabouts pulled and fought each other amid a lot of loud drunken talk. Clement, having mostly lived in Europe, had never seen rowdy village street fights. If he was going to be a member of this community, he would soon be very familiar with rural dramas. Specu, who had joined them, was traumatised by what she was seeing of rural life. The place was congested and dusty, making it difficult to breathe for the visitors who were used to a more refined lifestyle. Specu put on a mask.

Miss Morgan then took them to a joint they used to eat the *mutura* African sausage with Grandpa Smith. The two visitors loved it, but the simple rural butchery seemed to worry her stepsiblings who were concerned about its hygiene. They were relieved to get back home and hoped never to visit the market anytime soon.

Everything in the house reminded her of Grandpa Smith. Touching things Grandpa regularly used gave her a tingle down her spine. It felt strange to wake up in the morning and find his empty chair where he sat at the gazebo reading the day's newspaper. He would then tell her of the interesting things he had read in the newspaper. She was always up to date with the local news.

As news of his death went around, cars kept dropping off many visitors she did not know in the compound. It made her wonder whether someone became more important in death than in life. Some mourners told her how they knew Grandpa Smith.

Others gratefully told her of their business collaboration with him, such as a couple that once had their business on its knees in Nanyuki town.

The couple narrated what happened when Grandpa Smith one day stopped by their shop to purchase farm items. On his list of fifteen items, only one was available. As Grandpa Smith stood outside the shop entrance wondering

where to buy the items he wanted, he saw customers walk in and out disappointed that what they wanted was out of stock.

He went back into the shop and asked the couple why the shop struggled with stock, despite being in such a prime location. They had explained that paying for their sick parents' bills had drained their savings and ate into the shop. The parents did recover, but their shop hadn't.

Grandpa Smith asked them whether they would agree to a partnership if he invested in it. They agreed and, with the well-stocked shop, profits were soaring within a year of Grandpa's investment. He gave them an account number to deposit money to pay off his capital and within two years they had completed payments. They had since then been one of the major suppliers of Smith Gardens products.

"What an incredible story," said Miss Morgan impressed. "How come Grandpa had never mentioned any of this to me?" she wondered but they had no answer.

She now understood it must have been her grandpa's generosity such as to the couple that there were all these people she did not know who came to pay their respects.

when evening came, the mourners stayed up late, each celebrating Grandpa Smith's life the way they knew. The resulting noise that kept rising as the evening wore on made Miss Morgan, who was very tired, lose sleep. As late as 2 a.m., some were still trying to keep the fire lit outside going to keep warm.

Don't these people have homes to go to? Why are they still in Grandpa's compound at this late hour? They need to sleep. Tomorrow is another day.

When Miss Morgan finally fell asleep, she dreamt of nothing but her previous conversations with her grandpa. She knew it would be a long time before she stopped dreaming of him and the advice, he had left her to move the business and her family life forward.

The next morning, she woke up to a compound full of the previous night's litter. *This is the uncouth behaviour of uncultured people. Was the distance from the tents to the garbage pit too far for these mourners? Anyway, you can't buy good manners. We will just have to keep cleaning after them.*

I FEEL LIKE I'VE LOST my bearing after Grandpa's death. Do I even know who I am? I might have to be re-introduced back to reality before I lose my life as well. The

sadness I feel seems to have deleted a part of me with my anchor and mentor now gone to be with the angels. I need to stand on my two feet if I will save my mom from herself and Morgan. This is a defining moment for both of us. She will have to choose whether to live with me or go back to France with Morgan. She has all along thought I was the demon she needed to protect her two children from. I have to change that perception. The buck stops with me.

As these thoughts passed through Miss Morgan's mind, she felt someone suddenly hold her from behind and gave her a soft kiss on the cheek. It was Leonne.

"I lose myself in your presence, Leonne. I don't know what to think anymore. I am just overwhelmed. But it was Grandpa's wish that you comfort me, though I feel lost without him. Let me take this opportunity to apologise for my delay saying, yes, I will marry you."

"Grandpa was right. A future is not a future without a past, Miss Morgan. The time you shared with your grandpa was precious. No one would have given you exposure to the business as he did, and that is priceless. It was like he was under your spell. You made his world beautiful. You took the place of Mina who has come back too late. Now that Grandpa is gone, you must take time to know who you are, Miss Morgan, or you will spend the rest of your life being what others think you should be. If not, you might be left wondering why life should feel incomplete despite your best efforts. But not to worry, beautiful. I am here to protect you and Calda. Be my wife, Naila. I know it is not the best time but accept this engagement ring. It has been too long a wait."

Miss Morgan was in tears as Leonne slipped a gold ring on her finger. Until then, she didn't know how much she wanted the ring.

"I've missed you too, Leonne, this engagement ring has just come on time."

"Your grandpa has lived his life, my lady. You now need to spread your wings and live your own life. You have a beautiful daughter, Calda Smith, to inspire you, which makes me wonder when she shall be Calder Smith Leonne!"

"I want you. Bring it on, Leonne. I am starving. No one can get my soul back on track but you. Thanks for coming. Sex has a way of calming the soul."

"I also want you so bad. Oooh, I have missed you so much."

They were interrupted by Calda before much could happen. She said she wanted to be with Mom and Dad. Before the interruption, Miss Morgan had

hoped their getting to bed would result in a new seed to reincarnate Grandpa Smith with a second child.

“I hate a creaking bed, Miss Morgan. I will tighten the screws before evening.”

“Shhh! Sorry, you need to move in with me. I was to repair the bed for Calda. This shall be her room when we visit the Morgans.”

“I know it has not dawned on you that you are now a guest in this home. But, sure, we need to soundproof the bed, Leonne. You have become a beast in bed lately.” This made them laugh.

The entire Smith Freights fraternity and its clientele came to salute the fallen hero. Smith had left firm instructions that the paying of respects should take only one day and that the funeral should take place the following day without delay. He had repeated this to everyone, and they were eager to honour his wish.

Smith had been Miss Morgan’s greatest treasure, and ensuring he rested according to his wishes was the least she could do to honour him.

Smith had cremated his wife only to regret it believing that it was the reason she never appeared in his dreams, though it was her wish to be cremated. He wanted to be buried in the crypt that held his wife’s ashes and had ensured that his and her image were engraved on it while he was still alive. All that remained was to place the casket in the crypt.

They combined the body viewing day with the burial day. Miss Morgan and her mom stood at the head of the casket as Grandpa Smith’s immediate relatives. Most of the mourners expressing their condolences only knew Mina by name. Having been away for more than thirty years, she was like a stranger in the village. The outpouring of grief in condolences was mostly directed at Miss Morgan, who they knew, but their outpouring was overwhelming even to the rest of Morgan’s family. She hoped that the Morgan family now understood who Grandpa Smith’s real family was in the eyes of the community, her—Miss Morgan! She had been as kind and generous as her grandpa and would attend village gatherings whenever she was around. She was, therefore, much cherished by the community.

The priest took to the pulpit to lead the funeral ceremony. “We gathered here as believers, which is a good thing,” he said. “Our God is the same despite the different names we refer to Him. Let us therefore agree that our God’s religion is called Love. His church is not a building but the whole earth, which

he has given us to live and worship him. Let our scripture be the kindness of our hearts and compassion our prayer.

“Do not be afraid to be different. Smith, as we all knew him, was a kind man who saw no boundaries when doing good. Be afraid of being one who is quick to sin. Let’s emulate the good deeds our father Smith taught us by example. May the Lord rest his soul in eternal peace.”

Just as the casket was about to be lowered into the crypt, Mina and her husband stood up asking the Smith’s will be made available.

This shocked Miss Morgan, who could not believe their inheritance should be more important than paying respect to the person who created the wealth and accord him a dignified departure. Consumed by anger, she harshly scolded her mom and dad Morgan. “How insensitive can you get? Grandpa is dead. We will have all the time for your shenanigans after the burial, and besides, whatever is in the will we have no power to change at this point. Let us accord Grandpa Smith his respect and dignity. I beg of you, Mr. and Mrs. Morgan,” she urged, her voice louder than she would have liked. She was on the verge of a breakdown to think that the two could show so much disrespect.

Smith’s lawyer, Mr Jackson, was at the funeral and would guide the family on the way forward after the burial.

“We can only deal with the succession tomorrow after the guests have left,” the lawyer said firmly. “The will is already written and can wait.” By the way they shot their eyes at Miss Morgan after the stranger – the lawyer spoke, one could tell they were not amused with her suggestion the will should wait. Leonne gave her a sympathetic look and squeezed her shoulder to reassure her he had her back. This helped her focus her mind on the burial ceremony and not bother with the Morgans’ shenanigans. *Smith’s death must have irrevocably changed all of us his family members. I can’t see how this drama will end with my parents knowing I am the one in charge of Smith’s wealth.*

Naila felt a sense of hysteria was building up inside to see the rude impatience the two unruly adults, her mother Mina and her husband Morgan had publicly displayed.

I have to stay calm no matter the provocation. Grandpa was a great man, and we have no right whatsoever to fight over his property.

Mr and Mrs Morgan went to the house and left Miss Morgan and Leonne to conclude with the ceremony. However, the first commemorative

photoshoot by the graveside had captured them causing chaos. Their children, Specia and Clement, looked as disappointed as Miss Morgan was with their parents.

Leonne was by her side all along. It surprised her that her dad Morgan did not care to know who Leonne was. It was not that Miss Morgan was interested in introducing him to her parents.

She let things remain the way they were for those who didn't know to fill the gaps their own way. With only one day for burial preparations, she imagined Morgan and wife being busy trying to find out how the Smith properties were managed and who was the likely heir.

She soon forgot about them, and her attention turned to the fact that she had organised takeaway meals to ensure the guests did not leave hungry. The serving table had already been laid out by the end of the funeral for the guests to receive a pack on their way out. It was a tough day for Leonne and Dad Mwangangi who were organising the guests. They managed to keep everything under control.

With the tensions in the homestead because of the Morgans, everyone was in a hurry to leave after the funeral ceremony.

Miss Morgan knew that her mother was determined to disinherit her of Smith's wealth, despite being the one who oversaw its growth and success.

I have to tackle this nonsense with the Morgans, else they forget I am the Smiths' gatekeeper. Other than that, I want something deeper, a husband, a caring hand, and a mate in bed. A husband will give me strength as I will be with this fight for a while. I also have to save Mom from her cheating husband, who is waiting to rip her off.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

The Eagle

*Behold countless ways
This body has entrapped you.
Break this deadly hold.
Rise up. Lift your head.
Clear off this delusion.
- Rumi*

I FELT LIKE AN EAGLE, the symbol of strength and power. I was like other eagles that have impacted the world with their inventions and skills. My mother Mina, like Grandma Calda before her, is like a bird that never flew, a bird like a chicken. Calda walked in the shadow of Grandpa Smith all her life, and my mom was ever in Morgan's shadow. I am not saying a chicken is bad. If anything, a chicken nourishes our bodies, something an eagle can never claim.

Chicken drumsticks, chicken wings, chicken breast, omelettes, eggs sunny side up—a chicken is a friendly household bird that knows how to reproduce itself in large numbers. This makes me think I am not an eagle, after all. I must be a chicken. No, no, no. I am an eagle. I have been flying alone all this time growing my grandpa's businesses into blue-chip companies.

These successes I have won with pride—Smith Freights and Smith Gardens. They are success stories I can teach people how to become a good entrepreneur globally. And what I have built I am ready to fight for. Morgan has taken me for granted for too long. He needs to know what I am made of. I can strike in unexpected ways. I know his dark secrets, knowledge of which would snap my mom out of her slumber. He will regret

disowning me when I was a child, only to show up with his dirty linen claiming to deserve inheritance from Grandpa Smith.

I am no longer the helpless little girl he disowned 30 years ago. I am a dynamite waiting to explode.

DESPITE THE DRAMA at the funeral, Morgan had a feeling there would openly break out a tug-of-war between his wife Mina and Miss Morgan about the inheritance. He, however, didn't know that Mina had had a discussion with her dad Smith before he died, and therefore had no problem with Miss Morgan inheriting everything that belonged to Smith. He also had no idea about the amount of wealth that Miss Morgan and Smith had amassed. All he seemed to care about was how he could manoeuvre himself to be in charge of everything that belonged to Smith. He reasoned that he was, after all, the eldest son in the family through his marriage to Mina.

His phone started ringing while in the bathroom taking a shower. It angered him that it should ring while he was in the bathtub and had to towel himself to get it. His anger was replaced by panic that his wife Mina might chance to take the call that might be from the second wife, Gradah.

He stepped out of the bathroom without drying himself, leaving the floor wet as he rushed to grab the phone before quickly getting back into the bathroom. In his haste, after he was back in the bathroom, he missed his footing and slid on the wet floor, and accidentally dropped the phone in the bathtub full of water. He cursed himself that he had not checked who the caller was, as he watched the phone get soaked. He abandoned his bath angry at himself.

Replacing the phone with a new one would have to wait as the reading of Smith's will at the lawyer's chambers was an hour away and he had to drive there. He was relieved that Mina was not in the bedroom when the phone had rung. She was in the kitchen assisting with the preparation of breakfast. His worry had been in vain. He would have finished with the bath and return the call.

Shaking off his anger, Morgan went to the dining room to have breakfast. He was welcomed by Calda Junior, who was happy to see her brand-new grandpa. She never had a grandpa before Morgan came in her life. She used to call Grandpa Smith by his name. He was therefore not her great grandpa, which

was OK with him because he, too, referred to her as "her highness" his wife Calda.

She was, however, still too young and therefore unaware of any grudges between her mother and her stepdad, Morgan. On the other hand, Morgan had no problem with his granny Calda. She was the same age as his twins, which had surprised him that he had the twins at the same time his daughter Miss Morgan had Calda.

Morgan gave in to his granddaughter Calda's demands to take her to see the cows at their shed as she had done every morning with Grandpa Smith. Morgan could not find his shoes even as Calda became impatient. He thought they might be at the doorstep where everyone usually left them before entering the house. He found the boots there as he had suspected.

As they walked to the cowshed, he worried that he might be late for the reading of the will. But he remembered that somebody, he thought it was Mina, had told him that the time had changed and that the lawyer would read the will at the farm instead.

His primary worry was Miss Morgan. He was impressed by her maturity, although she remained a threat. She was not stupid or naïve, as he might have thought. She was sharp and had shown leadership qualities even at a very young age. He had by now learned that it was Miss Morgan who had kept the Smith farm solvent, and everyone seemed to look up to her. He realised it would not be easy shoving Miss Morgan aside as he had thought. Things had long changed in the homestead.

I DON'T THINK the Morgans have ever engaged in business despite Grandpa once telling me he had given them his two airplanes. Morgan nevertheless did well for himself and adequately provided for his family. Clement and his sister Specia have left the nest, and Mina is becoming a bit idle. She plans to settle in Africa to keep close to her son Clement, who is determined to remain on the Timau farm. Specia has been living in Canada for some years now and there are no signs she intends to return to France or settle in Kenya. It was her mom who had persuaded her to visit her grandpa.

Now that the funeral is over, she plans to take the next flight to Canada. Morgan has also been busy trying to find something to do with African airlines. In the meantime, Mina hopes things will work out, especially now that Morgan is retired and does not have money as he used to.

As these thoughts passed through her mind, Miss Morgan decided that since the businesses were doing well, the whole Morgan family must also shine and gain from their profit as well.

JACKSON, THE LAWYER, kept time and was at the Smiths Timau farm at 10 am. Present for the reading were Morgan, Mina, Miss Morgan and her fiancée Leonne, Specu, Clement, and Mwangangi. Invited witnesses for the reading were elders Mr Jordan and Mrs Scotts, who had been good friends to Grandpa Smith and were the only survivors of his generation in Timau.

Miss Morgan was amused that Madam Scotts came for the will reading dressed in a worn yellow dress and a bandana that looked like it had come straight from chewing in a calf's mouth. The knee-length boots did not suit her age and looked ridiculous. She had a funny smile that made Miss Morgan feel like laughing. She seemed to pride in her chain-smoking, lighting one cigarette after another.

Miss Morgan remembered how it irritated Grandpa Smith, who hated cigarettes but nevertheless found himself knocking on Ms Scotts' door to share a cup and maybe much more, Miss Morgan was not sure what. Mrs Scotts was however a jolly and carefree person. Her mate, Scotts, had passed on some years before. Miss Morgan hoped she was in the dating scene with older men.

AS THEY WAITED for everyone to gather, Miss Morgan recalled things about Mrs Scotts' life. She remembered that when her daughter Isabella who got married and moved to Nairobi, it had left Mrs Scotts very lonely having been used to being with her daughter's kids when they lived in Nanyuki. She soon met Mr Scott, a divorcee, after being single for many years. She managed to persuade him to move in with her, which helped ease her loneliness.

Not long after, she started feeling unwell and suspected it had to do with the dust that heavily lingered in the air from grading of the dirt roads in the neighbourhood. She started getting admitted to the hospital every once in a while with a congested chest and a banging headache. Her smoking habit must have also contributed to the chest congestions.

She told Grandpa Smith at the time that she almost called the priest to give her the last sacrament so that she would be in good books with her creator should she die. She decided it was best if she stayed with her daughter for a

while, also because she missed being with the grandkids. She was convinced that their energy would help her stay healthy.

She was not sure her husband would agree to be left alone and allow her to spend some time with Isabella. So she requested Isabella to tell her stepdad Scotts that she needed treatment in Nairobi and would be back in Nanyuki as soon as she felt better. Being a working mom, Isabella welcomed the idea, as her mother would look after her babies. This would allow her to spend a few more hours at the office.

The stay at her daughter's took longer than expected. This left Mr Scott very lonely. He called asking to get his wife back. He said he would join her at their daughter's house so that they could be together for the remaining time before she was ready to go back to Nanyuki. The wife won't let him, saying they would not fit in the daughter's house. It was too small.

Miss Morgan remembered Grandpa Smith making a joke about it, recalling how Scotts had asked his wife whether the tiny house was so small that she was living on a hanger in the wardrobe. If that was the case, Scotts told her, then he would buy himself a hanger so that he could live in the wardrobe with his wife. Scott was a stubborn man. Mrs Morgan always remembered the hilarious incident every time she opened her wardrobe.

With her husband's wardrobe challenge, Mrs Scotts had no excuse to remain at Isabella's and had to return home to keep her spouse company. She could not escape the obligations of marriage, meaning that her freedom was tied to her husband's. When she was praying for a husband, she knew the man would feature in all her endeavours.

Miss Morgan imagined that Scotts must have thought that his wife being past fifty would be too old to explore life without him. If so, he may not have understood that age is just a number. Some women still gallivanted around town, and nothing changed simply because they had taken marriage vows. Even Mrs Scotts deserved her time alone to do whatever she liked. They could agree on days either of them could do anything or go anywhere they pleased. If not, Miss Morgan thought, Scotts should start signing his fifth divorce if that would be too much for him. He was already a veteran of divorces, and Miss Morgan didn't think Mrs Scotts would be disappointed should he leave her. She had entered into marriage well aware there may be other fishes in the pond for either of them.

“GOOD MORNING, everyone. My name is Jackson,” the lawyer introduced himself. “I am the executor of the late Smith’s will. He wished to leave all his properties to Miss Naila Smith, following an agreement she reached with Mina, his daughter. When the grandfather communicated this to Miss Naila, she declined to inherit everything, fearing that her mother’s marriage to Morgan might fail leaving her homeless with her two children. This made Mr Smith allocate her daughter Mina Morgan 45 per cent of his wealth. The only thing he bequeathed a different beneficiary was the title deed of the 5-acre land on which this homestead stands. He left it to his ‘wife’ Calda Junior, who is still a minor and is under the parental guardianship of Naila, her mother. Mr Smith put aside another five acres that now hold his grave and that of his late wife Calda. He said the title for that land would be jointly owned by the family and should be the final resting place for present and future members of the Smith family.”

They looked at each other, and Mina was unhappy that her daughter had received more inheritance than her. This surprised the lawyer, who opened the file with all the recorded conversations between her and her late father Smith to remind her of her agreement with her father.

In the meantime, Morgan was outraged that his wife should have reached an agreement with her dad behind his back, almost forfeiting all her inheritance to her daughter Naila. He had his eye on the inheritance all his life. That was the reason he married Mina.

“My wife Mina is the rightful owner of Smith’s wealth,” he protested. “Miss Naila Smith was just a steward. Why should my wife Mina get less shares? It is Mina’s family, being the only daughter of Smith, that should receive the inheritance. Families define us. Naila is our daughter. She should inherit together with her siblings, and not on an equal basis with her mother!” he shouted.

“Mr. Morgan, a true hero should always restrain his anger and hatred,” cautioned the lawyer. “As I was meant to understand by Mr. Smith, you disowned this poor girl when she was still young, and now you want to disinherit her of the wishes of the grandfather who brought her up. You want to deny her, her sweat, having helped grow the wealth,” he reprimanded Morgan.

Before the will was read, Mwangangi had been anxious that his daughter Naila might be left at the mercy of Mina, who was under the influence of her husband.

Before he could speak, Miss Morgan said, directing it at Mina's husband, "Captain Morgan, get this into your head. This is not the same girl you wasted when she was a toddler. I am a mother too. You are following an illusion to think that you will get anything, now that your money is over! The Smith family wealth was determined by my grandpa, Mr. Smith, not you, Captain Morgan. Remember also that what you are saying about family would only have mattered had Smith been a member of the Kikuyu community. In their culture, inheritance goes to the children of the late parents. But Grandpa Smith was of a different cultural heritage and had his reasons to bequeath me what he did and to Mina according to his wishes."

