

ZOMBIE LAND



The Journey to Redemption

PATRICK M. SAMUEL

Abstract

This book captures the catastrophic impact of alcohol and drugs in Kupe-an African country, where the youth are turned into zombies due to an endless culture of drinking harmful alcohol and taking drugs. Despite all the damage over the years, the youth turn to shine a light on their potential for resurgence through solidarity and action, challenging a society that must rise to meet its responsibilities.

Through the journey of Juma, a young man caught in the throes of addiction, the narrative explores the deeper societal and institutional failures that perpetuate cycles of despair. However, it also highlights the transformative power of unity, as Juma and his friends, once trapped in hopelessness, rise to challenge the **unscrupulousness** and apathy that have long held them captive.

This poignant tale emphasizes the importance of community-driven change, resilience and the unyielding belief that even in the darkest moments, there is hope for a brighter, collective future. By confronting the harsh realities of enslavement with alcohol and societal neglect, the book calls for a paradigm shift—one that recognizes the potential of youth and empowers them to reclaim their lives, their voices and their future.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Dreams and Drowns.....	1
Chapter 2: The Failed Glimmer of Hope	9
Chapter 3: The Crush by Own Society	15
Chapter 4: The Monstrous Addiction	21
Chapter 5: The Cartels and Corruption of Doom	27
Chapter 6: The Last Straw	33
Chapter 7: Unity for Change	40
Chapter 8: Hope in Action	46
Chapter 9: A New Dawn	53

Chapter 1: Dreams and Drowns

In the slums of Kibanda, a suburb of Kanaish—the big city, Juma a young brown innocent boy, whose eyes burnt with anxiety to explore, walked through the narrow, garbage-strewn alleys with a heavy heart, his steps slow and dragging, as though his very soul was sinking into the filth beneath his feet. Once a bright and ambitious teenager, he had become a shadow of himself. His dreams, once vivid and full of hope, had slowly dissolved, much like the cheap, locally brewed alcohol he had come to rely on—'chang'aa,' a bitter, intoxicating drink that had stolen his past and was now taking away his future.

Juma was born the only boy in a family of 7 and his parents had made every bit of effort to accord him quality education. When Mr. Kombo's children were sent out of school for lack of school fees, unlike Juma, it was Juma's sisters who were sacrificed to miss school at the earliest opportunity of securing funds. Juma knew well that the odds were on his side every time and worked hard not to disappoint his parents.

Juma had once dreamed of becoming a mechanic. He had always been fascinated by the hum of engines, the way gears and pistons meshed together to make machines come alive. As a child, he would tinker with broken radios and bicycles, trying to make them work. His mind was sharp, his hands steady and for a while, the future seemed full of promise. His family had believed in him, too. They saw the glimmer in his eyes, the same fire that had burned in his father's heart when he had first moved to the city with the hope of a better life.

His father would make sure Juma accompanied him to the nearby garage owned by his friend Mr. Kanika, so that he can quench his anxiety of understanding how vehicles operate. Juma would be mesmerized by the ease at which Mr. Kanika and his team would dismantle a vehicle in minutes and diagnose its problem at the relief of the owner. Inspired with enthusiasm to understand mechanics, Juma would volunteer to check engine oil of cars, try to understand the complex wiring mechanisms and undertake many roles at no compensation. During school holidays, unlike other boys who would spend their time playing, Juma would spend his days at the garage and retire to his home quite an exhausted boy.

After school Juma spent a few post -school days with his friend Musa-a tall dark young man with a well-built physique. They would both stroll out in the evenings to discover the streets that they had not explored, in their busy days at school. Juma's poor parents had assured him that he will join a mechanics training college once they source for money but he was not sure when this would happen.

But now, Juma stood at the very edge of his dreams, staring into a dark, abyssal hole that seemed to swallow any glimmer of hope. He could still remember the first time he had tasted chang'aa—its harsh, burning sensation sliding down his throat like molten lava, yet strangely comforting. At first, it was just a way to forget the endless hardships of life in the slums, a temporary escape from the noise of the city, the constant struggle to survive. But like all obsessions, it quickly grew into something more.