My mom Mina went through what she did, even though he once rejected me when I was young. The silver lining is that this made me determined to be the epitome of success. But she is back home after a painful journey. I need a team on my side, which should include her and her other children, my stepsiblings. I have to find a way to get along with my brother Clement and sister Specca. I am the eagle holding all of Smith's descendants' secrets. I am the eagle because of the wisdom handed down to me by Grandpa Smith. By virtue of my mom's absence and entrepreneurial limitations, Grandpa made me the holder of the Smiths vision as an entrepreneurial family.

My focus was Smith Freights though I worked part-time with Smith Gardens and real estate. I helped grow the family wealth to the tune of 500 per cent, building on what Grandpa Smith had made. With its supply of products to Europe, Smith Gardens ranks among the top 10 on the list of major horticultural businesses in Africa.

Naila had greatly contributed to making the Smith companies into a conglomerate, which surprised her that Morgan should not appreciate this in his greed to grab the wealth that was the end product of her hard work.

On her part, Mina thought of selling everything her father Smith had accumulated over the years just to spite her daughter Naila.

As for Mina, Miss Morgan thought she had little attachment to the inheritance except that it would keep Morgan by her side. If she had to keep him close, she had to agree to his demands.

Miss Morgan was, therefore, not surprised when Mina said, "Naila is my child and I insist her inheritance is shared between her and her brother Clement

and sister Specu,” Mina said. “Forget about the will. I am the one to decide for my family. My dad is no more! I want to sell everything and leave the country with my children to live in France with their dad, Morgan.”

“Now I know better, Mom. Wealth is not just for our tummy to eat and finish but a fortune to ease the lives of our future generations. I may have had everything to do with the growth of the Smiths wealth, but I have come to the realisation that it belongs to all of us –you mom, me, and my siblings Clement and Specu. Morgan may forever be part of us, but the inheritance belongs to his offspring and me. I have to cut down his selfish ego and keep Smiths' wealth away from his hands. His control over you means that he might take the rest of us in the wrong direction should he be allowed any control of the wealth.”

Everyone was surprised by Naila’s wisdom. The lawyer agreed with her while pointing out to Mina the loss awaiting the businesses should she sell her share of the inheritance to strangers.

AS THE FAMILY DIGESTED what Naila had just said about sharing the wealth Miss Morgan’s stepsister Stella walked into the compound with Gradah, who tagged along her children with Morgan. The children were miniature versions of Morgan.

Mina was left speechless, as they ran to hug their dad, Morgan.

Gradah, on her part, was surprised to find Morgan in the compound and wondered what he was doing there. She had brought her friend Stella to console her stepsister Miss Morgan for losing her grandpa Smith.

Was Morgan here for the same reason? Gradah wondered

In the meantime, the look on Morgan’s face told a story of a liar who had been found out.

The look on Mina’s was one of rage to discover she had co-wife in Gradah, who she eyed suspiciously.

This was a moment Miss Morgan had always dreaded when she first saw Morgan with Gradah. She hoped this was the day Morgan would get out of her life and never see him again.

“Hi Mom,” she said with a sly smile. “If you want to know who sleeps with your husband, talk to me nicely. Meet Gradah, your co-wife and a mother of two of Captain Morgan’s children. Their names are Will and Hope. Look at

these babies and you will know where your man's heart is. Mom, if you want to die of high blood pressure, keep supporting Morgan's promiscuous causes!"

"Burn in hell, Miss Morgan," said Morgan in a hate-filled voice. "Why did you bring my other family here? And how do you know Gradah?"

"I owe you nothing, and neither do you owe me anything, Captain Morgan. The right person to confront for answers is your wife, Gradah. She was the wife of my friend Wafula. When did she become your wife and not let my mom know she had a co-wife, Mr. Morgan? I am not fighting you, my dear father. I am just setting boundaries to protect those I love."

Gradah turned to leave the compound. Morgan went after her and held her hand. "You can't just walk away from this Gradah!" he said sounding defeated.

"Sabotage your life, Morgan," retorted Gradah, "but kindly do not ask me to blow up mine. Watch me walk away." As she turned to go, she saw the young man that was her daughter Yenna's boyfriend. It was then it clicked in her mind that Clement was Morgan's son.

"Oh my God," she said with alarm, "what is Yenna doing here?" She sank to her knees and started to cry.

Morgan forgot about her and turned to Mina and said, "I can't just walk out on this Smith family web. Just like a spider, Mina has my children. So I belong in this family, and I am as entitled as every one of you members of the Smith family.

"We agree with you, Captain Morgan," replied Miss Morgan. "But at the moment Mom and I are the owners of the Smith estate. It is our prerogative to decide whether I really want to share my inheritance with you or not. Be careful with your words."

"Wonders never cease, Naila! you good-for-nothing kid have destroyed my dream of owning the Smith estate. Now I will die penniless! Did this have to happen when I am retired?" Morgan said, his face as pale as white paper. He rested his hands on his waist.

"Life is not about having fun all the time, Captain Morgan," Miss Morgan replied. "Children are a big responsibility. You have a wife with children the age of my Calda. You ought to have retired from giving yourself such a responsibility, great Morgan!" Then, turning to Mina, she cautioned, "Mom, don't listen to him. He is married to another woman, and they have two young ones, as you can see. Put it into your head? You have a co-wife, Mom. The

sooner you get your act together, the better. Otherwise, you will go down with Morgan in his sinking boat.”

“Oh my God,” said Mina, who was still in shock, “Never once did I suspect that I was living with a double-crosser. Had it not been for my daughter Naila, I would have sold everything my parents had worked so hard for to please Morgan.”

“Keep your regret short, Mama. That is the only way to heal faster. Do not kill yourself before you are dead, Mom. You are better off without Morgan's greed and selfishness. He is not worthy of you, Mom. Morgan is a schemer. A person suffering from his failures and wants to ride on your good will to succeed and enjoy life with the woman he now adores, Gradah. If I do not protect you from yourself and your greedy Captain Morgan, your children may not have anything to inherit from your dad Smith. With someone like Morgan, wealth such as the one you have inherited may not necessarily liberate you from your situations, but it can also be a death trap, Mama! We all have an obligation to protect the Smith family property for future generations. That was Grandpa Smith's wish.”

“It is difficult to save Morgan from himself, my Naila,” said Mina. “His new family cannot be wished away. Let him raise it with Gradah. Let him give my Naila a break. We can take care of ourselves as he starts a new journey with his other family.”

Morgan has taken my mom Mina for granted for too long. He should let her be and move on with his new life.

I had to protect the Smith family's wealth from this hyena Captain Morgan. He has been Mina's dangerous blind spot, though I and Grandpa Smith saw through him. We all along knew his intentions and I was well prepared for it. He can as well rot in hell. I have to liberate my poor mom and her other children.

I wish you were here Grandma Calda. What were you before you died, Grandma? I was too young to have known you, but everyone says I resemble you so much that in my mannerisms I am you in every way. Maybe that is why Grandpa trusted me with his estate. I proved to him that I am well able and proved him right by multiplying his wealth despite the many challenges along the way.

“With what have you done to me, Naila,” said Morgan interrupting her thoughts, “never again call yourself Miss Morgan. You never were my daughter. You are not my daughter!”

“Who cares? My birth certificate reads Naila Smith. You dug your grave when you decided I am not family to you, Captain! I am where I belong with the Smiths. I am only defending my territory not to be invaded again by you. Once bitten twice shy. I have to keep my family afloat now that Grandpa is gone. You do not recognise me as yours, but I am part of the Smith family story. Whatever bleach I choose to use, nothing can change my spots, but my mindset can.”

“How did you end up with all the Smith wealth, Miss Morgan, oh I mean... Naila? Or have you been stealing from your mother by pretending to be loyal to Smith?”

Miss Morgan did not reply. She cared little about what Morgan thought of her. She thought that if she didn't put her foot down, Morgan might think her a joke. She had to be strong to carry forward Grandpa Smith's legacy. She convinced herself that she couldn't afford to fail.

“Mom, please take charge of yourself. Life is more than Morgan. Learn to relearn life without Morgan and create a new path for yourself and your children.”

“I am glad someone feels my pain and loneliness, Miss Morgan, oh, my Naila.”

“Yes, of course, I have always felt your pain. And I also know that you are not the only one to survive living with shame. There are many of us. And of the pain you are talking about, release the built-up emotions, old habits, negative thoughts, and unhealthy connections. Strength is not always shown in what you can hold onto. It can also be seen in what you can let go. Sometimes change brings in something more significant. You can't explore new possibilities without crossing the bridge of your insecurities.”

“I agree with you, my daughter. I am not about to let my inheritance benefit the notorious Morgan and his new family. He needs to walk out of our marriage with dignity and not hurt the family. He can be supported by his children Clement and Specia if they wish. I am happy to drop the title Mrs Morgan and return to my maiden name Ms Smith.”

Miss Morgan was relieved that her mother seemed to have overcome Morgan's hold on her. Should she cling to him, Miss Morgan feared he would transfer everything to himself and continue dictating her life.

“There is a big difference between hiding a lie and facing the truth, Morgan,” said Mina to assert herself. “You have another family and kept me in the dark about it. Coming out with the truth would have allowed us to look at the problem together and find a happy solution going forward.”

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Morgan's Wives

*Freedom is not worth having if it does not include
freedom to make mistakes.*

- Mahatma Gandhi

AFTER THE INITIAL SHOCK of discovering the truth about Morgan had subsided, Gradah wondered how it could all have happened. She remembered it was in the airport lobby struggling with her bags and trying to find the right booking counter when she first met Morgan. He offered to help the hot working-class lady. Gradah was quick to accept the handsome man's offer. She felt special that it was a pilot pushing her bags, who also helped her jump the long queue at the booking counter. Pleased with the assistance the kind pilot had offered, they exchanged contacts. They started chatting on the phone and soon arranged to have a date.

When they met, Morgan told her he was single and had been divorced for several years. He said the marriage had been childless. Before she knew it, Gradah had fallen in love with the purported bachelor.

Neither did Grada disclose that she was married, but she had informed him she had a daughter. Not long after, Morgan helped the daughter enrol in a college in Singapore without ever having met her. She had been in Singapore since before Gradah had married Captain Morgan.

Gradah feared that confessing she was married would have lost her the handsome pilot, who she thought held better prospects than Wafula, her

husband. Soon she and Morgan got the twins. It was then she decided to end her marriage with Wafula and wedded Morgan.

Everything went well between them until that moment after the funeral when the truth came out about each of their secret family lives.

Since the lie about her marriage to Wafula had now come out, she did not know what to say but just observe the drama unfolding between Morgan and his first wife. It now didn't matter that Stella had invited her to Smith's home, pretending she was not aware Gradah was already married to Naila's stepfather, Morgan.

Mina looked at Gradah who was now seated on the ground looking sorry for herself. Morgan's betrayal of her – Mina – made it feel like a painful stab wound on her body. To her Gradah was a gold digger, the same Gradah who had abandoned her marriage to get the pretentious Morgan and had children with to hook him. She thought Gradah worth nothing but contempt and thought about her no more.

Turning to Morgan, she remembered how she had sacrificed her eldest daughter, neglecting her when she was still a child for the sake of her marriage with him. She even had to run away with him as he had wanted to keep her as far away as possible from her parents when they moved to France. She had also agreed to sell her inheritance once she received it to make her Morgan happy. Remembering this made her feel like going crazy that she nearly allowed herself to be a puppet to this good-for-nothing man who could so betray her by getting another wife while they were still married.

Looking at her mom, Miss Morgan thought she should show how angry she was: *Mom is way too silent. It seems like my battle, not hers. Yet I can see regret written all over her to realise the hypocrisy and betrayal by Morgan. This shows that she is not stupid. It was just a matter of time before she woke to reality. I had classified her an idiot. How could Morgan have thought the women would never meet? Maybe it doesn't matter because he must have by now made his choices. It is hard for Morgan to give up the forest of Mina and her inherited wealth for the tree that is Gradah who has nothing to offer.*

Mina seemed to echo her daughter's thoughts when this passed through her mind: *The more I think about Morgan, the more I despise him. I need to let go of him and embrace my daughter Naila. She has my best interests at heart.*

Although Miss Morgan felt that she had been tough on her mother with her words earlier, she felt the need to offer her a piece of advice. “You may know a lot, Mom, but you'll never know everything. Now that you know what you didn't know before today, it is time to move on. But remember never to shut new information from yourself. It is time you get around people who think and know something different from what you already know. Pick their brains as you respect your differences. That's how you continue growing mentally but not locking the outside world for Morgan's sake. Anger and resentment hurt you more than those whom you resent.”

Mina did not seem to heed her daughter's advice about resentment as she picked herself up and bitterly said to Morgan, “Do you ever feel guilty for your clandestine affairs such as this one, my dear Morgan? How will you ever redeem yourself from this shame? I have always known that you are a Billy goat jumping on women, but never did I expect you would marry another wife, Morgan! Just know that you no longer exist in my life anymore. You are just the father of our children. I put up with a lot in your village back in France and still remained a faithful and loyal wife. The time I spent in that kitchen alone cooking for your family and yet failed to win their hearts as my in-laws. I put up with all that, only to suddenly find myself competing for your love. Not anymore, and over my dead body shall I accept the false affection from you. “Morgan, I remember telling you one day how you would land yourself into serious trouble because of the many women in your life. Today has turned out to be that day.”

Then, turning to Miss Morgan, she said, “I accept that I have to face my demons, Naila. I least expected such betrayal from a person I have supported all my life. I realise now that I too had taken for granted my late dad Smith, including you, and my granddaughter Calda. I am not ready to share a husband. He can pack and go live with his younger wife. I will keep busy around my grannies than lick his boots. I have been too blind to accept reality. I regret that it was too late that I only saw my dad on his deathbed as I pampered this good-for-nothing man.”

Miss Morgan felt proud of her mother to hear her say this. And, looking at Morgan she did not think he was man enough to handle the two “hurricane” wives even if he had the money. She saw a change in him after he must have realised that he might lose the wealth he had banked on.

On the other hand, looking at her mom, she thought Mina looked a bit confused, as if still wondering, to use a phrase she had read in a novel, “where the rain started beating her”.

“I am glad Mom has said no to a polygamous arrangement.” Naila shouted at Morgan.

My mom is out of her marriage. She still has her children, though the pain of betrayal will linger. No one marries because they want to divorce. Trauma arising from divorce is not worth such a doomed marriage if it can be avoided. Everyone loves marriage and family, but now that Mom has discovered a co-wife, she has vowed to be single forever. Morgan deserves a divorce.

“If hard work pays, show me a donkey that is rich, Morgan!” Mina shouted at her husband. “They are beasts of burden for others to benefit. It is the donkey’s owner and the cows and goats the donkey has to fetch food and water for that benefit. Hence, why I laboured for you in vain. You have no shame to have schemed to gain wealth through me!”

Morgan’s children Specca and Clement, who had been silent and too shocked to have said anything, now joined their mother in screaming at their dad Morgan. They, too, felt betrayed and could not believe he could have another family, especially at a time when their parents were already retired.

Turning to Gradah, Mina said harshly, “Woman, I have no energy to fight you for this good-for-nothing man. You can keep him to yourself, young lady. I am done. It has been good for as long as it has lasted with him. Let me be, for now, as you inherit Morgan from me. I am complete with my children Naila, Specca, and Clement. You have enough work ahead with your young family,” she said and physically pushed Morgan towards Gradah. Whatever love that may have existed between Morgan and his two wives was long gone. There was no longer any compassion in either of them to feel kindness for him.

Gradah started fighting Morgan for having lied to her that he was single when they met, making her throw away her marriage with Wafula. It also more than pained her to realise that that Clement, who she thought was her son-in-law-to-be, was Morgan’s son.

Morgan walked away, leaving Gradah and her daughter fighting over Yenna’s now illicit relationship. Yenna was adamant that she would never leave Clement.

Morgan went to plead with Mina not to leave him.

Mina would hear none of it and heatedly pushed Morgan towards the daughter-mother fight of Gradah and Yenna.

My mum Mina knows that if she overlooks Morgan's lies and deceit, she will lose not only her self-respect but my respect as well. But Morgan seems determined to milk her dry of her inherited wealth if only to support his other younger family. The two women, having rudely discovered that each is the co-wife of the other, obviously can't suddenly like one another.

After Mina told Gradah that Morgan was hers to take, they now weren't even looking at one another.

In retirement and with a dwindling pension, Morgan sat in a corner looking defeated. He wondered what to do next, especially for his second family which he was not sure how he would sustain. He wished both families could suddenly disappear. He had never foreseen them ever meeting, or what it might mean should they ever meet. Now neither of the two wives wanted him, let alone share him as a husband. He would have to ponder a new future.

Looking at Morgan in a way she had never done before, Miss Morgan thought he had a great, well-muscled body despite being in his fifties. No wonder the two women had fallen for him. She wished she could see inside his mind to see what emotions were playing within. Did the emotions include hate, anger, guilt, and in what proportions? She remembered him as a sweet talker who could suddenly unleash biting curse words when provoked.

MORGAN DID NOT KNOW his son Clement was engaged to Gradah's daughter. But he was the one who got Yenna the college in which his son also attended in Singapore. But neither had he met her to introduce the two to each other. This meant that the two collegemates could not have known of the web of relationships between their parents. Either way, their relationship was the least of his worries, as the two youngsters were not blood relations. Gradah being someone else's ex-wife had thrown him off balance. She had never mentioned that to him, and instead lied that she was a single mother. Yet he felt it difficult to just let her go.

He went to where Gradah was seated to plead with her to respect his first family.

“Morgan, you are persona non grata to me!” she shouted at him. “I don’t want you near me. You are on your own in this mess you created, and it cannot be undone. How can I be your wife and your son be my in-law at the same time? The bargain was that I was the only wife in this marriage, and you have failed your part,” she said angrily and shoved him towards Mina.

He looked at Mina not knowing what to say. He now realised that the two women were now dealing with him on their own terms, and between them were prepared to torment him the whole day. He knew enough about women to know that they could be tough and unruly and could destroy one when their ego was hurt.

The menacing look Mina gave him made him take two steps backwards. He tripped on a stone and swayed clumsily before regaining his balance. Then he tripped again and fell, landing the back of his head on a sharp-edged rock causing a concussion. The wound started bleeding as he lay motionless panting.

The two women simultaneously screamed with concern as they both rushed to where he lay and tried to nurse him. This was different to their attitude towards him only a few moments before when neither of the women seemed to care anything about him. Now they showed deep concern for him as he lay on the ground helpless. Both now seemed to want him back.

They tripped over each other trying to help him. He lifted himself and sat where he had fallen. He was trembling in the effort to look strong in front of his women, but it was in vain. He felt drained of energy.

“Please try and relax, Morgan,” said Yenna, who was a medical doctor. “Let’s try and stop the bleeding.” She viewed him as her father-in-law but with her mother standing there, she had to refer him by his name.

His wives were not making it any easy for her, as they fussed over their husband.

Looking at his wives, he didn’t feel hopeful and mumbled a prayer: *I don’t feel like I will be able to move forward with life. I thank God that I lived the way I knew best with the world at my feet enjoying life. I wish I had the foresight to see what was coming. How I will miss the golden sunsets and the sunny skies even though they were grey some of the time. I failed in many ways, but I hope the souls I was privileged to touch and be part of will shine long after I have departed. Dear Lord, remember my families, may they find it in themselves to forgive and live in harmony.*

“Stop talking to yourself, Morgan,” said Yenna, as she tied a bandage to stanch the bleeding. “Spare your energy. You have drained yourself too much in this fiasco. We need to get you to the hospital as soon as possible.”

Mina was trying to wrap a Swahili *leso* around his body to keep him warm, as her co-wife Gradah caressed his chest to calm him.

Mwangangi was on hand and had rushed to his compound to bring a van, on which he placed a mattress at the back for Morgan to lie on. His two wives and Yenna rode the van by his side to the hospital.

The children, Clement, and Speca boarded Miss Morgan’s car, who had asked Smith’s driver to take them as Naila remained behind. The twins and Calda remained with the nanny in the house, happily unaware of the drama unfolding around them.

As she watched them drive off, she felt a tap on the shoulder. It was Leonne, who had kept his distance not wanting to interfere with the personal matters playing out between Morgan and his women.

He, however, felt he had to do something and said to Miss Morgan, “When you realise you have the power as you do with the inheritance and the responsibility Grandpa Smith accorded you to run things, you can’t be a small God to wish or do bad things to those who have been left under your care. Do good by them and make them comfortable around you. Please get into the car, we need to support your mom. As much as Morgan has offended you, he is still her husband. Respect your elders when you are young, my dear, and always be there for the weaker ones in the family. You, too, will get old one day.”

Miss Morgan did not argue with what Leonne had said and they drove to the hospital in Stella’s car.

THEY FOUND MORGAN had been taken to the intensive care unit of the hospital in a coma. The fall had caused a serious brain injury. An aeroplane was chartered, and he was airlifted to Nairobi Hospital.

Morgan succumbed to his injuries later that day. There followed a delay transferring his body to the morgue as both his wives, Mina and Gradah, claimed to be the immediate next of kin and therefore should decide where it should be taken for preservation. Yenna took charge and ensured the body was released to the mortuary. She wished Morgan had had time to ensure harmony between his spouses. She thought it a very sad thing that they should have been left bickering.

Miss Morgan watched all this from a distance, content that Yenna had a hold of the situation. Then her thoughts turned to Morgan, who she now viewed in new light: *Everyone seems to agree that he probably needed a rest after the chaos he caused for himself. But it is a very sad time.*

We buried Grandpa yesterday, and today we have another death in the family. I wonder whether Captain Morgan had a pension. And if he did, which of the two wives was registered as legal? I read somewhere that in France he might have been accused of bigamy for marrying a new wife while still married to another woman.

It is sad that Morgan and I never reconciled and now our lives shall remain parallel, never to meet perhaps even in the afterlife. In his eyes, I was not his daughter, let alone a relative. In my eyes, I remain my mother's daughter, who he denied the opportunity to raise me for the sake of her marriage. That now is past. I will do my best to fundraise to give him a decent burial in France, close to his family. I will even accompany him on his last journey home because I would also like to see where mom had lived.

It is time I also took another step. I will let everyone take charge of their inheritance. Whether they use it wisely or squander their fortune will be none of my business. What I want now is to be taken care of by Leonne. It has been a long and tiring journey pleasing my grandpa to reach this point. I have no energy left to satisfy the wishes of other family members. I now have my own family, Leonne and Calda.

It was late evening by the time they finalised with the necessary arrangement with the morgue in Nairobi. They used the same chartered plane that had brought Morgan to take them back to Timau. Having left the children behind, Gradah was worried her twins must have missed their mother to whom they were so attached.

They found Grandpa Smith's compound full of mourners, this time for Morgan's wake. They immediately began with his burial arrangements.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Voyage To France

*There is a time for everything
and a season for every matter under heaven.
- Ecclesiastes 3:1*

MISS MORGAN WAS WORRIED about her sister Specá, who was pregnant and almost to term. She begged her not to take the long trip to France, as it would be too stressful and might affect her health. Specá would hear none of it, saying that Morgan was her father, and nothing was going to stop her from his burial to see him off. Miss Morgan had to agree with her, and she requested to travel with Miss Morgan, who was accompanied by Leonne and Calda, to Nairobi for the onward journey to France. The rest of the family followed in a caravan of cars led by Naila's biological dad, Mwangangi. He led in his van with his family. Gradah and her children who would all attend the burial. Mina and her family were in a separate car with Clement and Specá driven by Smith's driver. They found Alastair having made all the necessary arrangements with the morgue to facilitate air transportation of the body.

France here we come!

UPON THE PLANE LANDING in Paris, they found Aunt Aggley – Morgan's elder sister, already at the airport to receive them. Their parents had long departed, and she was Morgan's only surviving sibling. Morgan had been the third and last-born of the family, their older brother having perished in a road accident some years earlier. Aggley now lived in Morgan's house which was modern and bigger, having already sold her parents' apartment where she

had lived. Meeting her for the first time, Miss Morgan thought she looked like one who enjoyed an extravagant lifestyle, and that perhaps it was the reason she had moved to Morgan's house, which was in an affluent urban setting. She imagined Morgan might have been supporting her sister, who might now push Mina out and keep to herself what little belonged to her late brother. Miss Morgan noticed that Aggley seemed to ingratiate herself with Gradah, like one already looking for an ally against Mina.

Besides his beautiful home, which Aggley now occupied, Morgan had no other investment. He had bought it from his grandmother who had decided to spend her final days in a home for the aged where she could receive care.

He had shown Mina other properties, but it turned out they belonged to his nephew, Brix, his elder brother's son. Morgan had only been holding the property in trust until Brix came of age to claim them, which he had done only a month before.

Miss Morgan was by her mother's side as her nephew Brix gratefully thanked her for taking care of his property until now that he had taken it over. Miss Morgan thought that her mom should have been as quick to thank her not only for taking care of her inheritance but for making it grow.

Seeing how lucrative the property market was, Mina was of a mind to invest her inheritance in France for her and her children. It might seem that the reason she wanted to invest in France was to show her friends that the Morgan's were doing fine despite the rumours flying around that the property everyone thought was theirs have been given to its rightful heir, Brix.

When Mina got into her house, she found that Aggley had brought some stuff from her deceased parents' home and rearranged everything to look like the parents' former home. This caused Mina some distress, adding to her grief. But she felt no need to pick a fight with her entitled sister-in-law over stuff she had no attachment to, especially now that Morgan was no more. She was glad that she had left her bedroom locked, otherwise she might have found the nosy Aggley having already put her hands to it thinking Mina was gone forever.

The funeral was taking place the following day, and everyone needed a rest if they were to be early after the long flight.

Mina asked Miss Morgan and Calda to share her bedroom. Leonne would share Clement's bedroom. Aggley had already set aside the guest wing, into which she settled Gradah and her family. She had also arranged for hired chefs

to cater for the guests for a week, and French dishes were already waiting when they arrived.

Mina left Miss Morgan in the room and was surprised to find her following behind her.

It is her house, after all, and she must make sure everything is going smoothly, thought Miss Morgan.

Mina also wanted to check on her pregnant daughter Specia, who looked drained and had swollen legs after the long flight. But she determined to see off her father.

MORGAN'S HOME spoke volumes about him. It was a vast, beautiful home with tasteful landscaping that Miss Morgan had never seen before. She thought that no wonder her mom had never wanted to leave, being so comfortable in the home. Every piece in the home was exquisite to the finest detail and things were so well arranged that there was no clutter anywhere. She knew that it must have been her mom's work. Despite her failure in business, she could be very organised.

I am only good at marketing, and someone must clean after me in the house, unlike mom. I am a bit clumsy and can't have taken after her in housekeeping and the kitchen. 'Don't burn my house down, Miss Morgan,' Grandpa used to caution me all the time. I was not the best cook either and I often burnt food in the kitchen. Leonne keeps cleaning after me a lot. I hope he shan't leave me for the mess I leave behind, oh my God.

She soon forgot about her messiness after opening Morgan's closet and finding his diary on a shelf. The page she opened read:

Unfortunately, I could not take care of Naila as I had promised her grandparents. This was because my attention was completely taken over by my daughter Specia, who nevertheless turned defiant as she grew up. She refused to go to college and instead went to Canada at age twenty. She has never been back to France since she left. My darling Mina thought it had something to do with my neglect of Naila, who left the family to live with her grandfather. Mina thought Specia was bitter to see Naila leave and never forgave me. Mina's bad energy pushed our son Clement away, too. He left school in Sweden and went to Singapore and never looked back. I have been an absent husband often leaving Mina all alone in France. She has lost herself in her palace chores with little

interest in the life outside, except for her drinking circle of lady-friends with whom they keep each other company. Even when I am home, she seems to have little time for me, yet her diary is full of laments about how she is becoming lonely. She is not the woman I once adored!

After reading this, Miss Morgan wondered whether this was the reason Morgan had remarried. She thought it natural for a woman to lose interest in something once her nest was empty. Some took to hobbies, or took to their circle of friends like Mina, as others took to church and became evangelists travelling the world leaving their sick and hungry husbands alone at home, except perhaps for Morgan. Other wives, like Mrs Scotts, got consumed with their daughter's homes taking care of their grandchildren. To them, it felt like they had given new births in their enjoyment of raising their grandchildren.

CALDA WAS SOON BACK in the room looking for her mother's attention. They left the room to check on her dad Leonne. They found him with Clement seated in the garden facing the water fountain that adorned it. Miss Morgan did not want to interrupt their discussion and headed to the kitchen to find something for Calda to eat.

Had she paused to eavesdrop on their conversation, she might have heard Clement say, "Thank you, Leonne, for coming with us to France. You are the brother I never had. I think you can be my mentor. I have been marketing for a vegetable farm in Singapore, only to discover when I came here that my grandpa had a much bigger farm, probably ten-fold the one I work for. I am disappointed with Mom for never letting me know about this. Which reminds me I resented Dad wanting to claim for himself what Grandpa had worked for, without seeming to care that we too had an interest in it."

"I know how it feels, Clement. I am an orphan, and my father's two brothers shamelessly dispossessed me and my sister of our parents' wealth. A good Samaritan raised us – me and my sister, Teo. He also taught me how to be an entrepreneur. With what you have learnt in Singapore, you could pick up from where your grandpa left off. The two businesses, Smith Freights and Smith Gardens kept Naila permanently on her toes to make them successful. The family properties belong to you too, and I am sure Naila would be willing to

let you do something with your experience at the farm. I am planning to relocate from Burundi to Nairobi and be with her and my baby Calda. We shall be guiding you on how to make Smith Gardens better and more profitable. I plan to establish a market here in France before we leave after the burial. I am already familiar with the market as I have been exporting some products here. It is an excellent market I can assure you.”

“Thank you, Leonne. I’ve already clinched Singapore and Sweden. I clocked in the accounts on the day of my grandpa’s burial. It was both a sad and happy day for me – sad about Grandpa, and happy to tie the accounts. I saw the opportunity immediately after visiting the Smith farm and was keen to take it. Unfortunately, I did not get to build a relationship with my grandpa. I blame it all on Mom and Dad for never paying him a visit or encouraging us to. We had nothing to do with their differences. They denied us a golden opportunity. It was only recently that Dad had been persuading me to come to Africa. Maybe his intention was for me to work at Smith Gardens. I kept away because of Mom’s advice not to come, although she never explained why. Grandpa and Naila had such synergy. Maybe I can take his place and try and build the same synergy she had with Grandpa working together, perhaps with my sister also. I am not sure what Specia is up to, but my wish is she remains close to the family now. She mentioned to me that her boyfriend had broken up with her. He has been a bit irresponsible. Now with the baby on the way, she needs to be more careful.”

Mina served Clement and Leonne with drinks. However, as she had been approaching them, she had overheard their conversation and thought she should say something.

“Leonne, you do not have to reinvent the wheel about this market,” she said. “I already have established three clients, and they are ready and willing to continue importing flowers and vegetables from Smith Gardens. Seasonal fruits are welcome too. I had stopped supplies to the three clients after a fight with my dad Smith, who thought they were not remitting payments to the home office for the products ordered as agreed. I later came to realise it was Morgan was receiving the payments and not remitting them as he was supposed to. This put a wall between my family and me - dad and Miss Morgan, I mean Naila Leonne.”

“Oh, wow!” exclaimed Leonne, “Then Clement can follow up with them, including two other accounts he already has in Singapore and Sweden. Miss

Morgan has many more accounts. You need to talk to her once things have settled down.” He went on.

“At Smiths, there is room for all of you, including Specá. She had mentioned to me that she has been an estate manager in Canada. She can take over the estate Naila completed a while ago. There will not be much to do, as all the management systems are already in place. She will have a lot of time to be with the baby as she tries to date again.”

“Wow! Do you mean we have real estate in Kenya, Leonne? That is the best news today,” said Clement

“Yes, you do. Naila is a trailblazer. I have been waiting to marry her all this time while she amassed wealth for you guys. The only person she couldn’t see eye to eye was your dad, Morgan. May he rest in peace!”

“I have my reservations, too, after Gradah showed up with his babies, but now he is gone. May he rest in peace!”

“Sit yourself down and give yourself credit for the much you’ve done so far, Clement,” said Leonne to encourage him. “Reward yourself for the far you’ve come. Be proud of yourself and celebrate your small wins. Believe in your potential and trust your ability to achieve even more difficult milestones.”

“I concur, brother Leonne. I will stay close to you and Miss Morgan to learn and improve my skills. Cheers, brother,” said Clement as they asked for more drinks.

MINA AND HER YOUNGER DAUGHTER Specá had a lot to catch up on. Specá opened up to her how sorry she was that her dad died without her reconciling with him. She had never forgiven him for allowing her sister Naila to be taken away from her when she went to live with their grandfather. She had looked up to Miss Morgan as her big sister and was left feeling empty. All she ever wanted was to be with Naila, and when it finally dawned on her that they would never be together she wanted to be as far away as possible from her parents as she grew older.

She explained that it was after her relationship with the father of her child had failed that she had agreed to visit their ailing Grandpa Smith after Mina requested them to. She decided that she would not only visit but stay on so that she could finally be with Miss Morgan and Grandpa Smith. She remembered that despite being ill and bedridden, Grandpa Smith was very happy to see them and wanted them to stay with him. Unfortunately, he died

soon after, but they had his blessings to stay and continue his legacy in business. He mentioned wanting Naila to have as many hands as possible to help her run things.

“Although the father of my child wants us to reconcile, I shan’t be going back to Canada soon,” Specia explained. “I want to stay here in France for a while to tend Dad’s grave. He loved me a lot, despite my keeping away. He would make sure he visited me every time he was in Canada delivering goods or passengers with the planes. He once organised for me a fully paid trip to Africa which I failed to take until you and Clement invited me to join you to visit Grandpa Smith. He was a great dad to me. Staying here is the least I can do to honour my fallen hero,” she said tearfully.

“That is good to know, my dear Specia. Come to think of it, he was a great husband to me, too. I never realised he was a man lonely and hurting for love. I realised it was me who failed him by refusing to move back to Africa, as much of his work was there. He wanted us to be there so that we could keep an eye on Grandpa Smith as he aged. But I didn’t think it was that important as my father always sounded strong whenever we spoke on the phone. I also had my disappointments with my parents for rejecting my first love Mwangangi, which deeply hurt me. They were also unhappy when I chose Morgan. This is the Morgan I loved and now dearly miss, and not the Morgan who often manipulated me. I am still trying to get to terms with this contradiction of the man I loved and didn’t love at the same time.”

“I feel you, Mom.”

“The only reason I am bearing Gradah being here is her children with Morgan, and of course, her being the mother to Yenna who is Clément’s fiancé. She is too sweet not to accept her mom. Yenna is carrying Clément’s baby, too. I am glad we have had this discussion. Now we need to rest, dear. We have a long day tomorrow. I need to press our funeral gowns. They are in the washing machine. I did not want to bother the workers with them. They looked overworked by Aggley. She is the queen of the Morgans.”

“Good night, Mom,” she kissed her lightly on the cheek. Mina tacked Specia’s bed and left the room. It had been years since she last set foot into her daughter’s room. She had forgotten the arrangement of the toys on the drawers, which they found on the floor after Calda got her hands on them.

“I feel sorry for you, Mom. I also feel for Gradah and the young twins, Will, and Hope. And I am happy to hear that Clement and Yenna also have a baby

on the way,” said Specu, adding, “You will soon be a grandmother to three or four kids, should Yenna get twins,” she said to tickle her mom.

“We trust God that everything shall be well, Specu,” she had replied. “My grannies will be a blessing after the grief we are going through. I shall be privileged to have lived to see my little angels. Morgan has not been as lucky. Rest my dear, Specu. We have a long day tomorrow. Mina covered her daughter and left the room.

As she stepped out the door, there stood Mwangangi, the father of her eldest daughter Naila.

He pulled Mina to an adjacent room that served as a study room. He had already taken it as his bedroom. It had a comfortable couch he was going to use as his bed.

“I know you are going through a lot, my dear Mina,” he told her tenderly. “I am sorry about what happened. Today, I am a lonely man, and I would like you to be by my side. Stella’s mum left for Germany and doesn’t plan to come back soon, if ever, as she takes care of her ageing mom. She is more interested in her family property in Germany than in my well-being. Now that you are single again, would you consider spending the rest of your life with the man you once adored?”

They had no time to waste, and Mina did not have to answer his question. They locked in a passionate embrace, with every bit of their body afire like it did when they conceived Naila. There were hairy pulsating thighs between her smooth legs. After having Mwangangi once again Mina too fell into a deep sleep. A companion such as Mwangangi is what she craved to heal the wounds deep inside her. Even in her sleep, the tender whisper sounded the same, and the groaning was familiar. Mina's whole body was in total submission, only to wake up drenched in sweat.

When she went back to sleep, she talked in her dream asking, “For how long shall I be sleeping with a ghost? I need a life. I need to date. I need to free my spirit. There’s nothing wrong about my age. Widowers and bachelors are all out there waiting to mingle.”

She awoke suddenly and realised it was not a ghost she had in bed with her but her childhood lover Mwangangi. Having him made for a good distraction before dawn came. They had a lot to share and only had a few hours of sleep.

Mina and Mwangangi were survivors, and everything had to begin anew for them. Others like Gradah were like birds that had to find the nearest available tree to perch, which she did and was soon engaged to Aggley's lawyer, Robbie.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Rest In Peace, Mr Morgan

*Understand me. I'm not like an ordinary world.
I have my madness. I live in another dimension and
I don't have time for things that have no soul.
- Charles Bukowski*

MINA WAS NOT PROPERLY RESTED when she woke up. It did not help that they had spent some time awake catching up with Mwangangi. She left the study where they had spent the night and went to her bedroom to take a shower and find suitable clothes for the occasion ahead. After the shower, she opened the wardrobe she had shared with her husband to look for a black outfit. Seeing Morgan's aeroplane captain's uniforms waiting ready to be worn, it felt as if he was in the next room and would momentarily walk in. It felt like a dream. She realised that all his clothes now had no one to wear them. She made a mental note to donate them to charity organisations that accepted second-hand clothes. Somebody in need might find a use for them, or even get themselves the perfect Sunday-best from Morgan's expensive clothes. She, however, would remain with some of his favourite pair of trousers and a t-shirt or two to show her grandchildren when they were older.

The morning was beautiful, and everyone was dressed in black. Mina looked at her husband's body in the open casket. He looked peaceful, as if in relaxed sleep. The good times they had together flashed through her mind. This was the man on whose chest she would sometimes rest her head at night and drift off to contented, undisturbed sleep like a child till dawn. His hands now looked

stiff, but she remembered their magical touch massaging her legs when they were tired and swollen from too much walking about.

She remembered the time Morgan would paint the house, mend the fence and take the kids for games and movies during his annual vacation from work.

Thank God they are all grown now. I am not an outdoor person, and I am not sure how I would have kept them entertained.

As the thought passed through her mind, her eyes fell on his full pilots uniform he was dressed lying in the casket as his colleagues filed past to view his body.

She remembered how his impromptu lovemaking when the kids were away was the greatest. She could picture him in all the corners of the house he held her promising her heaven. All those memories were now distant and few and were often unhappy by the time the accident took Morgan. It had happened suddenly, and it was not the best way to go. She wished there had been time for them to reconcile. She wondered whether people met in the afterlife because then there would be a chance to tell him what she felt.

I miss him. The mess we are now dealing with would have been sorted out, even if over time. With him gone things now seem that much more difficult.

Her train of thought was interrupted by Specia who held her by the waist. Her daughter seemed to have sensed what was going through her mind.

"I miss Dad too, my dear Mama. I wonder why finding out about his second wife had to happen when it did at Grandpa's home. I imagine he must be sad to have broken your heart after all those years you spent together as a couple. I could see it in his eyes as he lay there bleeding."

Lacking for words, Mina squeezed her daughter Specia's hand to indicate that she understood what she was saying.

TO MWANGANGI, who was witnessing a European funeral for the first time, it looked like a simple affair with just the priest leading the funeral service by the graveside and overseeing the final rite of lowering the body into the grave and burying it. In many places in Africa, a burial was a whole day event where almost every member of the extended family, including distant cousins, were given a chance to say something about the deceased.

Here it was just the Priest speaking, and he was saying: "A year comes and goes. We all look forward to another season. Sometimes the season is in our

favour and at other times not so favourable. Everything good or bad, desirable or miserable – they are all part of the story of our lives. We can't help them but keep optimistic as it is not in vain that we are alive. We are the shapers of tomorrow come rain or sunshine. Nothing is permanent. And whatever comes, good or bad, it is God's will. Rejoice and always welcome a new day with a cheerful heart. We may have no control over God's will, but our thoughts and the outcomes we desire we can make happen. We pray that God blesses Morgan's family and grants them a prosperous future. Rest in peace, Morgan. You shall forever be in our hearts."

The priest blessed the grave and the body as the family and friends gathered at the funeral watched it lowered into the grave. It was a sad moment for the family members to witness the lowering of the casket and the shovelling of the soil into the grave. This was followed by placing flowers by friends and family members before everyone left.

Miss Morgan held her daughter Calda in her arms with Leonne by her side. She had mixed feelings during the brief ceremony. She was not sure whether she cared that Morgan was no more, or whether she cared when she broke down with sadness as the casket was being lowered into the grave. She may not have liked Morgan very much, but she would never wish death even on her worst enemy. She saw the plus side of Morgan rejecting her when she was a child in that it gave her the incentive to thrive as a self-made businessperson. She was one of the best CEOs in her country, and the businesses she led were among the top ten blue-chip companies in Africa. It had all been in God's hands. She now thought that she needed Morgan's rejection to become who she was.

"I honour my fallen father, Captain Morgan. He impacted my life in an unexpected way."

"True, Miss Morgan," agreed Leonne. "You have been the only one using his name. Clement is proud of his name, while Specu has never and will never refer to herself as Miss Morgan. You stuck with the name."

"I am not about to change it anytime soon, Leonne. Miss Morgan is the name everyone knows me by."

"Calda can adopt my name and become Miss Leonne," he said.

After this, Calda kept repeating the name Leonne the whole of that day, owning it.

AS THEY WENT HOME, Aggley drew Gradah close to herself and whispered, “Gradah dear, you just can’t let life happen to you. You have to make life happen. You have a young family, and you need to be assertive. My brother Morgan loved you a lot. We need to work together to get rid of Mina’s family from this home for good. If Clement and Specia make no claims to it, Mina will have no reason to come here. I have a perfect solution. Mix this powder in a glass of juice and bring it to my room. I will give it to Mina’s kids to drink and they, too, will be in the obituaries like their father.”

Gradah didn’t have to think twice about it; she thoroughly disliked Mina. To her, it was Mina who killed her husband. She also did not want her defiant daughter Yenna to marry Clement. To her, their marriage would forever remind her of Morgan’s betrayal of her.

She took the poison powder to mix with juice as she had been asked and spared some in her bag to kill her co-wife, Mina, when the opportunity arose.

She went to the kitchen and had some difficulty finding the jug of Juice before finally locating it on a kitchen tabletop. She mixed the concoction and took it to her dear sister-in-law Aggley. She then went and sat alone in the pavilion to wait for news of the death of her enemy’s children.