His friend Musa had drawn Juma to taste chang'aa in one of their many outings after church one day. As they walked down the valley of the slum, Juma saw young boys his age, seated at one of the dens enjoying the drink and as inquisitive as he was, he asked Musa if he had taken Chang'aa. Musa who was a bit elderly teased Juma and told him that Chang'aa was the 'thing' that always made him feel bold and ease the thoughts of his hardships. He invited Juma to follow him and quickly they dashed into Mr. Baraka's den which was very popular with young men and boys. Juma was thoughtful whether to try Chang'aa today but Musa assured him that he will enjoy it and make a decision to take more after he buys him just one glass.

The first drink led to another and soon Juma was meeting his friends in dark corners of the neighbourhood, where the smell of sweet, cheap alcohol and unhappiness clung to the air. Together, they had become a part of Kibanda the underbelly of Kanaish, a city that pulsed with life and opportunity on its surface but hid a far darker reality beneath. Juma had tried, in the beginning, to fight it. He had dreams, after all—real dreams of owning a garage, working with machines, building a life for himself and his family. But those dreams had faded slowly, just like the light in his eyes, until they were nothing but distant memories that haunted him late at night.

Mr. Kombo tried frantically, to dissuade Juma from starting to drink Chang'aa at such an early age, but the influence of Musa and his peers would not let Juma listen a word from any other people especially from those that preached against his newly discovered beloved drink. His parents approached his former class teacher to help counsel Juma but could hear none of his illustration of life without chang'aa. Juma felt that the teacher had been part of his problems since the education they gave never gave any economic solutions to their poverty.

As days went by, Juma and Musa adopted a schedule of waking up in early morning and disappearing into the valley of 'comfort' before everyone else was awake to drink the first brew of the day. To get money to survive to afford their lifestyle, Juma and Musa were recruited by the brewers as informers with an assigned role of keeping watch on police movements and gathering information about their whereabouts from other neighbourhoods. But with time they came to realize that the local police themselves had no issue with brewers but the brewers just wanted to know of their presence in order to prepare themselves on how to deal with them once they pounce in case.

Juma started wandering deeper into the slums, which had now become part of him. As he moved from one point to another, he could hear the familiar sounds of the slum; the laughter of children playing in the streets, the chatter of women gossiping over cooking pots, the honking of cars in the distance. But none of it seemed to matter anymore. Everything felt distant, like he was watching the world through a fogged-up window.

One day he passed by his old friends—those he had once looked up to, those who had shared in his youthful enthusiasm for life. Now, most of them too were no more than broken versions of themselves. There was Mato, his childhood friend, a short boy with a shining young face, who had once dreamed of becoming a teacher. Mato's eyes were glassy, his hands shaking as he clutched a bottle of chang'aa, his smile a hollow, empty curve. Beside him, Kendy, the beautiful sharp-witted girl who had always dreamed of becoming a doctor, now sat on a makeshift bench made from old crates, her clothes torn and unkempt, her face gaunt and pale. She hadn't always been like this.

'I see you're still holding on to your dream, huh?' Mato's voice cut through Juma's thoughts. He took a long swig from his bottle, the liquid dripping down his chin.

Juma hesitated, his hands shaking slightly. 'What do you mean?'

'Your dream of becoming a mechanic,' Mato said with a sardonic laugh. 'That dream is gone, my friend. You should know that by now.'

Juma tried to push the words away, but they stuck to him like the stench of the alleys. He didn't respond, instead turning his gaze to the broken buildings around them, the narrow, litter-filled streets that seemed to trap them all in a cycle of poverty and distress.

Kendy raised her head slowly, her eyes vacant, but there was a trace of recognition when they landed on Juma. 'You're still trying, aren't you?' she asked, her voice a whisper, almost as if she had forgotten how to speak properly. 'Still hoping that one day, it'll all be different?' The beauty in Kendy's face had now been replaced by spots of blackness on her cheeks and her eyes were as red as an ember.