In the meantime, Aggley was inciting Mina against her co-wife, Gradah. They were in the kitchen where Mina was busy helping serve guests food, when Aggley told her, “Gradah is an eyesore and a gold digger. You cannot share with her your sweat of 30 years. Without her children, she can claim nothing. She needs to learn her lesson. You do not want Clement to marry your worst enemy’s daughter, no matter what!”

Mina liked what Aggley was suggesting and accepted the poison powder. She poisoned the food she was going to give her co-wife’s children and left some of the poison to deal with Gradah later. She vowed that the whole Gradah family would be dining with Morgan in hell before dusk.

The devilish Aggley must have taken time to plan this, and it was obvious what she wanted, even if Mina and Gradah could not see it. She wanted all of Morgan’s children dead so that she could inherit everything that belonged to her brother.

AFTER THE BURIAL, Leonne took Calda to a shopping centre that had a children’s park. He wanted to let the family have privacy to grieve for their recently dead. He insisted that Miss Morgan should remain behind and be with

the Morgan family, the man she sometimes thought a stranger who once wished her dead had it not been for her grandpa who gave her wings to fly.

She led Specca to the study room, where they were joined by Yenna and her fiancé Clement. Gradah's young twins tagged along behind their big sister Yenna. Their Mom, according to her plan, was busy preparing the first family's last supper.

Both the Morgan wives' commitment to their husband was as strong as their jealousy for one another in their insecurity. It is this jealousy that Aggley was manipulating, inciting one to eliminate the other, each in her own way. She would solely inherit Morgan. They did not see the evil in it, nor realise that where evil was involved everyone often lost, which was something Aggley must have already known. The loser and the winner often lived in regret and pain for the rest of their lives.

Mina usually liked to sit in the garden under a tree shade to read a book when she wanted to be alone. This time she did so waiting for the drama to unfold.

Grandah was seated at the pavilion with some of the remaining guests who had stayed behind to have a meal.

"Thank you, Miss Morgan, for securing a fortune for us," Clement was telling his big sister where they were in the study. "Mom may not have clearly come out to thank you but take it from me, you are a hero. I hope you shall give me a job at one of the Smith companies!" He hugged her.

"You will never know your unique abilities until you try your hands at something extraordinary. I thank God for the skills Grandpa taught me. Your skill earns you money, but work is what you are born to do. Your work gives you fulfilment. You belong to the Smith family, and you are entitled to the Smith family businesses too, Clement and our dear sister Specca."

"I am sure my sister Specca and I were away from grandpa's home for too long to have gained entrepreneurial skills from him, but we shall be fast learners." Clement observed.

"Well, no worries, we are a family, and everyone shall find their place in Smith's businesses. I am sure you two have experience in something that I can learn from. The more I share, the more I will learn. Be open to new possibilities, Clement."

They were interrupted by Aunt Aggley, who knocked and walked in with a dish of food and fruit juice in a jug. She went and brought plates.

“My brother’s children,” she said to them, “here is your food. Serve before it is cold,” she invited them smiling. Aggley was a childless spinster and always showed them kindness. But she was good at acting.

“Thank you, Aunt Aggley for the food,” Clement replied with a big smile.

She had brought with her a rose flower for each of them. She promised them her care and affection, now that her brother Morgan is gone.

They placed the flowers on the table saying that they would find a vase to put them after they had eaten.

“Specca, kindly serve the twins and yourself first,” said Miss Morgan. “I, Clement and his wife-to-be Yenna, can wait as we don’t want to cut short this discussion. It feels good to be here together as siblings and should stick together. I am sure Dad would have been proud.”

“No worries, Naila. I shall serve all in a minute,” said Specca.

“The children look as hungry as I am, but they can’t feed with the juice glaring at them,” she said and poured herself a glass, and more of the juice in two little glasses for the Gradah twins. Specca and the twins downed the juice. Then she started serving the food on plates for everyone as they tried to help.

Miss Morgan was not paying attention as she listened to Yenna expressing her surprise that Naila looked too young to have accomplished such great feats making the Smith companies so successful. Her fiancé, Clement, echoed her surprise, with the three of them seeming to have forgotten about the food.

They were suddenly interrupted by groans of pain before they heard a thud as Specca fell on the floor vomiting blood. Turning to look, they saw the twins writing on the floor, also vomiting blood. They started screaming. Yenna, being a doctor, instantly knew the vomiting was from poison, and urgently directed Clement and Miss Morgan what to do and try to resuscitate the twins as she tended Specca.

Unable to help Specca and thinking fast, she frantically looked around the study for a sharp object pulling all the drawers before she saw a pair of scissors. On her mind was to save the baby. She took the scissors and used them to open Specca's tummy as life was draining out of the pregnant mother.

Yenna spanked the beautiful baby’s bottom to induce a cry which the baby vigorously did to announce his entrance into this world. She was crying, as were Clement and Miss Morgan, both for losing the twins and for the joy of a new life.

“We have a miracle baby Morgan Junior,” said Miss Morgan, taking it upon herself to name the baby. “He is a true reincarnation of his namesake!” she added.

With the birth, another tragedy had occurred in the family, this time losing three family members at the same time.

“Had I known that Specu would not live to see tomorrow,” said Miss Morgan sobbing, “I would have told her how much I loved her, and how sorry I was of our separation as children when I had to live with Grandpa. How I wish she had listened to me to remain in Kenya as we came to bury Morgan. Why did she have to die on the day of her father’s burial?”

In the meantime, the screams and the commotion in the study had attracted the attention of Mina and Gradah. They came rushing into the room only to begin screaming at the sight of the three standing children whose clothes were soaked in blood, as three of their other children lay motionless on the floor. The mothers rushed to their children on the floor, Mina to her daughter Specu and Gradah to her twins. The pain they felt after realising they were dead was incomprehensible. The two mothers were now screaming and crying uncontrollably. Their world seemed to have crushed down on them for losing their youngest children. And yet each mother was guilty and knew that Aggley had something to do with it.

But there was no time to think that, as the children were carried to the ambulance that had taken only mere minutes to arrive once it was summoned. They hoped against hope that the paramedics might do some magic and bring back to life the three souls.

“How could we lose three lives in a single day,” Miss Morgan wondered out loud. “Who wants us all dead, and for what?”

“This is unbelievable,” said Clement, trembling with rage. “One minute we were happy siblings chatting along, and the next three of us lay dead! Why them? Why now?” He felt guilty not to have protected his younger sister and the twins, who he had come to like. He felt helpless.

“When are these deaths going to stop, or is it the new normal for us, Clement?”

“It had better not be! We have to refuse this happening to us, Miss Morgan. God have mercy on us.”

Saying this, Clement felt that he must take charge. It also came to him that he had never felt the need to assert himself before because his dad Morgan

never gave him the chance. His dad had never inspired him or encouraged him to take responsibility as a man of the house in his absence to look after his mom and sister. Now he had to find the courage to become the new head of the Morgan family, now that his father was dead.

The mourners still in the compound after Morgan's funeral could not hide their shock, wondering what had befallen the family losing five members within a very short time. They now had to regroup console and help the family where they could.

All the food cooked that day was kept aside as they wondered how poison could have got into it. They waited for the police to collect samples to analyse whether the food had anything to do with the deaths. This was puzzling as it seemed to have only affected Morgan's children, while everybody else including the guests looked fine.

Miss Morgan nearly fainted to think that Calda might have been among the dead children had Leonne not taken her to the children's park. Her daughter was always in the company of Gradah's twins, Will and Hope. Having grown fond of the twins, Miss Morgan felt a deep pain and wondered how she was going to explain to Calda what happened to her two friends. She felt sorry for Gradah and her mom, knowing that as a parent herself, other parents always count on their children's potential. Now, the three siblings would forever remain young in the family's hearts.

EVERYONE NOW SPOKE of Morgan in good light, and they wondered why such a misfortune should befall his two families of Mina and Gradah. They remembered him as a man who looked after his family with dignity and wisdom and always wanted the best for them. The question, however, remained why anyone would want to finish his family. This was what was also in Miss Morgan, who was all tearful feeling sorry for the two mothers, Mina and Gradah.

"Who is this serial killer who could do this to us?" she mourned. "Why should it be the Morgans to deserve this?"

She prayed to God that the Morgans and the Smiths in general should not suffer any more tragedy.

Looking at her mom Mina, she thought that she looked the saddest she had ever seen for losing Speca. She had turned pale, somewhat making her veins

more prominent. She also seemed to have suddenly aged and looked ten years older. She appeared very vulnerable.

Still, only the two parents, Mina and Gradah knew what had happened with each of them thinking she was responsible for the deaths.

MINA DISENGAGED HERSELF and went to her bedroom and sat on the floor cursing Aggley for persuading her to poison the food with the assurance that only Gradah's children would be affected.

A moment later, Gradah entered the room, trying to force herself to stay calm. She couldn't and became hysterical, loudly cursing herself for poisoning the juice that killed her children. She had not noticed Mina in the room. They turned simultaneously and reached out for each other's hand.

They now knew it was Aggley that had turned them against each other with disastrous consequences. They realised they must unite and seek revenge on their evil sister-in-law. They may have wanted to eliminate each other but they both now suffered the agony of losing their children. It was a bitter lesson that it was not just their child's life that mattered but the other woman's as well. Each of them wished to die for the guilt they felt.

They made a pact to end their lives for betraying their dead children and for the shame of falling prey to Aggley.

Each of them took from their pockets the remainder of the substance given to them by Aggley.

Mina was the first to take her poison and followed this by covering her body on the bed waiting to die.

Gradah mixed her portion and got into bed beside Mina.

The poison did not seem to have any effect. They sat on the bed and faced each other. They were shocked to realise that the substance they had been given was not poison but something sweet and harmless that tasted like glucose. It was Aggley who had the actual poison, and it was she who had poisoned the food. Why she should have given them the harmless substance beat them to understand, but they felt a great sense of relief that they were not responsible for the death of their children. It felt like they had been given a second chance to live.

"Aggley deceived us!" shouted Mina. "We did not poison our children. Aggley has the poison!"

“Wow! It was just glucose,” said Gradah, shaking her head. “We both made a mistake Mina. We only have two choices: To pursue Aggley or feel sorry for ourselves and make excuses. We spoke bitter words to each other and harmed each other in our resentment and selfishness. I resented you the moment I saw you and realised Morgan had another family. Forgive me, Mina!”

“I have not been any better, Gradah. We need to understand each other now that Morgan is gone, especially because we have lost our children in the mix of it. Let us forgive each other. It is for the good of both our families and for their harmony, Gradah.”

“I agree with you, Mina. But let us also pursue Aggley for the children we have lost.”

“I have previously let a lot slide about Aggley’s interference in our family causing disharmony when Morgan was alive, but this time I will not allow her to interfere during his death. We are Morgans, after all. We are not asking for any favours from Aggley. She needs to be stopped before it is too late, Gradah.”

“Of course, Mina, take the lead.”

They both had tears in their eyes as Mina thought of her beautiful daughter and Gradah her little twins. The tears may have been in their eyes, but knew they had to be brave. The enemy had united them, making Mina more accepting of her co-wife.

When they left the room and went back into the compound, they found that the ambulance with the bodies had already left and that the police were looking for them to take their statements.

Somebody had already hinted to the police detectives that the person who should be of interest was Aggley, being the one who served the food leading to the death of the children before she disappeared.

The two mothers accompanied the police to Aggley's house.

They found her car parked in the compound and were surprised to find her relaxed on her sitting couch listening to music seemingly unconcerned about what she had done.

“Aggley Morgans, we are here to arrest you for killing Morgan’s Children,” said one of the two police detectives.

The police detectives wondered what kind of person they were dealing with as she tried to argue without seeming to be concerned about the tragedy that

had occurred. She, however, looked panicked at the sight of the two mothers who were asked to remain outside as the police did their work.

Mina thought she looked a happy woman and that the reason was probably because she had thought all the children had taken the poison, and not just the three. The dead tell no tales, a thought that probably made her feel safe that there were no witnesses.

It would seem that she was expecting a call about the deaths of the children with news of Mina or Gradah fighting each other upon the realisation that each had killed the other children. Only it did not turn out that way and instead received a call from the police to arrest her. When they searched the house, they found the evidence. They found the poison in a beautiful cosmetic jar still in her bag.

After the police had finished with their search, the two angry women got into the house. 'Hello merchant of death, Madam Aggley,' said Mina to Aggley not hiding hers and Gradah's intentions, "You have one foot in hell already."

Aggley saw the wounded anger in them that she thought looked as hot as chilli. She tried to compose herself and try and talk to them, but the women were like wounded lionesses ready to pounce on their common enemy.

It passed through Mina's mind how Aggley had made too much of herself being Morgan's sister, and how she had always tiptoed around her sister-in-law not to bruise her ego. Now Mina was ready to throw the respect out the window and was the first to unleash her wrath.

Mina pounced on Aggley and started pulling her long hair even as she hit her sister-in-law's head with her other hand's fist.

"Damn you, Aggley for all the humiliation!" said Mina angrily as she pummelled her sister-in-law. "There are many ways to make someone disappear from your world without killing them. I am not as desperate as you think. I was born in riches; it is only that my love for Morgan had temporally blinded me. I have nothing to lose now that I have lost everything I would have cherished of this land with my husband, Morgan, now gone. As you rot in jail, I will be merry making on my father's land. The world has no place for your kind.

"I want you to join your brother Morgan before he receives his heavenly reward so that you can share. Aggley, you have pushed me to a point of washing my hands of you. The same fate that befell your brother Morgan, as a curse, is back to claim for you, Madam Aggley.'

Mina then saw a big hardcover book lying on the table and hit Aggley on the head with it almost knocking her down. She again swung the book catching Aggley on the mouth knocking off one of her front teeth.

Aggley ran to the kitchen trying to get away from the two women, but Gradah was at her heels to unleash her angry wrath on this woman, who she now so hated. "I will give you your ticket to hell," she told her sister-in-law in a menacing and sadistic tone.

"You are the last of the Morgans, your parents, but you have ruined their good name," she screamed as she gave Aggley a smack on the face with a packet of wheat flour she had picked from the kitchen table, leaving her face dusted white from the flour.

The two women followed their assault on their sister-in-law with all manner of biting insults.

It finally sank in Aggley that while she may have wanted all the children dead in order to inherit her late brother, it was Morgan he had dishonoured. He had always been kind to his younger sister, letting her have everything she ever wanted. The reality of the situation seemed to dawn on her, seeing tears rolled down her cheeks in a deep sense of guilt.

She was overcome with sympathy for the innocent souls the poison had taken.

The police detectives had already informed her of the three lives that had been lost and therefore knew it was the pregnant Specca and the twins Will and Hope.

Her memories of Specca and how she would carry her niece when she was a little girl particularly struck her. She now could not believe that the girl who almost worshipped her had to die from her aunt's poison.

These thoughts then raced through her mind: *Was it worth it? Why do I realise this now and not an hour ago? The same mind that cooked the evil deed now becomes a tool of hope. Where is this demon that made me do it and when did an angel replace that devil? Who dwells in my mind? Why didn't the angel come to me first, other than the devil?*

Aggley had no answers to these questions. Still, she wondered whether the thought to kill her brother's children was from her own mind, or a whisper from hell.

After she had been handcuffed and was being led to the police car, she turned to look at her small mansion for the last time. She imagined how blessed she had been with the blissful life she had led without worry. She felt that all she ever needed was peace in her house, which she now could not enjoy. Her good and easy life of quiet was over.

Her thoughts turned to the day she so desired to own her parent's comfortable house. Now she had lost everything, including things that belonged to her grandmother. She didn't know how she was going to get back the house, or her own life despite almost clocking sixty years of age. She would be grandmother had she had a child of her own.

Aggley cast a final glance at the house and thought how her life had suddenly come crashing down. She turned and looked about at the neighbourhood she lived in for decades and whispered a quiet goodbye. Tears started trickling down her cheeks and fell on her breasts.

The two angry mothers had been following and trying to grab her from the hands of the detectives who did their best to shield their prisoner. They wanted to kill her.

"Killing her will not be the best way to make such a person pay for her sins, ladies," one of the detectives told them. "The best way to make her pay for her sins is to have her live with her guilt and the pain she will get from the departed souls that will forever haunt her in jail!"

"I somehow agree," said Gradah, "the hand of the law will never let her out of its sight. Torment will forever haunt her in jail before she bids this world a farewell."

"Neither will she escape her brother Morgan's torment. He will haunt her for life!" said the other detective, who looked elderly.

Aggley asked for the police vehicle to stop for a moment before they drove away after a thought crossed her mind. She was her grandmother's favourite and had been left with quite a bit of inheritance money. She now thought that the money made her arrogant and, coupled with merry-making enjoying life even as she grew older, she got late making a family of her own. It was this, she reasoned, that made envious of her two late brothers—Arthur and Morgan—families. Arthur left a son Brix, and Morgan four with his two wives. Only two now left after the poisoning tragedy. Guilt washed over her again and she did not think she would get out of jail alive. The crime she had committed was too serious for her to imagine freedom.

“Before you take me away. I know I may never make up for the pain I have caused, and the lives lost. I also know I shall not come out of prison alive. Kindly tell Clement to take over my small mansion and use it in any way he finds fit to benefit you. Anything else I might own should benefit the Morgans. You are the only family left,” she said sobbing, but no one paid her attention.

How could I have lacked foresight to see what was coming? Might I repent my sins with a priest while in jail so that God may forgive me and spare me from going to hell?

Going to heaven was more realistic to her than hoping for freedom. Other than this, she decided that the best she could do was wait to die so that she may finally rest in peace. It may take one year, twenty years, or days—but that was inconsequential now as she was done with life and its demands.

Morgan's lawyer Robbie was hired by Mina to sue Aggley and he promised to put the final nail in her coffin. He loved Morgan, an agemate he cared for deeply.

“Anything for my friend Morgan. Posterity shall remember Morgan for his courage and deep love for his family and neighbours. He was a hard worker and lived by what he believed in. He participated in projects that lifted his community and even had a college named after him. Morgan was a good man.”

Though she had lost her children, Gradah was accepted as a Morgan family member. She said she hung around until the Aggley's murder case was determined. As usual, she was a freelance lover, and she and the lawyer had a great time.

Aggley's murder case was straight-forward. She was found guilty as charged.

CHAPTER TWENTY

Will And Hope

*The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong,
neither bread to the wise, nor riches to men of understanding,
nor yet favour to the men of skill,
but time and chance happen to everyone.
- Ecclesiastes 9:11*

GRADAH STOOD BY THE CASKET as mourners viewed the bodies of the twins, Will and Hope. They were in the same coffin with their arms on each other's shoulders. They had a smile on their faces, not agony as one might expect given the way they died. Will was in a black suit, a white shirt, and a bowtie. His nails were well-manicured, and his face was well-done. Hope was in a white princess dress and a tiara, her hair well brushed and nails done in a beautiful natural polish. They looked like sleeping babies or dolls. Their late dad Morgan's good looks showed on them, and they looked adorable.

A mourner observed how twins tend to have a special relationship between them and always feel connected even when they are apart. It, therefore, seemed somehow appropriate that Hope and Will should have died at the same time.

Though she did not show it standing by the casket, the mother was overwhelmed with grief. She could not come to terms with their having gone so soon. Her sense of emptiness was beyond description. She blamed it on

Morgan's deceptions and the Smiths generally for the misfortune that befell her babies.

Soon, the priest started speaking to move forward with the funeral ceremony.

"The only problem with humanity is a lack of love," he said. "Love breeds tolerance and peace. Had people seen each other as members of the family even when they are not related, we would not be burying these beautiful souls today."

Just then, raindrops started hitting the ground. Seeing this, the priest said, "We can lower the bodies to the grave as we continue with the sermon."

The rain started beating hard as the casket was being lowered, sending mourners scampering for shelter. Some went to their cars, as others took cover under the trees. Even the priest took shelter under the trees as the now very heavy downpour disrupted the funeral. Rainwater started flowing into the grave even as it washed away some of the soil set aside for the burial.

Only the mother and some family members remained by the graveside. To save the situation, a mourner managed to find a tractor with a shovel machine and filled the grave with a mound of soil. There was no time for the usual citation of finality by the priest of "ash to ash and dust to dust."

Mourners who had brought flowers for the funeral started placing them on graves nearest to them in the cemetery as they hurried to their cars to get out of the rain. Soon, only the Morgan family members remained to the end.

AS THE FAMILY sat by the fire that had been lit in the compound that evening, each had their own thoughts about the expected journey back to Africa to rest Speca at her roots in Timau in keeping with her mother's wishes.

Mina left to go and sleep but could not as she tossed and turned with grief. She thought about the greed that had killed her husband and sent his sister Aggley to jail. Yes, money is good, it can buy someone freedom, but what are the lessons learned?

She wondered whether as a mother she would be able to contain her two other children, Naila and Clement, or they would tear at each other in their ambition to succeed in the family business. Although Miss Morgan had accepted everyone's right to the family and its property, the thought left Mina feeling vulnerable. She felt like a prodigal daughter who had foregone her

wealth to chase a life that never was. She felt that she had to be the anchor to hold the family together.

She prayed for divine wisdom to handle Miss Morgan without hurting her ego for the great wealth she now commanded. She needed to tame her son Clement, who she knew took after his father. He could be arrogant and selfish if not closely watched. He, however, was a hard worker and respected others' space, unlike his dad. She also worried about Specca's newborn son, Morgan Junior. Mina had immediately taken charge of the baby with the death of the mother and needed to plan well for him. Looking after the boy would keep her busy.

Before this, she had looked forward to helping Miss Morgan look after Calda, who she loved very much. She now wondered whether looking after Morgan Junior might not take too much of her time to also be there for Calda. She told herself she would find a way to strike a balance between her two grandchildren. She was seated at her bedroom balcony as these thoughts passed through her mind.

THE THREE ELDER CHILDREN, Naila, Clement, and Yenna, were lost in their thoughts and had nothing to say.

"What sin had Morgan committed to deserve three of his children murdered?" Yenna asked, not expecting a reply from the others.

Now Morgan is the king of the graveyard, with three of his descendants dead, Miss Morgan seems to think.

After losing Specca, and the twins Will and Hope, sleep was frozen away for some time for all the family members.

GRADAH AND ROBBIE were left at the cemetery in his car after the funeral. They were waiting for the rains to subside.

"Gradah, I know you have a long way to go before you heal from the loss of your children, Will and Hope, and the loss of your love Morgan," he said compassionately. "I would like you to marry me. It will help ease your pain. I want to help you heal, as you make me complete, dear," he kissed her and slipped a ring on her finger.

He had no idea she would be marrying for the third time in three years after Wafula and Morgan. It didn't matter to her, all she cared about were the

magical words “marry me” that were calming to her amid the chaos of the rain in her kids' burial.

“The feeling is mutual, Robbie. I am afraid to face this life alone with all these misfortunes. The last thing I want is to go back to my country and leave my two kids buried in a foreign land. Loving you shall give me a shoulder to lean on here in France and an opportunity to be close to them tending their graves. Yes, Morgan was a great dad to my children and a great husband, but it is his deceits that have caused all this damage. But I forgive him because his first family are my in-laws with my surviving child Yenna now married to Morgan's son, Clement.”

“That is a good decision, Gradah. Let us be together. We can have more children to take the place of the ones you lost. I love you so much.”

It was a while before they realised that they were the only ones left at the cemetery. Everyone else had long left after the grave was covered. With the rain now having stopped, they walked to the grave to have a moment with Will and Hope and lay their flowers on it.

“I promise to get you back, Will and Hope,” she assured them. Then turning to Robbie, she said, “We should try our luck today before their spirits begin their rest in heaven.”

In her grief, Gradah believed her two kids would come back. She was not going to wait. Beside the twins' grave was a raised stone, on which she sat and raised her skirt urgently, signalling Robbie what to do. It would be a treat Robbie would never forget. Heaven might have been happy to award them their request maybe.

MISS MORGAN RECALLED how her mom Mina was mad when she realised Specá's baby was named Morgan after her husband. She would hear none of it. She wanted her grandchild to be named Smith Junior, after her father. She refused the baby to be named after Morgan. She also wanted Specá buried next to her father Smith and mother Calda. Everyone agreed to that but begged her to let Specá name her baby Morgan to honour her deceased dad. Before she had died, she had already been referring to the baby growing inside as Morgan Junior. It was not Mina's call to name the baby, they argued, but Specá's even though she was now gone. Mina had to tearfully agree, and it

seemed the baby understood with the beautiful toothless smile he gave that seemed to say, "Yes, I am Morgan Junior."

GRADAH FINALLY WENT BACK to the house and was accompanied by his love Robbie. They looked radiant and happy. Seeing the happiness she showed, everyone wondered whether Gradah had grieved her children at all. She introduced Robbie to the family explaining that they were already engaged. No one commented about this even as they wished the new couple well. They said they wanted to leave but promised to join everyone at the airport to escort Specia to her burial in Kenya.

"Let us share a meal, people, before you disappear on us," suggested Mina, who had just come down from her bedroom. Now that Gradah was getting married, she was pleased that the competition between her and Gradah was over.

"Sure," Robbie accepted the invitation. "We are not in a hurry," he added, making himself comfortable in the boys' corner where there was booze.

When the subject came up, no one in the family had a problem anymore with Clement and Yenna becoming a married couple.

Only Mina and Gradah knew how this may not have been possible had either of their plans succeeded in killing each other's children.

"Now that Morgan is gone, we need to agree on the way forward," Mina suggested.

Clement wanted to say something first. "I am sorry about what the family has gone through. It has been a very trying moment for all of us, but we who are lucky to be alive must continue living. I would like to request your blessings towards my marriage with Yenna. Our relationship has not been influenced by any of you, my two moms. We met in Singapore, and we fell for each other. Our marriage shall keep the two families close together as we give you more grandchildren. We are expecting a son," he announced, turning to hug Yenna.

Gradah could not help shedding tears of joy at the news. To her, it felt like news of the reincarnation of her lost little son. She would have liked to see her son grow up but now felt she had a chance to see it happen through her grandson.

Mina was likewise pleased to be expecting a third grandchild.

"I want to say something," said Gradah rising from her chair. "I have no claim to Morgan's wealth. I have nothing left for me. The only riches my

husband gave me were my late twins. Now that they are with their dad Morgan in heaven, I need to get out there and make a new life with Robbie. I beg your pardon that I did not know that Morgan was already a family man when I met him. He deceived me!" she said almost in tears.

Mina picked up from where Gradah had stopped. "Now that your daughter Yenna is marrying my son, Clement, let them decide whether they will keep this home or move on and live elsewhere. I am happy for you, Gradah. You have already replaced your pain with hope. Robbie is a great man and not a liar like Morgan. May God give you more children with Robbie. May they survive the worldly storms that may come their way."

Clement replied explaining what they planned to do with the house. "My moms, this is your home because it belongs to my wife Yenna and me. We shall rent it out for a while through my cousin Brix until we decide on the way forward. In the meantime, we are geared to be in Africa. Miss Morgan needs a life too. Leonne is waiting to tie the knot with her. Mom, your hands are already full again bringing up Specu's baby."

"Excuse me, Clement," Miss Morgan said. "Baby Morgan shall be my responsibility," she declared.

"I am already raising a child, and I want to raise Morgan Junior properly. We do not want another spoilt brat of the family. We have dealt with so much of that already. Mama does not need to raise another child; she needs to find herself too, because even for her there could be love somewhere waiting for her."

"Thank you, Miss Morgan," replied her mom. "It would have been a tall order raising my granny given the situation. I, too, need my 'me time' for once."

"By the way, I want to ditch the title 'Miss Morgan.' I am now Mrs. Naila Leonne."

Everyone cheered welcoming the new title.

"We are yet to bury Specu," said Clement. "All roads now lead to Kenya. Unfortunately, Aggley will have to miss the funeral despite being the only remaining member of Morgan's family. We have agreed between me and Brix to always stand in for Aunt Aggley as she rots in jail. She does not seem bothered that her brother is dead or that she brutally sent his children to be with him before their time."

Being reminded of this brought tears to Mina. "I shall despise Aggley all my life," she said sobbing.

“I am with you, Mina,” said Gradah in sympathy. “It is hard to forget the pain Aggley has caused this family.”

“We need to take a rest if we are to be on time for Specá’s final journey to Kenya tomorrow,” urged Mina, who was now calm. “How I wish she had agreed to remain in Kenya when we were coming to bury Morgan. Good night, everyone.”

LEONNE'S HANDS were on Miss Morgan, to which she gently gave in as they climbed into bed. She hoped it did not result in a second child while she had already agreed to bring up young Morgan Junior. She was thinking this to amuse herself. She already had a baby growing inside her.

“I should be a mother soon,” she said out loud. “Mom should not worry even though I’ve offered to look after baby Morgan. I feel sorry for her, though. her mom Calda passed away more than thirty years ago. She rarely remembers her. Her dad's sudden death, followed by that of the love of her heart Morgan, must be too much to bear. They both died without having forgiven each other. She was left indebted. And then a few days later she lost her daughter Specá. It has been a week of total misery for her! With Aunt Aggley now in jail, we can rest easy before departing for Kenya. I now fear this land of my husband Morgan like the plague. Only Brix will be accompanying us from France to bury his cousin Specá. They were born a few years apart but having lost his parents at a young age to an accident, Clement and Specá became his siblings and therefore must come with us.”

CHAPTER TWENTY ONE

Specia Morgan

Do not believe the smiling face. Believe the smiling heart.

THERE WAS NO REQUIEM MASS for Specia, following Grandpa Smith's wish that burials should happen within the shortest time possible. The family had to respect Grandpa's wish if Specia was to be buried on the land he had set aside for family members. The grave was prepared the day after the family arrived from France. They were wary of mourners, having been emotionally overwhelmed with those that had flocked into the compound in large numbers after both Grandpa Smith and Morgan died. The family members felt they needed time to recover from too much outpouring of grief by them.

This time, they did not buy new attire for the funeral. They used the same clothes they had bought for the previous funerals – Grandpa Smith's, Morgan's, and that of the twins Will and Hope. The clothes were only drycleaned for Specia's occasion. It was also decided that those who did not wish to keep the gowns after the burial could get rid of them. There were those in the family who felt that keeping the gowns would be traumatised to see them again in the future, as they would always remind them of the many lives they had lost.

The family may not have wanted mourners, but they came anyway. There seemed to be more animated conversations this time around between the mourners who could be seen in groups discussing. The rumour making the rounds among them was that Grandpa Smith had cursed her daughter Mina

for abandoning him. It was because of this, they said, that he favoured the granddaughter, Miss Morgan, to carry forward his legacy.

Miss Morgan thought to herself after she heard what they were saying: *It may be true Grandpa liked me, but where the hell do people say things they don't know much about. Do they know how Grandpa loved Mina, and would never have wished her ill, let alone curse her so that misfortunes befall her family?*

Miss Morgan noticed the mother of her two childhood friends among the mourners. She and her two friends, Njuki and Mwea who were twins, used to ride wheelbarrows racing each other in a popular game when they were children. She went to say hello to the old lady. Miss Morgan thought that speaking to her would be a good if small distraction from the events of the previous days. She held in her hands some the snacks they had bought at the airport, which she gifted her friends' mom.

"How are Njuki and Mwea? We lost each other after primary school," she said after their greetings. Their mother remembered her well.

Miss Morgan received with shock news from her that the twins had passed on the previous year. They had grown up to become drunkards, and it had all started in fight at a drinking den on the fateful night that claimed their lives. They had continued their fight at the homestead, leaving Njuki dead. His brother was set upon by angry neighbours for the killing but managed to escape badly injured.

"We looked for him everywhere in vain," explained the mother. "We received a message the following day that his body had been found lying by a roadside and had bled to death. That is how I lost my only children. Both of them were married. Njuki left a son, and Mwea two daughters. Unlike their husbands, the wives are responsible and hardworking women. I wonder whether they'll stick around with me or whether they will remarry. They are still very young."

The mother started sobbing after narrating what had happened to her sons. Miss Morgan could not help sobbing as well, both for the mother and for the loss of her two childhood friends.

She requested to see their graves, as her friends' home was in the neighbourhood. The mother obliged and was touched to see Miss Morgan plant a flower on each of his son's resting place. She was informed that her

friends' wives and children were at the Smith compound, which was the reason they weren't at home to receive her.

Miss Morgan remembered Njuki being a bully in school, but his brother Mwea was well-behaved. She suspected Njuki must have been the cause of the fight that resulted in their death.

Their mother composed herself before she spoke again. "They were not perfect, but they were loving sons," she said, "Should their wives choose to remain here, it will not be vain that they had married, as the wives being here will mean that I will not be left childless. The sad thing is that my boys were fighting over something their wives had disagreed with each other about. When shall women get more contented with what they have than what they lack?" she wondered, more thinking aloud than speaking to Miss Morgan.

Not sure how to respond, Miss Morgan said, "I am so sorry, Mom. May God ensure your sons souls rest in peace."

Miss Morgan then asked her to visit the Smith Foundation branch in Timau where she would leave a recommendation that Njuki and Mwea's orphaned children receive the foundation's support. She would later also enrol the three children in the school she and her two friends were students. It was still one of the best schools in Timau. Miss Morgan wondered why the mother had not shared her problems with Grandpa Smith when he was alive. He was generous and always willing to support where there was need. Njuki and Mwea's children deserved a bright future.

When she returned to the Smith compound, she found that nobody had even noticed she had left. She found everyone at dinner. She looked at the now empty chair where her grandpa usually sat at the dining table. She half-expected to hear a bon appetit, which he never failed to wish her anytime they sat to eat. She also had expected him to light a candle, another thing Grandpa Morgan liked. She nearly lit one but stopped as the scent from candle would have made her sad that he was now gone.

I need to move on as he had advised. "Time never waits, Miss Morgan," he had said. "Do not prolong your mourning, dear. Carry on with life. Beautiful flowers are yet to bloom even as the old ones wither."

As these words echoed in her mind, she opened a bottle of red wine. She wanted to get tipsy, and invited those who wanted to have a drink to share it with her as they ate. The drink seemed to bring out everyone's grief, which they had suppressed in order to cope. Mina seemed the one most overcome,

having been the most affected for losing her father, husband, and daughter all in the space of a few days. However, with her reawakened sadness was also hope there might come good tidings to make her full of life once again.

Everyone got drunk, each leaving the table at their own time. It was a peaceful night.

THE PEOPLE hired to prepare Specá's grave were already at work at dawn as the sun was rising. They discovered that they had forgotten some of their implements. One of them came to the house to ask for help. It was Miss Morgan who entered the dark-lit store to get what they wanted but stopped suddenly after seeing what looked like dismembered hands reaching out to her. She also saw things that looked like sleepy heads. She almost screamed with fright, only to discover that the dismembered hands were her Grandpa's old gloves. What looked like sleepy heads on a wheelbarrow were shovels.

Who left the ghostly items in such a frightening position?

She grabbed the shovels she wanted and hurried out as if something was after her in hot pursuit, catching the grave digger by surprise. She wished she had asked Leonne to get the items for her.

Miss Morgan then took a walk to Grandpa Smith's crypt to update him on the misfortunes that befallen his descendants. She also wanted to draw strength and wisdom from her grandpa's spirit to do the right thing and fairly share the wealth he had bequeathed the family without leaving anyone feeling cheated. She thanked God that the misfortunes had happened after Grandpa Smith was already gone; otherwise, she imagined they would have killed him.

At the grave, she said to Grandpa Smith, speaking in the same adoring voice she usually spoke to him when he was alive: "How is the afterlife treating you, Big Boy? I miss you a lot, Grandpa. Had you been around, maybe things would have turned out differently. Something happened and we lost four family members after you left. I wonder whether this is what you meant when you once told me that rotten fruits fall by themselves.

"Had you foreseen the deaths coming, Grandpa? If you had anything to do with it, may you hold your wrath, Grandpa! You hated Morgan and no sooner were you gone than he followed you. His body was not even cold yet than three of his kids followed him. This included the twins, Will and Hope, who you never met. I wonder why heaven summoned them. Was it angels or their dad Morgan, who claimed them and took my Specá as well? Was Specá taken to

take care of those babies? Look over us so that we may live our lives to the fullest, Grandpa!

“I saw your will and thank you for trusting the estate with me. Everyone has calmed down about it though I hope to make some changes and make it fair for everyone. I am now in your shoes, big boy. I can guarantee you they feel pretty big on me. I need to offload some responsibilities and live a less stressful life. You and I were a team, and I am not sure who to take your place. Some in the family have a different orientation on things and I am not ready for standoffs with them. I want us to live in harmony as you wanted. Allow me to channel your wisdom in words I can share with Mina and Clement. I beg of you, Big Boy.

“Give my love to Grandma Calda. I am sure you are with her. Also share my love with Specu, and the Morgan twins. I forgave him for the wrongs he did me. May he rest in peace knowing that we have nothing against him. He had a second wife called Gradah, the mother of the twins. She had not even mourned him before jumping on the next available boat. She is now Mrs Robbie. She married Morgan’s lawyer. I will soon be tying the knot with Leonne. And, by the way, I am expecting a second child, a boy. We plan to call him Smith Leonne. May your name live forever, Grandpa!”

She kissed his tombstone. She felt his calming presence as she spoke to him, and this comforted her. She was now ready for her sister Specu's burial.

MISS MORGAN NOTED that Mwangangi was at the burial accompanied by his wife. She thought the wife’s presence was because of Mina, realising that her old rival was back in Timau and might steal her husband. The wife – Stella’s mother – had to leave Germany so that she could be by her husband. She could not have known that Mina was too tired to enter into another relationship. Morgan’s death took with it her need for another love life. In any case, she had little grannies like Calda to think of, with others on the way by Miss Morgan and Clement. Add to these her housekeeping, which was still a lot. She had no time for Mwangangi, as Stella’s mom might have thought.

The skies had promised rain, but the weather was good and sunny. The burial was attended by a handful of people, mainly because many in the village may not have known Specu. The priest kept the funeral short, and everything went smoothly. He said a prayer that mourners found comforting:

May light always surround the Smith Family

May your hurts be healed, and love fill your lives

May your hearts embrace your new lives with your loved ones gone

May your trials become a source of new wisdom

May your every act of kindness count and laughter infect your lives

May your passion for life re-energise you

May you fulfil your deepest desire to reach your goals

My dear brethren, remember each day is a new day with its blessings. Every new beginning emerges from the ends of other beginnings. Never regret anything in your life that cannot be changed, or that cannot be undone, or forgotten. Take it as a lesson learned and move on. Change won't be automatic but don't let its disappointments catch you off-guard. Rise and face the hard work ahead.

As the proceedings continued, Calda told her mother that she was thirsty. Miss Morgan led her daughter from the congested graveside. She heard the priest ask the mourners to turn to Mark 10:27 in The New Testament. The priest read out the verse.

"But Jesus looked at them and said, 'With men, it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible.'" He finished the verse, then said, "There are so many impossibilities in our lives... but not with God. God will give us healing, financial breakthrough, successful marriages, job satisfaction and wealth, educating our children, paying our debts, happy family reunions, overcoming drug addiction, restoration of loss and many more. Trust that God will do it for you."

The voice of the priest faded as she walked away trying to calm Calda. As they walked to the car to get some juice, she distracted her by pointing to how the wind swayed the trees and their leaves seemed to rhythmically dance with the swaying trees.

She missed having the character of children don't-care attitude, which she found freeing, and which parents have no luxury to. Life accorded them responsibilities that can never be ignored. And whether one is happy, sad, idle, or busy, the responsibilities must be attended to; otherwise, the consequences are dire.

She remembered how before Calda had forced to take her outside the church Leonne had tapped her drawing her attention to the offering basket that was being placed on her hands by the person seating next to them. She

had been too absentminded to have already removed her offering from her bag and couldn't find it when she did. Leonne saved the day by placing a banknote in her hand. She not sure why she could not find the offering in her bag, but she had a separate envelope for the young priest. She told herself that she must remember to pass it to him when serving him a meal after the church service.

The priest and many who have attended have been part of this family for a long time. We used to visit the parish every month for a cup of tea with Calda and grandpa. This tradition shall die too with Grandpa gone, also because I shall be married in Rwanda and take my Calda with me. Mina follows a different faith altogether. Specu was buried by our priest courtesy of Grandpa Smith and me. I was deeply saddened to see and hear the sound of the soil being dropped into the grave to bury the casket. That sound has haunted me since Grandpa's burial. Leonne came to my aid and took Calda from my trembling hands. Calda had no idea what the event was about.

BY THE TIME Miss Morgan was done with Calda, the funeral was over. She found Clement had already arranged with the chef to offer guests a meal at the house. Seeing how even the seating arrangements were already done, it impressed her that Clement was proving to be someone the Smiths could count on.

Soon, everyone was enjoying a refreshment.

Let's celebrate our dead as this shall not be repeated again. Whether you show up in a burial or not, the ceremony ends on the day of the burial.

Miss Morgan held her mom Mina's hand to introduce her to the priest. She also wanted to inform him of her forthcoming wedding and give a happier tone to grief that came with the many family burials.

"I know people may not be OK with my wedding only two weeks after my sister Specu's burial," she explained to the understanding priest. "But my pregnancy will soon be showing, and I want to be in a fitting white gown. I want to be celebrated for once after being a loner for so long."

The priest agreed with her and saw nothing wrong with getting married soon after the burial.

In the meantime, Miss Morgan thought it unbelievable that her mom should be so comfortable around her. After losing Smith and Morgan, the two men that had ever mattered in her life, Miss Morgan knew she had now become her

mother's pillar. She was not only Mina's eldest but also the most stable compared with Clement, who was in many ways beginning in life.

I am now the only daughter of my mother, Mina. She looks up to me in so many ways. Never underrate your potential. Your season will come to shine. When did the tables turn?

She could not find an answer.

Wafula had also attended the burial in sympathy with the family and wanted to take the opportunity to see his ex-wife, Gradah. He was surprised to see that she had brought along a new lover. He pulled her aside the moment an opportunity presented itself, after her new husband, Robie, turned to discuss something with Alastair as they ate.

"What have you been up to, Gradah, now that you lost Morgan and his children?" he paused and continued before Gradah could reply. "You have been the talk of your office; how you messed our marriage and took your misfortune to Morgan's family," he said looking her in the eye.

"Offices never lack their gossips," she said finally. "You may be close to your staff as their boss, but they tell you little and yet have everything to say about you, from the way you dress, the time you report to the office and who you date, when you sleep in your house and with who. Offices are centres of gossip. I am engaged to Robie, who introduced himself as the lawyer representing Morgan family from France. I am set to exchange vows with him before leaving for France next week. You can open another line of gossip in the office, I couldn't care less. Let those who judge me continue to do so. Let their misunderstanding of who I am feed their gossip. What you guys think about me is none of my business, Wafula. The opinion of rumourmongers doesn't pay my bills. I will stick with the man who has given me hope during my time of loss and loneliness. You are married and should not worry too much about my worth to you. I have no doubts about my worth and how it keeps me shining. The hater's hate won't stop me from shaping my destiny, Wafula. I have nothing left for me in this country except our daughter Yenna, who is engaged to Clement, Morgan's son. I am still joined at the hip to the Morgan family. Take care of Yenna. I shall be coming over to visit her once in a while. Life waits for no one; I have to keep moving. My best world is the one I will create for myself."