Juma didn't answer. He didn't have the words to explain. How could he? How could he explain to them that, in his heart, he still felt the spark of his old ambitions, even though the rest of him had already given up?

But the truth was, the city had already swallowed him whole. The intoxicating pull of chang'aa had crept into his blood, numbing the pain, filling the void left by his failed dreams. He

tried to remind himself of the young boy who had once vowed to leave the slums behind, but that boy felt like someone else entirely. His life had become a series of blurred nights and forgotten days, each one melting into the next in an endless cycle.

The thoughts of change felt increasingly distant, like the dreams of his youth—barely a whisper in the back of his mind. Every day was the same and every night, the sharp sting of his reality would set in when the day's alcohol wore off and the harsh truth of his life returned to his mind. The voices of his parents echoed in his mind, warning him to stay away from the streets, from the alcohol, from the people who would pull him down into the abyss with them. But now, they were just voices in the wind, unheard, as he stumbled further into the darkness.

As Juma continued down the alley, he saw his friend, Musa, huddled in a corner. Musa had once been the smartest of their group—quick-witted and always full of ideas. He had dreamed of opening his own small business, something to give him a way out of the slums. But now, Musa sat with his head between his knees, mumbling incoherently to himself. A bottle of chang'aa rested beside him, a cruel companion that had slowly turned him into a shell of the person he once was.

'You okay, Musa?' Juma asked quietly, though he already knew the answer.

Musa looked up, his eyes bloodshot, a twisted grin playing at the corner of his lips. 'Yeah, man. I'm good. Just... you know, waiting for the next drink.'

Juma wanted to say something—something to help, something that would wake his friend up from the grip of this suppression.

But the words felt empty, meaningless. How could he offer advice when he was just as trapped as they were? They were all prisoners in the same dark world, their futures slipping through their fingers like sand.

In some occasions when he was sober, Juma had tried to break free, tried to walk away from the bottle and reclaim the life that once seemed so bright. But each time he tried, the pull of chang'aa was stronger, more insistent. It was as though the drink had its own mind, its own will and every time he thought he could walk away, it dragged him back. It was easier to surrender, to forget about the dreams that seemed so distant now. It was easier to numb the pain and pretend that nothing mattered anymore.

He glanced at Musa, who was already lost again, his mind wandering somewhere far from the present. Juma's heart ached for him. For all of them.

Walking away from his friend, Juma made his way through the slums, past crumbling walls and broken windows, his mind a whirlwind of thoughts. Each face he saw, each broken body he passed, reminded him of the consequences of this weakness situation. There were no success stories here—only lives torn apart by alcohol, poverty and the relentless weight of the world they had been born into.

The air grew thicker as he neared the edge of the slum, where the streets began to look a little cleaner, a little more 'normal.' But Juma didn't care about the neatness of the streets. He didn't care about the glimmer of wealth that shone on the other side of the city. He had long since given up on the idea of escaping the slums.

Instead, he thought about the people he had left behind; the people who had tried to warn him, to pull him back from the edge. They had failed, not because they didn't care, but because they hadn't understood how deep the pain ran. How could they? They hadn't lived his life, hadn't felt the crushing weight of each day, hadn't experienced the way chang'aa soothed the ache, if only for a while.

He stopped for a moment, just at the edge of the Kibanda slum and gazed back. The city ahead stretched before him, sprawling and indifferent. Somewhere beyond the haze of smoke and fumes, there was a world that hadn't been touched by this darkness. And yet, Juma felt utterly alone, cut off from it, as though the distance between him and that world could never be bridged.

'One more drink,' he whispered to himself, as the thought of chang'aa called to him, the way it always did. 'Just one more.'

As he turned to walk back into the shadows, the faces of his friends—their wasted, broken faces—flashed in his mind. They were all slipping away, piece by piece. And in the end, they would drown in the same sorrows that had claimed so many before them. Juma wasn't sure when it had all gone wrong, when the spark of his old dreams had been snuffed out, but one thing was certain: they were all falling into the void together.