Wafula did not interrupt her as she spoke. Then he asked, "Your parents and family do not matter to you anymore, Gradah?"

"I left their home ages ago. My parents are used to living without me. It is too soon to introduce my new suitor to them, but I shall do that before leaving the country. If I wait until the next time, it might be too late. They might not have long to live, Wafula. I want to go if you have nothing else to tell me. You replaced me with somebody else. You better get used to your new life."

Wafula was left speechless, but not without a sense of relief: Thank God I remarried. This woman is a gold digger. I cannot afford her. I am happy for my daughter, Yenna. She is all I need of Gradah. Gradah doesn't give a damn what people say, whether they think she is too uncaring or crazy. It is up to her, after all, to decide the journey of her life.

She had nothing to live for anymore in her motherland seemed to lose her proposition. After all, a change is as good as a rest, especially with husband and children dead, and her daughter's new beginning in her new marriage.

Speaking with Wafula, it reminded Gradah to ask her daughter Yenna to clear her house after she left the country. She was only going to take with her a suitcase with her essential items and leave everything else in the house. With that done, she was going to concentrate on giving Robbie children to fill the void of those she lost.

Wafula gave a defeated laugh, frustrated by Gradah's lifestyle and her don't-care attitude. He couldn't understand her.

Is she an animal in human skin to show no feelings? Wafula now felt angry with her and didn't want anything to do with the woman or anyone at that moment. He felt like going to Nanyuki and get himself drunk.

In his irritation, he signalled Musembi, who had accompanied him to the burial, to go with him. That was fine with Musembi, as he did not want to spend the night at his in-laws. They left without informing anybody and headed to Nanyuki, where they would spend the night.

"I am so depressed, Musembi," he admitted as they left the homestead.

"Does this concern your good luck charm, madam Gradah? To forget her just like you did her ghost sister Sassy. Let her be, you have my sister for wife now, and she is equally a very pretty girl."

"Gradah is a total catastrophe," said Wafula, "She messed me and Morgan. Not sure what she will do to the Robie guy. I know I am a lucky man. Your

sister is an angel. I had married someone who had no idea how to love. Or what does it mean her going for Robie and into a third marriage in the same year?”

“You need to knock off clinging to Gradah, Wafula! Gradah is just trying not to lose herself no matter what.”

“Why another marriage a week after losing her husband and children? People might think she killed her kids with Morgan so that she could remarry!”

“Stop being so attached to her. Gradah is trying to find her new self again. It must have been tough on her, and changing everything in her life is the easiest way for her to recover maybe. She lost you, she lost her love Morgan, and lost her children. She has lost a part of herself. Let her be, my friend!”

“I was just trying to give her advice, but she was too proud to listen to me, Musembi.”

“I agree that Gradah is a proud person, but the ship left the dock long ago. The sooner you get that in your head, Wafula, the better.”

“You can say that again, Musembi. The drinks are on me tonight. You can take care of where we will sleep. My kids are fine with their sister in-law Stella. You are now the brother I never had.”

They were soon in Nanyuki town and didn't waste time ordering their first round of drinks. They were joined by other Smith Freights staff members that had attended the funeral. Such drinking often happened after funerals, leading Wafula to comment, “Burials and merry making are relatives!”

CHAPTER TWENTY TWO

Ownership

*At least there is hope for a tree: If it is cut down,
it will sprout again, and its new shoots will not fail.
- Job 14:7, The Holy Bible*

WITH THE LAST OF THE BURIALS OVER, there was a sense of emptiness even as life for members of the Smith family returned to normal. The large compound, now deserted of mourners, gave the home an air of loneliness. Life, however, had to go on.

Individual family members, however, handled it differently. Mina was left feeling unimaginably lonely after Spec's burial. While she had agreed that Miss Morgan should look after Morgan Junior, Spec's son, she now wanted to be the one solely responsible for bringing him up. Miss Morgan understood, and let her mother take care of the boy.

Morgan Junior would not only keep her company but give her comfort that she had something of her departed daughter. For reasons she could not explain, wanting to raise her grandson recalled her guilt when she gave up Miss Morgan to be brought up by her father Smith when Naila was still a young girl. Mina wanted to compensate for this by raising her grandchild, Morgan Junior. She apologised to Miss Morgan again for growing up without her parents. To Mina, Miss Morgan must have suffered because of this, but to Miss Morgan it was the best thing that had ever happened to her. Life with Grandpa Smith was not only the most blissful, but it made her who she was. She appreciated the knowledge her grandpa had given her, in addition to his belief in her

entrusting her the stewardship of the family wealth on behalf of the rest of the family.

“Catch some sleep, Mama,” she urged her mother. They were in Grandpa Smith's bedroom which Mina had taken over. “Little Morgan is already asleep,” she added. “We can finish with the other arrangements later.”

Miss Morgan said a prayer with her mom and kissed her good night. She tucked in her blankets and left.

Little Morgan shall be a handful for Mina, but it is true that it will be for the best she takes responsibility bringing him up. My hands will soon be full when my baby comes. Morgan Junior can be coming to play with my son and Clement's daughter, who is also coming soon. They will make good playmates for little Morgan.

Mina pulled up the blanket to better cover herself as she struggled to sleep. She was physically and emotionally exhausted from the month-long grief sending off loved ones. But she accepted the solitude that was now hers on the bed without her husband. It somehow brought to her memories of her as a child when she would beg to sleep in this same bed with her parents Calda and Smith. Now the bed was hers and when Morgan Junior started living with her, she would be sharing it with him until he was a bit older to sleep in a cot. There also would be days when her two other grandchildren would come around for a sleepover after they were born.

Her mind turned to her two surviving children, Clement and Naila. They could never take Specia's place in her heart, but they would always be there.

They give me comfort, even though Naila is a bird freed from her cage and has carved her path at work and will often be in Nairobi. She has a husband to love and two kids to take care of. Clement is still finding his way and is on course to succeed like his sister.

IN HER ROOM, Miss Morgan felt the baby kick in her tummy, making her a bit uncomfortable. Like her mother, she too needed a good rest, but her mind was still active. She thought of Gradah, and how some society sometimes overlooked widows thinking them helpless even as some married women thought them new competitors out to steal husbands. Miss Morgan saw it as interesting that Gradah could drop a husband and find another in a day, seeing her status change from Mrs Wafula to Mrs Morgan almost immediately. And no sooner had her second husband died than she was already Mrs Robbie.

Miss Morgan referred to her as the gold digger, madam Gradah, and recalled that night in the club when she and Morgan had eyes for no one else but each other. She recalled that the twins were almost five years old and Gradah had not met a single family member from Morgan's side until that day in the homestead when Morgan fell and died. She didn't seem much troubled by her husband's death. Even now, Miss Morgan thought, her sadness appeared to be from a distance. It felt as if her losing the twins was good riddance because her grief seemed so short-lived. She seemed to have forgotten everything about her previous life immediately after she found her new love. Replacing Morgan with the next man seemed to be very gratifying for her. She, however, seemed to have regrets. She felt that she could not go back to live in her home country Kenya for fear of being ridiculed for carelessly losing her children and second husband within days of each other. Getting the lawyer bachelor as soon as she did must have felt great. It must have felt great for the lawyer too, Miss Morgan mused.

MINA, ON THE OTHER HAND, was also struggling to find sleep, and remembered her deceased husband. She thought that she had always been contented in her marriage with Morgan even though it was not perfect. For her, it was a safe refuge guaranteed for life. Unlike Gradah, she was heartbroken and didn't want to find another man. This reminded her that she had always thought Morgan would never fall for anyone else until her co-wife Gradah showed up.

For as long as I can remember, Morgan had a non-committal policy. How did Gradah change his mind? Mina wondered. It probably didn't matter how his mind got changed and, either way, what remained now were the scars from his death and the death of the other family members.

With this thought, she fell into a deep slumber from which she never woke up till nine the next morning. She had not woken feeling that rested in a long time.

LEONE WOKE UP EARLY the next day and, finding Naila busy with Morgan Junior, attended to his daughter Calda and got her some milk. Naila was, however, a bit tired and wanted to stay in bed a bit longer after finishing

with Morgan Junior. Leonne understood and was happy to keep Calda and little Morgan entertained after serving Naila breakfast in bed.

Yenna was as tired as Naila. Her pregnancy was two months older than Miss Morgan's. She, too, wanted to lie in. Mina would soon be flooded with grannies. Leonne and the kids joined Clement at the Smith Gardens office, where he was taking over as the boss. The staff seemed to like him as he got acquainted to them. Clement was soft-spoken like his mom Mina. It was Specia who had taken after their dad. After the introductions, Clement took a tour of the farm accompanied by Calda and Leonne, who was giving him tips on how to run a business.

"A mature and successful person is the one who develops a thick skin to take negative comments criticising them. One should accept the criticism and digest them without losing temper, or their self-confidence. Success has its setbacks. The trick is to keep the course and not be swayed by whatever challenge one finds along the way. You should enjoy the good days even as you ponder the tough ones. Remember that determination and challenges are the two sides of the same coin if you are to succeed. Ego is a small three-letter word that can destroy a twelve-letter word – relationship. Workers need to trust you; they also want a leader they can count on to keep the same harmony in the office they enjoyed with your grandpa and Miss Morgan. I already like the way you conduct yourself around them. Trust them in their skills to do what they know best and learn from their experience."

"With my little experience," said Clement, "I plan to solve problems as they come. I can never be Grandpa Smith or Miss Morgan, but I will do my best. I can only learn from Miss Morgan because Grandpa is no longer here to impart his wisdom. I also know the staff members at Smith Gardens will have a lot to teach me, and I believe it will be a great learning experience. Thank you for the advice and support helping me shape my life. I'll not let you down, dear brother."

After their tour of the estate, they had a drink and toasted to Clement's success.

THE SETTING SUN cast a beautiful golden colour in the horizon as Miss Morgan took a walk along the route that she and Grandpa Smith had frequented when he was alive. It felt good and decided she would be taking the

walk as often as possible whenever she came visiting Timau with Leonne and Calda.

I wonder why youth find the village boring. It doesn't have the noise of town, just beautiful songs from birds as they chase each other to mate or play. There are also squirrels here and there and fascinating insects. The fishponds offer other beautiful sites. They attract pelicans and other fish-eating birds. I love to watch these birds eat. Grandpa loved nature and had designated some fishponds to provide them with food. Sometimes they can be pretty wasteful. They get a fish, kill it and not eat it, and go for another one. It is however a good thing because the fish they discard feeds scavengers. I think we should set aside small area as a kind of bird sanctuary. It would make a beautiful site to come and see the colourful birds. Grandpa had wanted to have something like that. I wonder whether Clement would think of such a thing. He seems too business-minded and may want an area such as the one dedicated to the birds be utilised to earn income for the company. Besides, he is a town boy and may not be very interested in nature.

She was overcome with sadness as she retraced the route she walked with Grandpa Smith. She missed him dearly, thinking of how the land they used to walk responded to his commands to be fruitful, as if the land was a person. She soon caught herself with a reprimand to let it be a closed chapter; Grandpa Smith's priorities and desires were different from hers.

She remembered him once telling her, "The world is what it is: a place with its own rules and ways of operating. Everything comes with its season and the season after it brings with it other things. The things you cherish today you may not be excited about tomorrow. Learn to embrace change, my girl."

She reminded herself that it was up to her now to forge her future but must embrace her past with Grandpa Smith if she was to forge that future and that of the family.

Your fingers wiped away my tears many a day. This shall forever be cherished more than the thousand hands that clap for our family businesses success. I will do the best for your descendants, Grandpa! I promise this with my mouth to you, Grandpa. Please rest assured, my great Hero Grandpa Smith.

She came to a path that led to a hill that overlooked a forest close to the homestead. She took the path because she had always admired the forest, which she was once told had been in existence long before her great-grandfather was born. She wanted to do her best to preserve the woodland for as long as she lived.

She arrived back home almost at the same time as Leonne and Clement. Calda immediately complained to her that she had fallen and bruised her arm. She showed Miss Morgan the arm. Calda hated the sight of blood but loved to climb on things, often hurting herself. Miss Morgan put a band aid on the bruise to make Calda happy that Mom had done something to the arm. She was soon active and almost hurt her head after missing her step jumping from a sofa and landed on the floor. In the meantime, Clement and Leonne were preparing fish they had caught at the ponds for lunch. Miss Morgan was proud to see how close the two had become.

Looking at Leonne, she could already see themselves in the beautiful house Grandpa Smith had built for her and had just been completed. He had built it so that she would be near him when she and Leonne finally got married. Clement so liked the house that he requested to occupy it with his wife Yenna. Miss Morgan was glad to oblige and escorted them after dinner that night to warm their brand-new home, which overlooked the farm dam.

WHEN MORNING CAME, Miss Morgan went to her grandpa's grave. The great Smith did the magic to keep her spirits up. She laughed at the thought of Grandpa Smith and his Jeep with the "E" light always on, on the fuel gauge. The thought of it made her wonder whether it had made him happy for the embarrassment he caused her jumping on a motorbike taxi to rush to Timau for fuel over and over again, and yet there was always enough diesel in the farm to run the generator. It amused her that this was all because he was not happy with government policy to raise the cost of fuel. *It wasn't worth the trouble.*

She liked the smile on his face on the picture imposed on his gravestone. She removed her phone to replay old clips of him and her Grandma Calda captured when they would be walking, cycling or eating together when both were alive. She remembered his smiley face always welcoming her questions, many of them nonsensical. This morning, she wanted to draw strength from the spirit of her grandfather and deliver a message.

"Grandpa," she spoke to him as if he was seated next to him, "I know it must be hard for you to know the situation you leave your loved one after you die. But it is even harder for those left behind with the grief and sense of loss. Nothing feels the same anymore since you've been gone. Everything changed, especially for me since your heirs came and I don't want to do anything that may make us fight over your legacy. I want your spirit to be there with me

when I speak with Mina and Clement. The house you built for me now belongs to your grandson Clement. He took over the house and is more excited than I would have been to occupy it. Your daughter Mina has been lost in her world as you had predicted. It is she that deserves your mansion. It doesn't belong to your granddaughter Calda anymore. Your daughter Mina is attached to it, having grown up in it. She needs it more so now that she has left France to live here after Morgan's death, and because of the mayhem that followed with his sister Aggley. Just like your bride Calda, my grandma, left her parents and came to live with you, I will leave this home and my grave will be in Burundi, the land of my love and the father of my children, Leonne. I loved Timau as long you were alive but not anymore. With your heir Mina back, I feel like a guest here."

She wiped away some tears before continuing.

"I will be visiting you as often as possible. Many thanks for raising my Calda. You gave her a good foundation. She is always asking for you. It will take her time to forget you, Grandpa! Keep invading my dreams, big boy. I wake up jolly after your visits in my sleep.

"Do not forget to be there to witness my wedding. Leonne is in Cloud Nine, a daddy-of-two-to-be and a ring for me in a few days to come. Thank you for your advice to keep him close. I love him so much, Grandpa. I remember how you ran after me with a cane to beat me for asking about what happened to Mama and her first love Mwangangi. I remember your statement that I should never give up on those I love. I take back my anger at my parents, Grandpa, now that Morgan and his life with Mina is gone with him. It turned out fine in the end. Forever in my heart, Grandpa!"

She felt energised after talking to him. Her life had always revolved around her grandpa, even in death she felt he still had to make decisions about her life and work.

She was now ready for the family meeting to officially introduce her love Leonne and introduce Mina and Clement to Smith Gardens. They needed to agree as a family on what each one of them wanted and let each other be. Miss Morgan saw her grandpa's house from his perspective. Without him around the place would not feel right to her and the sooner she forgot it the better. Visiting her mom was a better option than settling there with Leonne and their little princess Calda. Life was going to be different for Calda away from home in Timau, but she was still young to adapt wherever they would settle. Calda's

nagging questions about when her grandpa would come back from his visit to the Lord were slowly reducing with her dad Leonne's being around her all the time, taking over as her father figure.

It somehow felt harder for Miss Morgan to be a parent, and she thought it was because she had the benefit of growing up with her grandfather. And yet she did just fine as a parent, recalling how she was in tune with her daughter Calda as that day at the funeral when she led her away to quench her thirst.

In the meantime, Clement moved in with his wife, Yenna, as Mina took in Morgan Junior. Naila looked forward to living as a family with Leonne and Calda. She acknowledged that he had waited for too long but was now finally getting paid for his patience.

WHEN LEONNE WOKE UP, he was surprised that Miss Morgan was not in the bedroom. He called Clement to find out whether he knew where to find her. Clement managed to trace her to their grandpa's tomb. After sighting her, Clement sat down at a distance to wait for his sister Naila to finish her talk with Grandpa Smith. She didn't look sad, so he knew it must have had something to do with missing their grandpa. She finally noticed Clement and walked to him.

"Either life is a daring adventure, or it is nothing, Clement," she said when she reached him. "Nothing gives one pleasure like discovering your own a fortune. I love the fortune I forged with grandpa and will die for it. I hope Smith Gardens shall make your future. Your insistence to take the home by the lake tells me you are determined to be a part of the Smith story."

"I now breathe Smith Gardens, my dear sister" he replied. "It is my joy and motivation, not just a source of revenue for my family's upkeep. As a family, we are happy to make our own chapters in the Smith story. Now I understand why even now you look up to Grandpa Smith. I feel the same about you; I look up to you. Every step I take on this farm requires your touch. Transitioning into the business is more than I imagined it would be. But I am determined to keep things moving as smoothly as they were during your reign with Grandpa Smith."

"Farm life must be slightly different from what you are used to, Clement, but you will warm up to the new job as you go along. There is a lot to do here, and it will make the perfect environment for your children's motor skills, running around the farm as they grow up. I will be a frequent guest, too, with

my family. Let's go. We need to have a family meeting now. There is something I want to share. Is Mom in a good mood today, Clement?"

"No worries, Miss Morgan. I am sure she is fine. I am curious to know what this is you want to say."

Miss Morgan was beginning to appreciate Clements's potential with his politeness and the way he had been handling himself, though he seemed to have a discreet lifestyle. She hoped he would be open with the workers to build trust and learn from them. She saw that his confidence had improved since the first time she took him around the farm. Leonne had told her he was hands-on and warm to the Smith Gardens staff. She now felt ready to let go of the farm and let him take it forward.

The rightful owner of the business is here. Clement shall be the new face of Smith Garden. I am proud of his enthusiasm. He is looking at it as if his whole life depended on it, which is the right attitude for the successful continuity of Smith Gardens. He is the man now to replace Grandpa.

"One becomes a man when he decides to act like one," she said as they walked. "You have filled the missing gap so well and so fast it is amazing. I like how you have taken charge of everything without expecting to be guided. My dear brother, this is your call, and it is up to you to fit into Grandpa's shoes." As she was saying this, they saw Mina outside the house. "Let's call her to come to this side of the dam," she suggested. The house is too crowded, and I want a quiet place."

When Mina reached them, she admitted that she had not managed to tour the whole farm to see how much it had changed since she had been away in France. They walked her to the campsite.

"When did you guys make a camping site here," she asked impressed. "Is it for hire?"

"It is not for hire just yet. We use it as a getaway and for open meetings with staff members," Miss Morgan replied. "It has a good and relaxing atmosphere. We could open it to the public soon. It could be another stream of income. You never know, Mom, you might as well get a man just like Gradah did. He may want to keep busy with the farm than wait for Clement to feed you."

Miss Morgan waited for the suggestion sink in before adding, trying to persuade, "Mom, it would not be a bad idea to find a companion as I move on with Leonne. Clement has a wife already."

“I am sure if that happens and I get a man, he would be happy to do the camp business with me. Miss Morgan, thank you for the suggestion. You see business in everything.” It sounded like stating the obvious to say that she saw business everywhere, making them laugh.

“I have to, Mom,” Miss Morgan replied and went on to speak for quite a while. “We have to build on what we found. The reason for this meeting is for us to agree on what needs to be done. I was of the opinion that we draft memorandum of understanding on each of our roles so that we don’t step on each other’s toes in the running of the family business. An organisation ruled by two heads is a monster. We have faced enough monsters in the past month, and I am sure we have all learned some lessons. It is every parent’s pain to be left in an empty nest. Mom, you don’t need to be reminded of that. Clement and I are already moving on with our families. This land is three thousand acres.

“Clement can have two thousand acres for the Smith Gardens business. It is our biggest revenue earner. With the additional land to the company, I expect it will keep productive as you get the hang of things. The business has good revenues, be sure to grow sales. We need to create a programme to ensure our ageing mum is properly taken care of, Clement. She needs a proper life insurance for herself and baby Morgan before she finds her place in the Smith businesses. I remember how we burned our fingers for five straight years of losses with Grandpa as we tried to shape Smith’s Gardens into what it is. Circumstances change and you might find yourself dealing with losses as happened to me and grandpa before reality hit us about the change in the business climate. But we managed and I took a year off from Smiths Freight to look for business in various countries and signing contracts with them for our vegetables and flowers. When I made the first sale, which amounted to a huge consignment, it came at a time when we badly needed it—and there’s no better way to learn how to do business than directly engaging with it my dear Clement. I hope you shall be able to keep the business top-notch. I will be on standby should you need me. You do not have to worry about anything.

“Mom can have the six hundred acres that also host the dams and this campsite. It reminds me that species like the coloured salamanders that used to bask on the rocks are now lost or are extinct because the workers liked to use them as fish bait. Grandpa had never needed the fish to grow his wealth. That is why he left the dams for the workers to fish and sell to supplement

their family incomes. But the workers ran the dams down, including the two he had set aside as an animal sanctuary. Losing the dams was such a waste. I had to rehabilitate all of them and now the birds are back at the two ponds, and fish are reproducing again. The fish business has flourished now. It will provide enough upkeep for Mom and young Morgan. We are now exporting trout to Europe which will be a good excuse for Mom to go on holiday in Europe or wherever every now and then.

“Mom can retain the real estate we have in Nairobi and Nanyuki. There is a remaining debt which shall be cleared next month. The Nairobi one has a higher revenue which can be put into an account dedicated to Morgan Junior. You can have the Nanyuki one, Mom. Smith's orchids are a good investment, too. I hope Clement shall continue growing them at Smith Gardens.

“The only fortune worth making is that which gives you fulfilment, and I like this particular side where we are standing. It is so beautiful seeing Mount Kenya and the clouds, or blue sky on some days. The weather is exciting, swinging from cold to hot. It is the best place for our children to run around. We shall be regular visitors too. Everything shall fall in place soon. I also have a favour to ask you Mom and my brother Clement. Now that I have let go all the Smith property in Timau, would you allow me to retain the Four hundred acres of forest and the Morgan house in France, now that none of you has an attachment to it? Gradah can go to hell with her new marriage and gold-digging. There is nothing left for her to claim at Morgans now that she is married. She needs to give Mom a break. I shall continue with Smiths Freight as it is a more challenging business. We need to heal the Smith family by being considerate of one another. Any storm that threatens to rock the family we shall look for a solution for it together as a family.”

“That is a brilliant suggestion Miss Morgan and a generous one,” said Mina. “I have no words to thank you for your kindness. Just a few changes I would like to make. The Canadian family is claiming Morgan Junior. It is an affluent family and would hear nothing of us keeping their child. For this reason, we do not have to include little Morgan in the arrangements. I suggest that Miss Morgan keep the Nairobi estate and Clement keep the Nanyuki one. With the Six hundred acres, fishponds, and the Smith home, I should be able to maintain myself comfortably. I am not too old; I can create wealth for myself too. I will have Clement around to help if necessary. You can have the homes in France, including the one Aggley had occupied. Clement and I will be behind you

should you want to demolish it and put up a modern building. It seats on prime land. After all, you have given us more than we bargained for. Had it been someone selfish, we would have walked away with nothing, or with very little. It is good that you understand these businesses more than we do. This is all your wealth, Miss Morgan. Keep it up, my girl. As for me, I will be fine.”

“I echo Mom’s words, Miss Morgan. You are a star and have lit our lives despite the uncertainties about the transition. We shall forever be indebted to you. Do not keep away from us; be coming to *your* house – the one you have given me and my wife – whenever you feel like it. I also want to suggest that when Mom’s time comes, the Smith Castle be given back to little Calda as Grandpa had wished. The Smith home is your home too.”

Miss Morgan was grateful for Clement’s generosity not contesting Grandpa Smith’s will to leave the home to Calda. She was also happy for him that he would keep the beautiful home that had been Miss Morgan’s, and which she had already transferred ownership title to him. He and his wife got more from Miss Morgan than they had expected. On their part they let her take the France home, as they did not want to be associated with it anymore.

“Thank you for the France offer, but about Aunt Aggley’s home, I shall build you guys a sanctuary so that when you get over your grief you can visit the land of your father Clement, and mom the land of your children’s father.”

None of them responded to her about the offer, but she understood their silence as they would take time to properly appreciate it.

“My mother-in-law Gradah is a nightmare,” said Clement. “We thank God she found her footing again. Otherwise, I would not have had her beautiful daughter Yenna as a wife, I was almost giving up!” he said hugging Miss Morgan for the wisdom she shared out the inheritance.

Talking about little Morgan, she said, “That is so soon for Specá’s in-laws to ask for him. Can’t they wait until he is at least one year old?”

She was very attached to Junior. She had hoped to breastfeed him together with her newborn when it was born so that at least he would not lose out on a mother’s milk.

“Two years would be good so that Morgan Junior may be a bit more stable,” Clement commented

“The boyfriend who fathered Morgan Junior was in France to look for Specá. He is on his way here to pick Morgan Junior, poor man. We need not

antagonise him. If little Morgan comes back to us later in life, we shall see what to do. Let us release him for now to be among his people,” Mina said tearfully.

Miss Morgan felt confident that the Smiths would remain strong and a solid family that would face any challenges that came their way.

Mina and Clement on their part felt that Miss Morgan was not only a good family head, but a perfect guide, given her hands-on experience in business. She was certainly better for Clement than his dad Morgan, who may have claimed the inheritance for himself had he succeeded in his plan. Clement would not do too badly with Miss Morgan by his side whenever he needed her for guidance.

They called for the farm van to tour the farm. Mina noted the sites that had remained the same since she had been gone and remembered the names of most old projects that no longer existed. Grandpa Smith had hived off a big chunk of land to settle his workers. Mina was surprised to find the workers place was now a town. It energised her to reacquaint with her roots as she aged.

“If people are in a good mood tonight, we can discuss a few things that will excite them – like marriage, beginning with food to the wedding dress code. Who shall play the role of my father to give me a way to Leonne on my wedding day?”

Mina was quick to answer her daughter. “It has to be your real dad Mwangangi, of course!”

Thank God Mom had thought of it. I was dying with hope that it should be my parents to give me away that day! I know dad Mwangangi has been keen on having Mom back, but it looks like Mom is happy to be single and free. She has no urge to submit to another man. Hit and run might be her new strategy. That will take time, especially because she will be sharing a compound with her son Clement and family.

SPECA'S BOYFRIEND arrived accompanied by his mother. He had many questions about how Specu died. The family wished he had not been so curious as it made him very sad to learn what had happened. He was happy, though, to see his son Morgan Junior. He had brought his mother along specifically to take care of the baby on their way back to Canada. They agreed to visit the family at least once a year so that the boy should pay homage to his departed mother at her grave and keep his connection with the Timau family.

Miss Morgan thought it very wise that Mina had decided to bury her daughter close to her. She may never have had a chance to see Specá's son had she agreed Specá be buried in France, where little Morgan would have been visiting his mother's grave instead.

CHAPTER TWENTY THREE

The Title 'Mrs Leonne'

*I know of no more encouraging fact
than the unquestionable ability of man
to elevate his life by conscious endeavour
- Henry David Thoreau*

MISS MORGAN WAS ASLEEP when she suddenly woke up. On her mind that morning was the phone Grandpa Smith had told her had audio clips he had recorded before he died. Upon finding the phone where he had kept it, she went to Grandpa Smith's grave to tell him about it.

"I had almost forgotten about the clips," she told him. "I have come with the phone so that I may listen to them with you here."

She tapped the phone to play the audio clips and Grandpa Smith's voice came on:

"My dear, there are 300 beehives we placed in the forest that should have bees by now. By next month the honey should be ready for harvesting. Keep adding more beehives. The guy in charge is Duen, the son of your father Mwangangi, and brother to Stella, your favourite sister. He thinks you have all along known about the beehives. Therefore, when you meet speak with him as if you already knew about them. I can't remember why I had not informed you earlier. I would like you to safeguard the forest and keep it intact in case the Morgan family should claim it for inheritance and destroy it!" his voice said, followed by a burst of his infectious laughter that Miss Morgan was so familiar, and which made her also start laughing.

She turned on another clip: “My young wife Calda and I had opened a fixed deposit bank account for all my grannies who will be born after her. Ten per cent of all the revenue generated by all the businesses must be put into the kitty. I have been remitting the ten per cent to the account for the past five years. This should continue and the name of each of Calda’s siblings and cousins to the account as a beneficiary immediately after each is born. Each will be entitled to one per cent of the total revenue per year once they reach twenty years of age. That should be enough motivation for all of you to beget me more descendants. I love you for Calda and thank you for entrusting me with her. Keep my castle well maintained for her. She is my wife.” This was followed by more of his contagious laughter before he continued. “Unfortunately, it is we the ageing and not the youth who seem to care about the future. Yet it is the youth who have fifty years ahead of them, and not us! I hope you agree with me Miss Morgan that you and Mina’s children need to hold the bull by the horns,” he paused a bit and then said, “You are the future.”

Miss Morgan could hear Calda murmuring in the background saying, “Yes! Yes!” like someone who understood what grandpa was saying.

“Leonne is an orphan and a son after my own heart,” Grandpa Smith’s voice continued in the clip, “I have a house in Europe, and I have given it to him already. I transferred my rights to him. The gift is unconditional. It is not determined by whether you shall marry him or not, but for being Smith Freight’s top client. I wonder how the young man has continued to give us so much business even after you have treated him so badly. How can you keep a man waiting this long, Miss Morgan? Please do not blame me; I was comfortable with my young wife, Calda!” More laughter followed with Grandpa Smith seeming the most amused. Calda joined him in the laughter, and they had a whole minute enjoying their baby talk as they laughed some more. Miss Morgan couldn’t help joining in the laughter even after the clip had ended. This was followed by a pool of sad tears, remembering the days the three of them spent together.

She was glad that she had only listened to the audio clips after her meeting with Mina and Clement to reach an agreement on the properties. Until listening to the clips, she had no idea she had a fortune waiting deep in her little forest with the beehives. She decided she would keep the phone away from her mom and Clement should they come across it and feel she did not deserve the forest and the beehives. She, however, soon changed her mind and took the clip to

her family to hear this final bit of Smith's wishes. The part that seemed to interest them the most was about his wishes to have all his descendants in the fixed deposit account and earning after they turned twenty years of age, which they all supported it. They vowed that the account would remain active for future generations.

LEONNE WAS GLAD that the moment had arrived. He was now about to marry the woman he had loved and waited for, for such a long time. Miss Morgan wanted a simple wedding, but Leonne's family would hear of none of it. They were coming a hundred of them, and the marriage ceremony would still have to be conducted in Burundi for those who would not make it to Smith's Castle. Mom Mina had mixed feelings wishing her daughter, the bride, the best while sad that she was leaving her so soon after mother and daughter had just got together after a difficult relationship between them. Mina however did not dwell on this as her mind soon turned to shopping for the wedding.

Miss Morgan wanted to tailor-make her dress, but her mom was of a different opinion. Mina reminded Miss Morgan that wedded in her mother Calda's gown, which was still good as new and was adorned with gems that make it special. When they tried it, it fit Miss Morgan perfectly, the same with the matching shoes that went with the dress.

And why not use them? Naila not only felt like a queen wearing the dress but was proud that it was a heirloom for her and future generations to use. Calda, her daughter, was touching and feeling every part of the dress with familiarity, as if she was a reincarnation of the actual owner of the dress. She was excited and happy for Mama. She demanded a photo of her and Miss Morgan in the dress. It came out as a bright and beautiful photo. Now she demanded that the photo be made the screensaver on her Mama's phone. Leonne appeared somewhere in the background in the photo. No one knew how he happened in the picture, but the whole family was represented in it.

The wedding would be on Miss Morgan's birthday in a fortnight.

Stella was happy to be her stepsister's maid of honour. She was soon going to relocate to the United States with her husband Musembi, where he had gotten a job. Miss Morgan imagined that once there, Musembi would visit Biazu's grave to tell her to rest in peace and not haunt him anymore as he would now be close to her.

MISS MORGAN WAS HAPPY to have a caring dad in Mwangangi, who checked on her on phone at least once a week and would not fail to visit her whenever he was in Nairobi. They usually had a long conversation. Miss Morgan would also not fail to visit his home to check on him and gift him a new shirt, and present a scarf to his lady, Stella's mother. She had to be careful with her, in case she decided Miss Morgan should never show up in her compound again. For this reason, Miss Morgan's stepsister Stella always provided a good excuse to visit their dad's compound.

Miss Morgan imagined how Stella's mom Lina never felt threatened by her husband ex-girlfriend Mina when Morgan was still alive, but now must feel Mina's loneliness a threat after Morgan's death. She had heard how Lina's father had divorced two previous wives before Lina's mother, to who he was still wedded. Because of this, Miss Morgan thought Lina smart enough to keep her man close now that a likely predator in the name of Mina was roaming in the neighbourhood. Neither was Miss Morgan a threat to Lina or Stella's inheritance of Mwangangi's wealth, as Smith had left her enough.

Miss Morgan asked Stella to shop for a wedding dress for her mom. She also paid Lina a visit to introduce her boyfriend Leonne, also to thank her for being her second mother. She brought her many gifts and assured her that Mina would never go back into Mwangangi's life.

When Mina learnt about this, she was very pleased that Miss Morgan had taken her time to assure her old friend Lina that all was well. Mina was single and available again but had no energy to fight for love again after losing Morgan in such difficult circumstances.

Miss Morgan would, however, learn that Mina had planned a date with Mwangangi to discuss the wedding in Nairobi. She wondered why they should plan to meet so far away when having coffee at Timau would have sufficed to discuss it! She, however, decided it was not for her to question their plans. She thought that they were probably planning their own wedding as they intimately recalled their youthful days.

"Did you take time to consider becoming my second wife, Mina, as we had discussed in France, or you are planning to marry the young man I spotted in your compound the other day?" he asked when they finally met.

"Mwangangi, thank you for the offer, but no. I don't like the idea of a husband having to hide from one wife in order to be with the other one. Getting myself a married man is a no-go zone for me at the moment. And since

you ask, I cannot date a young man in front of my dad's village friends and the children. The guy you saw is my son-in-law, Specá's boyfriend. They had come for Morgan Junior with his mother. I should have mentioned this to you. It seems I will remain single for a long time, maybe a lifetime. Your wife, Lina literally brought up my girl, Miss Morgan, despite both of us conceiving your children at the same time. You are such a player. I would hate to find myself mixed up in that again. I lost to her, and I am OK with that. Take care of your family and our daughter. I hope she will be OK with you giving away our daughter in marriage?"

"Naila is my daughter, and Lina knows I love the girl with all my soul. She has no problem with that. I am the only sad person between you and me for rejecting me for the second time, Mina. I wish you get a good man so that I stop looking over the fence now that you are back, dear."

"Should your prayers be answered, I look forward to that man who will be ready to inherit this grandmother! Naila told me the same thing: She would be surprised if I was taken soon." They laughed at this and moved on with their shopping.

Mina had organised with Alastair a visit to Smith Freights after the shopping. It had been many years since she had visited the company. The last time was when her dad Smith had bought it. She was curious to see what it had become, especially because it was her daughter Naila who ran it. She was lost for words to see the office setup which looked First World, including with the range of activities going on at the company's large five-acre compound.

"Your daughter Naila is a replica of Mr. Smith," Alistair said seeing the look on her face. "He poured all his brains into the girl. They held lengthy telephone conversations every single day and would have physical meeting whenever possible, especially when she visited him in Timau. She is a great implementer of ideas. When she took over, it took her no time to see the two companies, Smith Freights and Smith Gardens soar with success like an inflated balloon. She is a hard worker and very articulate in expressing her ideas. Her dedication to the company is such that I've sometimes wondered whether she would ever have a life of her own. She tirelessly worked to please the old man. Her loyalty to him was beyond a family call. She was wedded to implementing her grandpa's business agenda. I remember when the fish farms went dead after Smith left them to the workers to help themselves. She revived all the eleven ponds and dedicated one to the workers and imposed a schedule on it about

when they could harvest the fish from it to avoid depletion. Miss Morgan developed an extra two dams dedicated to providing food for wild animals and birds. The wild animals' dams were remade into bigger reservoirs and divided into eight chambers. Each chamber was opened for a month before it was closed, and the next one opened in rotation. The animals give the campsites such a spectacular view. I miss visiting the place.”

“Wow, Naila was not as detailed as you are, Alistair, about how she revived the ponds. I am impressed. I remember her telling me once that the biggest weakness a leader must overcome is the need to be loved. There is no place for emotions if a business must succeed. I am surprised at my stupidity back then. I now understand why she was not going to allow herself to be conned of her wealth by my stupid late husband, Morgan.”

“You look quite good, ma’am,” he complimented her, changing the subject. “What brings you to Nairobi?”

“I had come to shop for a wedding dress, for myself. I am sure you are aware my daughter Naila is getting married. I wanted to select clothes for her dad Mr. Mwangangi, too. Having been in the village for so long, he has lost his sense of style and might embarrass us,” she added laughing. “I have finished with that and must start my journey back to Nanyuki, which I now call home. I hope to lead a happy life with the change of scenery there away from France. Not that I will be doing much at Timau, but I look forward to being close to my surviving children and be the grandma I am with the little ones growing up around me.”

“That is good to hear,” replied Alistair. “Everything should work out well as all the dots are already connected for you. Enjoy when you can and share your love when still alive. Seasons come and go. The mourning is over now. Lift yourself all tall again, Mina. You are the mirror to Smith's Family. How you live your life gives those around you an example to follow. As much as Miss Morgan is independent and self-made, she still needs her mother. Continue with you family life but go easy being too involved with the businesses as you have people running them. But I pity the poor girl. She works too hard.”

“Yes, that’s my daughter Naila for you, and it is how she made wealth for us. She had no time for love. Leonne looks like a starved man. He needs this woman to put his life back on track. I am determined that Miss Morgan should also have a happy fulfilled life. Thanks for your observation about her. I wanted

a second opinion about my daughter. What about you? What have you been up to since we were in high school? How come you never mentioned that you have been working for my dad.”

“How could I do that to a pilot's wife? You were completely out of reach, and by then, we were just broke guys waiting to join college. Later I married and was divorced fifteen years ago. That is when I joined Smith Freights. Miss Morgan doesn't talk much about family, so I found it difficult to discuss you with her. Yet I was aware of the drama back then when Smith came for Naila from you.”

“So you are single, Alastair; how is your lost family?”

“My boys are now all grown up and living in Europe. My wife remarried. My parents are long gone, and my brother settled well on our family farm, leaving me to toil for your dad Smith. I would not mind you giving me a chance now that you are widowed, Mina,” he said with a mischievous wink.

“It's a great offer. I loved you a lot, and this loneliness is no good for someone who has been used to a man beside her. With all that we have been through as a family, I have given up on everything in this world, including myself, Alastair. Nothing makes sense to me anymore.”

Alastair stood up and hugged Mina.

“It has been a dry spell for me, too, Mina. I have many women around me, but none is a good match. It is not that I've wanted another kid, I am too old for that. But being a granny is a good place. I know you already have a granny to take care of—Morgan Junior. He should keep you distracted than if you were a young wife with a string of toddlers to raise.”

“I know that thing, Alastair. Either I go for someone's husband or take on a youngster with his ridiculous demands. I've dreaded that too. But I can have you any day. We have come from far together.”

“From the day I put my hand under your pants ...! I was the first person to feel your pubic hair. Let me feel it again,” Alastair asked and kissed her on the lips.

The taste of his mouth still felt familiar, and his touch ran through her body making her nerves come to life again.

“You know what, Alastair, I am lonely and almost losing my mind. Your touch has set my whole system alight. I am menopausal, Alastair. There will be no surprises with me. Only grannies will be gracing our home. Baby Morgan

was taken by his dad to Canada already. So the castle will belong to me and you for now.”

“Wow, it shall be fun enjoying this adventure again in our old age, only this time with nothing to tie us down, Mina.”

They left together for the bridal shop where she had been to buy Alastair a wedding suit. It didn’t matter that she had been at the shop earlier with her ex, Mwangangi.

She would learn later that his wife Lina had called to be picked up at the airport. Mina coming back to Timau was enough threat for her to be away from home near her husband. She had arrived from Germany and was informed by her daughter Stella that Mwangangi was in Nairobi, which was convenient, and they left for Nanyuki.

In the meantime, Mina and Alastair were getting reacquainted and looked forward to meeting their new family members. They were already two happy grannies who knew they could never get more kids. That was why they were not shying away from each other.

They parked the car outside Alistair’s home. “These two beautiful houses you see in the compound belong to Smiths Freight,” he informed her. “Miss Morgan occupies one as I the other. With your permission, we can leave it furnished for us to use when we come to Nairobi after I retire. We will never be too old to enjoy this city.”

“This is such a beautiful leafy suburb. My son Clement will be excited to see it and I am sure he will want to keep it too. We shall be letting them use it when we are in the farm.”

“I am in agreement. My sons and their families shall also be guests here once in a while.”

“Yes, we are now one huge family,” Mina said, emphasising what their new union meant.

Once in the house, they unpacked their new outfits to try them again in front of the mirror. Alistair’s chef was ready with dinner. They wanted to eat first before locking themselves in the bedroom. Alastair did a quick introduction of Mina and the chef. The chef seemed to fear now that there was a woman in the house. His fear was because he thought he might lose his job soon. There was no likelihood of that happening, as he was employed by Smith Freights to work part time for Alastair and Miss Morgan when she was in Nairobi.

“Do not mind the bobby cat,” Alistair explained pointing at large cat that had just entered the house. “It belongs to Miss Morgan. When she is away, it seeks refuge in my house.”

Mina bent to stroke the cat’s back. The cat ignored her and went to Alastair.

“Thank you, Alastair, for saving me from myself. My energy levels have improved, and I now feel more confident about life. As a family, we are still in grief, but we trust we shall be able to move on fine, especially now that Gradah is married and out of the way. She will, however, still haunt me as my son Clement is married to her daughter Yenna.”

“We all have our ghosts, Mina. There is no way to undo what's already happened. It is easy to see other people's flaws and be biased toward our family. Embrace Gradah as your in-law and move on. Embrace your new path now, my darling Mina. You have me now. We are both in safe hands. You and I shall be great parents. I admire the relationship Smith had with Miss Morgan. I'll be proud to raise little Morgan, especially having not seen my boys grow up after their mother took them away from me.”