Chapter 2: The Failed Glimmer of Hope

The next day, Juma sat hunched over a weathered table in the dimly lit pub, its walls stained with years of smoke and grime. The air was thick with the pungent smell of alcohol and the raucous laughter and slurred conversations of patrons filled the space. A low hum of music played in the background, struggling to cut through the sounds of the crowded room. He stared into his half-empty glass of chang'aa, watching the ripples on the surface, as if trying to find some meaning in the swirling liquid.

Gathered around him, were his friends, all of them in varying degrees of disrepair, their faces tired and gaunt, their eyes empty yet filled with the same hopelessness that lingered in Juma's own heart. The smell of alcohol on their breath mixed with tobacco and the desperation that clung to their words, was palpable as they sat in silence, lost in their own private battles. Despite the noise and chaos around him, Juma couldn't help but feel the oppressive weight of the world closing in on him.

'Nothing changes, does it?' Mato's voice broke through the fog of Juma's thoughts. He was slouched in his chair, his hands wrapped around his own bottle of chang'aa, his eyes glazed over. 'Yesterday, today and tomorrow we enjoy this cursed drink' He continued.

‘No,’ Juma replied softly, his voice barely audible. ‘It never does.’

Kendy, who had been silent for most of the evening, finally spoke up. Her voice was hoarse, as if the constant strain of life had stripped away the smoothness of her tone. ‘They promised us, you know? The government. They promised they would help. They called it Hustlers’ fund and all manner of sweet names. They said they’d stop the alcohol trade. They said they’d stop the drugs. They said they’d make our lives better. But here we are.’

Juma didn’t respond immediately. He had heard the same promises before; the speeches, the reports, the headlines that came and went like fleeting shadows, never leaving any real change behind. They were words, empty and hollow, given by people who had no idea what it was like to live in the slums, to breathe the stifling air of hopelessness that suffocated the youth of Kibanda.

Kendy’s words hung in the air for a long moment, as if they had more weight than any of the promises they had heard over the years. The government’s promises had always been so grandiose, so reassuring—fighting drug abuse, creating job opportunities for youth, putting a stop to the rampant illegal alcohol trade. Yet, here they were, surrounded by the very thing they had been promised would be eradicated. The chang’aa flowed freely, just as the illicit drug trade thrived in the shadows, feeding off the desperation of people like them.

Juma felt a bitterness rise in his throat. He had heard the speeches too. He recalled how, politicians would troupe the slums daily during political campaign period, keeping a blind eye on the chang’aa menace and pretending that once elected,

they would solve every kind of problem in the streets of the slums.

His mother had told him about this too, how the presidential candidates and their high delegations had gathered in grand halls and made bold declarations about change, about lifting the slums out of poverty. Yet, as Juma looked around at his friends, he saw the effects of that broken promise. His friends had dreams that had withered and died, replaced by the cold embrace of alcohol, the only solace they knew.

The door of the pub creaked open and a man walked in, his dark suit and polished shoes a stark contrast to the ragged crowd inside. It was Inspector Fujo, a local police officer known for his ruthlessness, but also his uncanny ability to turn a blind eye when the price was right. He strode confidently toward the counter, nodding curtly to the bartender, who immediately set aside a glass of whiskey. Juma had seen Fujo around before. He was a man of power, a man who didn't mind bending the rules for the right price.

Inspector Fujo was the embodiment of the corruption that ran like a poison through the veins of Kibanda. He had become infamous for his motto: 'No Violence, No Money.' To him, the slums and the suffering they contained were just opportunities for profit. He didn't care about the youth who were losing themselves to alcohol and drugs, didn't care about the promises of a better future that never came. To him, it was all just business.

Fujo's arrival shifted the energy in the room. The young men and women who had once spoken openly of their troubles now quieted, eyeing the inspector with a mix of fear and disdain. Fujo had a reputation, one that was hard to ignore. His

presence in the pub was no coincidence—he was the kind of man who ensured the system worked for him. And as the corrupt officer leaned against the counter, his eyes scanning the room with a sense of ownership, Juma felt a deep, familiar anger rise within him.

Inspector Fujo had a hand in the thriving illicit alcohol trade. He was a man who took bribes from the suppliers, who made sure that chang'aa flowed freely through the slums, while pretending to crack down on it when the media or government scrutiny became too intense. His role in the system was clear: maintain the illusion of control, of law and order, while making sure the real power. His power remained unchallenged.

Juma had heard the rumours, of course—how Fujo was in bed with the local illicit brewers and suppliers, how he turned a blind eye to the backdoor deals that kept the alcohol trade alive and well in Kibanda. It was all part of the game, a game in which the youth of the slums were the pawns, discarded once they had outlived their usefulness.

As Fujo made his way to a corner table, his eyes briefly met Juma's. The glance was nothing more than a fleeting moment, but it was enough to remind Juma of the man's indifference to the suffering around him. Fujo was not the kind of man who cared about the future of youth like Juma. He cared only about his next payday, his next deal, his next opportunity to enrich himself at the expense of others.

Inspector Fujo quickly guzzled the glass of whisky handed over to him by the bartender and dashed back to the counter where he pretended to greet the bartender with his left hand in disguise to collect the weekly bribe as his gaze remained tightly on the revellers to intimidate them to see no evil at all. After

collecting his take for the week, he quickly and visibly happy walked out of the pub and vanished for the next pub.

The pub returned to its usual hum, but the mood had shifted. Juma's mind raced as he thought about the difference between the illusion of support and the reality that the youth faced every day. The government could promise all they wanted, but as long as men like Fujo held the reins, nothing would ever change. The alcohol trade would continue, the drugs would flow and the youth would remain trapped in a cycle of despair.

'You know,' Mato spoke up, breaking Juma's thoughts, 'they say they're going to fix it. They say they'll stop the alcohol, stop the drugs. But look around. Nothing's different. Nothing's changed.'

Kendy nodded. 'It's just the same as always. They make promises, but we're the ones who have to live with the consequences.'

Juma took a deep breath, feeling the weight of their words press down on him. He had always known that nothing would change. The government could promise anything it wanted, but as long as people like Inspector Fujo remained in power, those promises would never mean anything. Juma's generation was caught in the crossfire of a system that didn't care about them, that didn't even see them.

'Maybe we were just born in the wrong place,' Mato muttered, his voice laced with bitterness.

Juma didn't reply. There were no answers. No solutions. Only the same cycle, the same dark path that stretched before them

all. They were trapped in the underbelly of Kibanda, struggling to survive, struggling to make it through another day, while the world outside continued to spin, indifferent to their pain.

He looked at his friends again, their faces haggard, their eyes distant and he couldn't help but feel the deep sense of betrayal that had woven itself into the very fabric of their lives. The government had promised support, but where was it? Inspector Fujo, as a government agent responsible in maintaining law and order, was the embodiment of that failure. The system had let them down, over and over again and in return, all they had was the cheap solace of chang'aa, the bitter taste of defeat lingering on their tongues.

But it wasn't just the government that had failed them. It was the world itself. The people in power, the ones who made the decisions, had no idea what it was like to live in the slums. They had no idea what it meant to fight for survival every single day. The youth of Kibanda were nothing more than statistics to them, faceless numbers on a report, easily dismissed and easily forgotten.

Juma clenched his fists. He wanted to shout, to scream, to break free from this suffocating life, but the words caught in his throat, swallowed by the hopelessness that consumed him. The promises had been made, but they were empty. And in the end, it wasn't just the chang'aa that drowned his generation—it was the betrayal of a system that had long since abandoned them.

The pub was growing louder, the laughter and chatter rising as more people spilled in. Juma remained silent, his mind a whirl of thoughts, his heart heavy with the weight of it all. The illusion of support had failed him. It had failed them all. And as the

night wore on, Juma couldn't shake the feeling that, no matter how hard they tried, they would never be able to escape the grip of this place. The cycle would continue and they would continue to drown in the sorrows of a world that had long forgotten them.