“By the way, Alistair, it will be just me and you. Morgan Junior’s Canadian family claimed him and took him to Canada. His dad and the mom came for him but promised to bring the boy to visit once in a while. I shall miss him, but it is good he has his father to bring him up. I feel lucky to have you, Alastair. I can’t stand young men, some of whom have been trying their luck with me. I have no time for high heels and the blisters they cause. It is time for me to enjoy my golden age. Thanks to Miss Morgan and you. I do not have to work for anything.”

“Oh my God, you had mentioned earlier about Morgan Junior. Old age is something else. We forget things like small kids,” said Alistair, making them laugh as they sat for dinner. The food was very well done. Chef employed by Smith companies seemed to understand their food demands from the farm to the dining table.

They spent the night together and left the following day to spend the weekend together at Mr Smith's farm.

Miss Morgan was very happy to see Alastair and her mother already a loving couple. She was worried Mina might go back to Mwangangi and spoil the great relationship Naila had enjoyed with Mwangangi’s family for so long.

Alastair declared his interest in Mina to Clement, being the only son, and he was quick to approve. He had hoped his mother would find a good man to

take the place of her departed heroes. He had already met Alastair and liked him a lot, both as a man and as a business guru.

Clement was still young and knew he had “to man up”. He had to be strong for the women of the family. It was a relief for him to have Alastair around. Where he missed a step, Alastair would fill the gap, having learnt Smith's style of doing things as the head of the family. Clement accepted Alastair as his father figure and would look up to him like a son to a dad.

EVERYTHING NOW FELT NEW to Miss Morgan. It began with Calda, who had been living with Grandpa Smith and had, therefore, been his baby. Now she demanded all of Miss Morgan's attention including infringing on her privacy, especially now that her dad had become a permanent resident in Miss Morgan's bedroom. She was not used to this. Suddenly, Naila has two mouths to think about each day—Calda's and Leonne's, and clean after them even though there was nanny to take care of it. It seemed to her when one became a mother she became an automatic nanny. Yet she was not sure her instincts as a mother had properly kicked in yet.

Her life always revolved around the market pushing company products and not in the kitchen heat. It was something she needed to adopt quickly as her second born child was soon coming. She suddenly thought about her cat. *How will I survive with the fluffy cat? Will he accommodate my family, or they will have to bear with his scratches every day? If he touches any of them, it will to be either him or my family, and I choose my clan. Immediately he scratches any of my family members I will sell him off. It will all depend on Fluffy. The cat had better behave around my family.*

MISS MORGAN WAS ANXIOUS to be over with the wedding and get back to work.

I am tired of staring at the ceiling idle. Being in the house all day is not my thing. I need to be in the office, especially now that Calda has started school. Three months in the house waiting for the baby to come will kill me. Smith Freights must have missed me, too. Yet I have no choice but to wait because I must be done with the wedding before I can even think of leaving my grandpa's house. What about Leonne? And, by the way, I had never asked him which girl I replaced in his life. I've already told him about the guys I dated trying to discourage him from waiting for me. But he had long made up his mind that I was the woman he would spend the rest of his life with.

“Leonne, you have never told me about your dating life,” she asked him not long after.

“My other date is not anything you would want near you. I was never conscious about what I did the way I did when I was with Virginia. I remember a time when the water pipe into the house had broken leaving the water reservoir empty. She told me that I did not have to flush the toilet when I went to pee so that we could preserve water. For some reason, I forgot the instructions and flushed the toilet. Virginia was immediately at the bathroom door and ran into her as I left the washroom. She immediately pounced on me and we fell on the floor with her arm tight around my neck. I couldn't breathe, and her weight on me made it worse. The last thing I remembered was a thousand angry words from her rushing into my ears before I lost consciousness.

“I don't know how long I was out except that I came to after hearing her phone ringing. I felt weak, and it took me some minutes before I could get off the floor. I went to the bedroom and locked myself in to ponder whether I was ready to live with such an angry woman. If forgetting not to flush the toilet could make her so mad, what would happen should I forget an item in the shopping list she had texted me to buy? It was my house, yet I had to be the one to leave. I had to choose between being an obituary or my sanity, Miss Morgan. I have since never been keen on dating. I am also careful not to fall in love with a woman with a lot of weight. My skeletal body may not save me should such a heavy beast ever lay on me as Virginia did. Maybe I am paranoid, but that experience remains stuck in my head.”

Miss Morgan did not hear the last sentence, caught in laughter at how funny it sounded for the usually confident Leonne to sound so defeated. “How can a grown-up man pack a bag and leave his own home?”

“I am not the first man to pack and go, Miss Morgan. By nature, women sometimes tend to control their husbands. Many men don't have a voice in their homes. They only pretend to roar when their side of the family comes to visit, or when they have their friends and neighbours over. When they leave, he automatically goes back to his place, and the chair lady takes over.”

“You mean I shall be able to control you, Leonne?”

“You already do, Miss Morgan. That I have had to wait this long to call you mine is how you have done it.”

“Do you appreciate those who value you?”

“I appreciate them a lot, and I have a list full of such people. I am not looking for a wife who does not value me. Note the difference.”

“Relax, Leonne, you have me already. I need you more than you imagine! I miss having that ‘Mrs’ title more than you think. All my life, I have seen myself as a married woman. I wonder why I allowed circumstances to keep me off marriage, Leonne.”

“I am happy to hear that. You had conflicting interests between your loyalty to Grandpa Smith and our marriage, which is understandable. I hope once we are married, we shall be together for life, Naila. Today I am spending the night in Nanyuki with my family so that I may leave with them to receive you at church tomorrow. I hope you won't miss me a lot. I can see Stella and Mom have made all the necessary arrangements.”

“We trust God for a fun day tomorrow, my Leonne. Calda is happy and all over with her cousins showing off her hairdo. She is aware of the wedding tomorrow. She insisted on trying her clothes for the wedding. They expected the children to demand to wear their new clothes as soon as they arrived, so she was bought a princess dress to fool her before she puts on the real wedding dress tomorrow.”

Thinking about Calda's innocence reminded her of childhood and Grandpa Smith, both in the same thought. She remembered hearing someone once express his surprise about people's lack of appreciation; how Calda may soon lose her innocence and get bored with it. “We all get bored with childhood in our rush to grow up,” the person had said, “Then we long to be children again. Then we lose our health in our haste to make money, and then spend it all to restore our health. As if that is not enough punishment, we lead a life full of anxiety to enjoy our past, present and hope for the future.”

Recalling this led her to think of her grandfather: *We all need to have purpose like Grandpa Smith to enjoy life. I miss him already.*

IT MUST HAVE BEEN a busy season for the priest, as he was the same one who had overseen the burials of Smith and Specu, and now the wedding. A week before that he had presided over Morgan Junior's baptism ritual. The priest's last sermon kept repeating itself in Miss Morgan's head:

“The Smiths,” he had said, “you must look ahead, and love will carry you through all the storms of life. It has been a very trying time for this family. I

beseech you not to ask, 'Why is this happening to us?' and instead wonder 'What are all these misfortunes telling us?' It is this that will keep you strong because there is a purpose to everything. Keep strong and remember that the Lord is with you, and that everything happens in God's own time. He shall guard and help you find your footing in all your struggles."

She remembered thinking: *I wonder whether God really exists or not. By repeatedly hearing that He exists, is it a way of making people believe in the spiritual world. And yet I always feel Grandpa Smith's presence around me. It makes me believe that souls are immortal, and that they must belong to our Creator. The Creator does not consult and decides the day one leaves their body. The Almighty's decision is final, however painful it may be to those it affects. understanding this does not make the pain of loss any less bearable.*

Still, I need to grieve if I have to let go of the souls I shared my love with only days ago. Some like Will and Hope just came into my life for only a few days, but my soul yarns for the beautiful souls. My sister Specia was also in my life for only a few days before she, too, departed this world. We had hardly celebrated our reunion and now we are separated forever. Morgan has left a vacuum in the whole family, including his. His death has deprived his sister Aggley the good life she had hoped for, being the only surviving of her siblings. She is in jail, even as his wives Gradah and Mina have been taken by other men. How I wish Grandpa was present in my wedding, just as he had been when I was giving birth to Calda. How I wish he was here just to hug me and remind me all over again that will be fine with me as Mrs Leonne!

THE WEDDING ALREADY FELT like it was ushering in a new dawn for the family. It was a white wedding, though it was not for a chaste bride. Thanks to the forgiving Cross of Jesus the wedding was blessed despite the bride already being a mother and expectant of her second child. Miss Morgan remembered that in her mom's day, getting pregnant before marriage meant one would never be married in the church.

She remembered hearing how in some African traditions, pregnancy was not a hindrance to marriage. If anything, was a leeway for a girl to leave her parents' home. Families never encouraged a girl to get kids at home before marriage unless she was an only heir of their parents. The illegitimate kids left behind by their mothers often lived with the poor grandparents until they became adults.

Miss Morgan barely slept the night before the wedding, anxious at how it would turn out. And yet when the day broke, and the rays of the sun started streaming into her bedroom, she felt that it held the promise of a great wedding. But the anxiety remained. Not long after, a sudden panic caught her giving her a dizzying headache. She remembered how in one of her dreams she had feared she was about to miss her wedding. She blamed it on her pregnancy.

What's with pregnancy? One day you are normal and okay. The next minute you have complications. Bed rest is a must whether you have a busy day or not. Pregnancy is like stormy weather. I feel so self-conscious to the point I feel I cannot undress before my husband, Leonne. I am so used to my mirror alone. You have no idea the disruption a kid, a man, or pregnancy bring... it's too much, yet today is the day to seal our wedding. I shall have to cope with it all.

She laughed at herself for thinking this. A moment later she heard a knock on the door. It was Stella with the makeup team.

DAD MWANGANGI SHAVES his head Jordan-style. You have to shade your eyes from his shiny head in bright light when you see him at a distance. He is still very handsome, despite the grey beard and ageing lines that have started invading his face. He is dressed like a cowboy, complete with the hat. He is particular about his grooming and style despite having lived in the village all his life. His English lacks the letter 'S' because his tongue is too heavy and can only pronounce it as 'Ch'. You can understand his English despite his heavy Kikuyu accent, unlike many village folks.

Mom Mina looks spectacular, especially now that she is in love and is out to impress Alastair. I like that she and dad Mwangangi are leading me to the altar. For the first time, I am sandwiched between my parents. It is the first time for them also to stand together as a couple for a daughter they both pride in. I am sure they will feel their loss after I am married, but both now have new families to worry about. Life has a way of snatching loved ones away. The memories however always remain.

Look at Leonne, how impatient he looks after waiting for so long hoping I would marry him one day. Look at him! He feels zero shame to shed tears as he sees me on the aisle being led towards him! My dad is gently holding one of my arms and my mom Mina the other. They are walking me slowly towards my man and his best man. His face seems to replay all the amazing experiences we have had and the beautiful memories we share. Now here I am beside him and I feel strangely happy.

He had written down and memorised his wedding vows, but he seems to fumble. He has finally composed himself. Let me hear him officially say his vows: "I spent my whole life looking for my other half, but I knew it must be you the very moment I set my eyes on you, Naila. I am certain we will never truly part, for our souls are made for each other till death do us part."

Those words pierce my heart. I feel so happy that I am sobbing. I hope it doesn't look embarrassing.

Seeing Miss Morgan sobbing, some guests at the wedding ceremony wondered if it was out of fear of becoming someone's wife, that she was so stuck to her single life to grieve losing it. Or was it out of joy at to finally have someone who deeply cared for her the way her grandpa did?

She looked at Leonne and thought she saw written on his face that whatever challenge the marriage might bring it would be welcome.

Miss Morgan now felt that her body and soul were ready for the change marriage would bring. She now expected family life and being someone's wife to be exciting. She expected them to wipe away her still lingering sense of loneliness after Grandpa Smith had gone. She was calm when she read her vows:

"I make this vow to you Leonne today that I, Naila Smith, shall cherish and devote my life to you and always be true. I pray that this marriage bridges our two shores, binding us together as an unbroken path to each other, a path I vow never to deviate, never to falter, and to always be by your side."

She closed her eyes and accepted Leonne's passionate kiss after the customary permission was granted to kiss the bride.

"Now that you have made your vows before God and men that you shall honour each other with your bodies, let the Lord be your hiding place. When you run to Him, you shall always be safe. When trouble comes your way, He shall help you overcome it. God shall give you victory over all your troubles and surround you with a song of deliverance. Therefore, Mr. and Mrs. Leonne, rejoice in Him for the triumph He has granted you today."

Guests in the church clapped and whistled in applause.

The priest continued. "It does not mean that trouble won't visit you. It means you shall always win with God on your side. And even where we are tempted, deep down we all know the right thing to do. All we have to do is keep our faith in God and in each other. The only fear you need to have should

only be the fear of the Lord. Fear prevents us from temptations, while ignorance is the mother of poor decisions. Always be well informed. Do not be quick to anger. It hinders progress. Envy denies you the opportunity to focus on yourself. Ego shall stop you from learning from others.”

These words from the priest sounded familiar to Miss Morgan. Then she remembered her first sales meeting at Smith Freights when she had looked down on her subordinates with the assumption that not being professionals made them not worth her time. She thought how such attitudes like hers when she joined the company had probably seen many wasted sales opportunities for ignoring subordinates who may be talented and have something to teach.

Her thoughts were interrupted by laughter from the guests, listening to the priest narrate how he once doubted his ability to encourage beaten souls as a young priest. He explained how taking the risk to follow his dream to be a good priest almost cost him his leg after slipping at the pulpit at seeing all those eyes of the congregants who had filled the church on him. He was very shy, but it was the only way he could become the priest he wanted to be when he remembered the Kikuyu saying that *maitho ma ciũra matigiragia ngombe inyue maaĩ* (the staring eyes of the frog don’t prevent the cows from drinking at the river).”

“Mr. and Mrs. Leonne,” he went on, “Being unforgiving wears you down. Sorry is a simple and easy word to use. It liberates you from anxiety and unnecessary quarrels. Have pride and trust in each other. Both of you being each other’s pillar in marriage keeps your bonds strong and nothing can come between you—not children, family, or friends can come between you. You are complete now. Go and fill the world with children who shall forever love the house of the Lord.”

Everyone stood up in song to praise the newly-weds as people went to congratulate the couple. Mina was the first to hug and kiss the new Mrs Leonne in congratulations of her marriage, “Congrats, Naila,” she said. “Your long wait has paid off. Now you belong to each other. Pull yourself together, Naila, wife to Leonne. It shall be your new life. Embrace and face the new you, my dear girl.”

Seemingly out of nowhere, a woman strode into the church with three young kids in tow. The woman wanted to stop the wedding. She was shouting all sorts of obscenities claiming that Willy was a lost cause, how he had

neglected her and their three children, and now he was getting married again. Nothing could quieten her despite the priest trying to calm her down.

“Kill me if you like, but this wedding must be stopped. These kids need a dad, too, and proper upkeep!”

Everyone was confused, including the new Mrs Leonne. She could not see how Willy could have been her Leonne to have lied to the poor woman.

“His name is Willy!” she shouted.

As everyone's attention was diverted by the angry woman and her children, Miss Morgan sneaked out unnoticed into the church hall where she quickly removed the wedding gown and the veil. She folded them nicely and carried them in her hands. She hailed a motorbike taxi parked in the church compound.

Having already removed the bridal gown, the rider could not have known she was the bride had he chanced to see her being escorted into the church. She didn't think he could have cared as he had the five dollars she sent to his mobile phone.

From the distance, Miss Morgan could see the bridegroom, Leonne, looked lost on the church grounds at her disappearance as he tried to ignore the angry Madam Alice, the woman with the kids.

He was holding Stella's hand as they watched the drama as the church ushers tried to calm the screaming Alice so that they may understand her problem.

The priest tried asking Alice how she knew the foreigner Leonne. He wondered how Leonne could already be a father to kids older than Calda, including the one on the woman's back. What made the priest suspicious was that the kids brown skin tones. And, as it turned out, their skin tones were like that of their dad Willy and mom Alice, while Leonne's skin colour was dark chocolate.

Miss Morgan would later learn Alice's story. She was a banker before she married William. After the second-born, Willy promised to provide for the family, with Alice taking a break from work to raise the family. After they got the third born, Willy met another girl, and they started hanging out at parties in the neighbourhood. Within a short time, he had organised a secret wedding that was to happen in Nanyuki town. Alice, it turned out, didn't know which church it was taking place, and that is how she ended up storming the wrong wedding.

Miss Morgan thought that the only difference between her and Alice was that she already had three babies. But she felt Alice's pain, as losing someone one had loved and nurtured for years could be a very painful thing. Miss Morgan was very sorry for her. Alice reminded her of Gradah and her mom Mina when they each realised Morgan had wives, not a wife. The sense of betrayal the two women felt must have been intense.

Miss Morgan decided not to judge the woman, and she was glad that an accident did not happen to her Leonne as had happened to Morgan. It was better if Alice took him for a husband than lose him to the cruel jaws of death.

People made monetary contributions to Alice to assist her find where her husband's wedding was taking place in Nanyuki. In the meantime, the priest sent a communication to the Nanyuki Diocese asking whoever was conducting Willy's wedding with the new bride to stop it.

Luckily, there had been a delay in starting Willy's wedding. His bride had decided to have a last fling with her ex-boyfriend the night before the wedding. They had overslept. Willy was tipped about the hotel he could find her. He could not believe she could indulge in infidelity even before their marriage had taken place.

It became a police case, of which Willy demanded compensation for the wedding expenses.

When the news got to William that his wife Alice was at the church to stop the wedding, he went there with his fiancé's wedding gown in hand and requested Alice to dress in it, and the wedding went ahead. Alice saved her marriage by storming Naila's wedding.

"Why am I holding your hand, Stella? Where is my wife?" Leonne shouted, still wondering where his bride had disappeared to.

When she could not be found, people guessed she must have returned to the farm while their attention was on Alice.

The new Mrs Leonne had indeed returned home and had gone straight to bed at her Grandpa's Castle, where they found her.

It took Leonne's whole clan to convince her it was a mistaken identity. She admitted to him that could not have dared to hang around and witness her Leonne being taken away from her.

While the whole of T'ima had followed the groom to Smith's home to witness more drama with Leonne's lost bride, but there was little of it. And so they looked forward to enjoying the wedding feast, which what they had also

come for. The tents were already pitched at the campsite. Even before the guests had arrived, the ground was already full of the uninvited ones. Leonne's Family had to be served in the house leaving the villagers to enjoy a free meal in the tents.

That, in a nutshell, was how Miss Morgan got the “Mrs” title she had long craved and became Mrs Naila Leonne.

About the Author

Mirigo Kinyanjui is a Kenyan motivational speaker and writer. Her books aim to impart practical lessons drawn from real life experiences and close observations of family life. Where many give up because of perceived insurmountable personal mistakes and frustrations of life, Mirigo hopes the experiences portrayed in her books will manifest into positive life choices for the reader towards a better version of themselves. The author seeks to help tap into opportunities often obscured by the hardships and calamities many encounter in life.

Other Books by the Author

1. **Cross-Roads Legend**

Wairimu Ndegwa is a goodhearted African girl studying at USA University Academy. Due to her kindness, she offers to assist a classmate whose visa card has failed. She feeds him using her 'peanuts' of pocket allowance for a fortnight. She later learns he is a Muslim billionaire heir-apparent. They connect and one thing leads to another, one cross-roads at a time.

2. **The Cloud Between**

Duofold's dad wished him dead for being his illegitimate child. Duofold got entangled in dark family secrets, lost his wife to his brother and, despite being cast out, would become the savior of the entire family.

3. **Transition**

Miss Morgan is born out of wedlock by a black father and white mother. She creates her own blissful world to live in with all the enjoyment and fun that nature offers. But life seems to have had its reservations as she helps the family navigate through inheritance chaos.

4. **The Layman Entrepreneur**

The saying, "*If you must burn bridges, build new ones,*" is not an idle suggestion. A bridge is for others to cross over as they find themselves or for you to find your way back to the crossroads to rediscover yourself should you lose your way. That is the way of entrepreneurship, as we must keep recreating our paths for our business ventures to succeed. The book draws from personal experience and tips from the business world at all levels of entrepreneurship.

5. **The Prodigal Daughter**

Experience the resilience of a mother. The prodigal son left with wealth but came back empty-handed. The prodigal daughter left with her womb, and she

brought back generations. Life is but a few moments, yet those moments last a lifetime.

6. The Remnants

The book tells the story of a young man born in Kikuyuland who loves his language and culture so much that it inspires him to trace the origins of Bantu peoples to understand where his community came from. This takes him to many Bantu communities around Africa, only to later learn that his ancestors were Maasai, who are Nilotic. He would later learn of a prophesy by his ancestral spirits that he would die at the horns of a buffalo at his prime age as a warrior. Did this come pass?

TRANSITION

Naila's is a story of triumph. She was rejected by her mother and stepfather and was brought up by her grandfather Smith, a white businessman and plantation owner in Timau, Kenya. She learns at his feet and eventually becomes deeply involved in running his businesses and helps grow them into blue chip companies. As her widowed grandpa ages, she is concerned that he is too lonely and wants to keep close to him. This leaves her torn between her loyalty for the grandfather and marrying the love of her life, Leonne. She has to choose one or the other.



Transition is a captivating tale of entwined love relationships with twists that include murders and unexpected ghost women, even as Naila tussles with her stepfather, Morgan, over inheritance after Grandpa Smith's death. It is among the book's intrigues that Naila should go by the nickname Miss Morgan, borrowing her hateful stepfather's name.

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