Chapter 3: The Crush by Own Society

One Sunday Juma woke up a bit late than usual and was deeply in thoughts. His hands gripped the edge of the table as he stared out the window of the rundown shanty that he had called home for the last several years. The sky outside was a muted grey, matching the dull ache that had settled deep inside him. The world seemed to be moving, but he felt frozen in one place, as if the weight of his dreams had slowly crushed him under its oppressive force. He had tried so hard to fight, to hold onto something better, but with each passing day, it felt like the foundations of his life—his hopes, his beliefs, had begun to crumble.

It wasn't just the alcohol. It wasn't just the chang'aa that had consumed his friends and him. It was the slow realization that every institution that had once promised a better future for people like him had failed. The church, the school system, the very foundations of society—each one had fallen short, turning a blind eye to the struggles of the youth in the slums.

It had been a few days since Juma and his friends had gathered at the pub and since then, his frustration had only deepened. As he walked the streets of the valley that kind of spelled doom than hope for the slum, he couldn't help but notice the contradictions that stood before him: the sprawling churches with their gleaming crosses, the grand buildings at the edge of

the Kibanda slum where school buses pulled up to deliver students to institutions that were supposed to uplift them. But none of it felt real. The shiny exteriors were mere facades, hiding the rot that lay beneath.

It was the weekend and as usual, Juma found himself standing outside the church in the neighbourhood where Pastor Karanja delivered his weekly sermons. The church was grand, a towering building adorned with stained glass windows and a shining cross at its peak, a symbol of faith and hope for many. Inside, the congregation sang praises and listened to the pastor's impassioned words, filling the air with the sense of a brighter tomorrow. But Juma knew that the reality outside was a stark contrast to the message they preached inside.

Pastor Karanja was a man of great charisma. His words could move mountains, or so it seemed. Each Sunday, he would stand before the congregation, his voice booming as he called for change, for hope, for a society that cared for its youth. But there was something about the man that bothered Juma. The pastor's speeches were always grand, always filled with promises of change, but in the moments when the service ended and the congregation poured out of the church, Pastor Karanja never seemed to see the youth that hung around the church's gates.

Juma had watched the young people who gathered outside, desperate for a way out of their hopeless lives. They stood there, leaning against the church walls, their faces hollow, their eyes glazed over. Some of them were no different from Juma, lost in their obsession with drinking chang'aa, or smoking cigarettes and other drugs as they whispered about their futures—or lack of one. Pastor Karanja never looked at them. He never spoke to them. His sermons were filled with

inspiration and calls for change, but he was blind to the very people who needed to hear his words most.

‘It’s all just talk,’ Mato had said to Juma once, his voice dripping with cynicism. ‘The pastor stands up there and preaches like he’s going to save the world, but what about the kids out here? What about us?’ The irony of preachings by Pastor Karanja and other Pastors across the country was just but annoyance to the very people their preachings were focusing on their messages to their congregations.

Juma didn’t know how to answer Mato. The church was supposed to be a place of refuge, a sanctuary for the weary. But it had become just another institution that turned a blind eye to the very people who needed it most. The pastor would collect tithes and donations from the congregation and every Sunday, he would remind them that God would provide. But God seemed to have forgotten about their slum. God seemed to have forgotten about the youth standing on the streets, looking for answers that the church never provided. Mato added ‘One day I went to a crusade and someone touched my shoulder and said “you will walk “I didn’t bother because I knew I was not lame. After the crusade, I touched my pocket and couldn’t find my wallet which contained my transport fare. Behold I walked”’ These are the people we expect to solve our problems’ Mato wondered.

As Juma turned away from the church, he walked down the familiar path that led him to the local school. The school, much like the church, had once held great promise to his ambition. The promise of education, of opportunity. But like the church, the reality was far different from what it had once been. The school had become a factory of frustration, turning out

students who were ill-prepared for the world they would face beyond the gates.

Juma passed through the gates of the school, the tall concrete walls that had once represented security now feeling like a prison. The school was a place where students were taught the bare minimum, just enough to keep the system running. The teachers were underpaid, overworked and often lacked the passion that once drove them to educate. The curriculum was outdated, focused on rote memorization rather than preparing students for the job market. Juma could remember his own time in school, how he had been taught to memorize facts and formulas that seemed meaningless in the real world.

In the classrooms during his days in school, students sat passively, their minds wandering as the teacher droned on. They were learning subjects they would never use in their lives, while the world around them was changing at a rapid pace. The economy was shifting, new industries were emerging and the world was evolving. But the school system remained stagnant, stuck in a time warp that offered no real solutions to the problems the youth faced.

Juma had been one of the lucky ones. He had had a dream—of becoming a mechanic. But even that dream had felt out of reach. The school had never provided the kind of practical, hands-on learning that Juma needed. The education system had failed to nurture his talents; to help him develop the skills he needed to pursue his passion. Instead, he had been taught subjects that had no bearing on the world he lived in.

When the time had come to graduate, Juma and his friends had found themselves faced with the harsh reality: there were no jobs for them. The job market was flooded with people just like

them—young, eager and unprepared. The few opportunities that existed were often out of reach, reserved for those with connections or the right family background. The rest of them were left to wander, searching for something they could never find.

Juma's friends, too, had been abandoned by the education system. Kendy, the girl who had once dreamed of becoming a doctor, had found herself stuck in a dead-end job, working as a waitress in a local restaurant. Mato, the one who had once dreamed of becoming a teacher, had turned to a petty thief in order to get by. They had all been abandoned by a system that had promised to give them the tools to succeed, but instead had left them ill-prepared for the harsh reality they now faced.

'It's all a lie,' Mato muttered one afternoon as they sat together in the precincts of their former school, watching the students go home. 'They tell us to study, to get good grades, to make something of ourselves. But where are the opportunities? Where are the jobs?'

Kendy had shaken her head in frustration. 'They tell us that we can make a difference, that we can change the world. But they don't tell us how. They don't teach us anything that actually helps us.'

Juma knew they were right. He had tried to play by the rules, to follow the path laid out by society. But the path had led him to a dead end, where his dreams seemed to wither away like the crumbling walls of the school. The education system was failing them, just as the church had failed them, just as the government had failed them. They had been left on their own, discarded in a world that didn't care.

As Juma walked back to his home, his mind raced with anger and frustration. The anger wasn't just for himself; it was for his friends, for the generations of youth who had come before him and had been let down by the very institutions that were supposed to protect them. The church, the education system, the government—they had all promised change, but they had delivered nothing. They had all failed.

It was a familiar feeling, the sense of abandonment. The feeling that they were just statistics to be ignored, pawns in a system that cared more about maintaining its own power than about helping those who needed it most. Juma could see it in the eyes of his friends, the hopelessness, the frustration, the sense of being forgotten. It wasn't just the chang'aa that had broken them—it was the realization that the very institutions that were supposed to give them hope had turned their backs on them.

The anger inside Juma burned hot, a fire that had been smouldering for years, but now seemed to reach a boiling point. He couldn't take it anymore. The empty promises. The lies. The system that had promised them a better future but had only given them nothing. Juma clenched his fists, his body trembling with the weight of his frustration.

He looked around at the world that had let him down; the crumbling buildings, the crowded streets, the people lost in their own struggles but he knew one thing for certain: something had to change. But what? How could he fight against a system that seemed so entrenched in its own failures?

Juma didn't know the answer. But as he walked through the streets of the slum, past the church, the school, the police

stations, he realized that the time for waiting for someone else to make the change had long passed. The pillars of society had failed him and his friends. It was time for them to find their own way out of the darkness.

The rage inside him was no longer just a feeling—it was a spark, a glare of something that might one day become a fire. And in that moment, Juma realized something else: the change had to start with him.

Chapter 4: The Monstrous Addiction

One day, Juma woke to the familiar ache in his head, a dull, thudding pain that felt like it was pressing in from all sides. His eyes cracked open, squinting against the harsh light filtering through the cracks in the walls of the shanty. The smell of stale alcohol lingered in the air, a constant reminder of the night before, of the cheap chang'aa he had drunk to dull the ever-growing ache in his soul. It was a pain he couldn't shake, no matter how much he drank, no matter how many bottles he emptied. The withdrawal was setting in again, the restless nausea and shaking hands telling him that he would need more soon—just enough to get by, just enough to keep the storm inside him at bay.

The room was dim, the only light coming from the space between the door and the frame. The clutter of empty bottles and crumpled newspapers strewn across the floor mirrored the chaos in his mind. It was a scene all too familiar. Juma was drowning, but there was no one to throw him a lifeline.

His phone buzzed on the table, its vibration cutting through the silence of the room. Juma groggily reached for it, squinting at

the screen. It was a message from Kendy, one of the few people who still tried to reach out to him.

Where are you? We need to talk. Meet at the usual spot.

Juma groaned, his fingers trembling as he typed back a response.

Later. Not feeling well.

He tossed the phone aside and leaned back into the pillow, trying to ignore the gnawing hunger in his stomach. The hunger wasn't for food. It was a deeper hunger, an emptiness that couldn't be filled by anything—certainly not by the small meal he could scrape together, or the empty promises of a better tomorrow. It was the hunger for an escape, for the numbness that only alcohol could bring. It was the kind of hunger that gnawed at his insides and wouldn't let go.

He could hear the faint murmurs of life outside; children laughing, the distant honking of cars, the usual sounds of the city. But inside the small shanty, Juma felt as if the world had stopped moving. His world had been reduced to the rhythm of his passion for drinking, the next drink always looming, with false hope to fix his problems as the only thing that mattered.

Juma knew the cycle all too well. It was the same every day: wake up, feel the pain of withdrawal, drink to numb it, repeat. It wasn't just the alcohol that controlled him now—it was the whole process, the routine of addiction. It was the only thing that made him feel alive, even if it was for a brief, fleeting moment.

The walls around him felt like they were closing in, as they often did when the hangover was particularly severe. He rubbed his face, pushing himself to get up, but his body felt heavy, like it was made of stone. The world outside seemed to taunt him with its movement, its progress, while he remained stuck in one place, a prisoner to his own need for escape.

At some point, he forced himself to stand. His legs wobbled beneath him as he stumbled toward the door. He took a deep breath, feeling the sharpness of the cold air as he stepped outside. The city was alive, its pulse quickening with the rush of everyday activity and yet Juma felt like an outsider. The people around him moved with purpose, while he shuffled through the streets, trying to find a reason to keep going.

He needed something to take the edge off. His hands trembled as he walked toward the alley where the local chang'aa supplier-Baraka usually set up. The small, makeshift stall was tucked away in the shadows, a part of the underbelly of the slum, a place where the hopeless went to drown their sorrows. Juma didn't have to look hard; he knew where to find the Baraka. His eyes scanned the alley and within seconds, a figure stepped out from behind a corner.

'Need something?' the Baraka asked, his voice low and gruff, his face obscured by a thick beard.

Juma nodded without speaking. Baraka reached into a bag and pulled out a small plastic bottle, filled with the liquid that Juma knew all too well. He fumbled for a few coins in his pocket, his hands still shaking, before handing them over. It wasn't much, but it would be enough to take the feeling off for a little while. The supplier didn't care about the amount—it was just business.

Juma stretched his hand, feeling the coolness of plastic bottle against his palm and without hesitation, he took a long swig. The burn of the chang'aa went down his throat, leaving behind a temporary warmth that spread through his body. For a few moments, the world seemed to quiet down, the noise fading into the background. The shaking in his hands began to subside and the ache in his head lessened. He felt the familiar numbness creep in and for a fleeting second, he could forget about the world, about the life he had trapped himself in.

But the respite was short-lived. The numbness that the alcohol provided was always fleeting and soon enough, the hunger returned. Juma knew this cycle well: the alcohol would never be enough and soon enough; he would need more. It wasn't just the need for more drink—it was the addiction to the escape, to the numbness, to the darkness that shielded him from the pain of reality.

As he leaned against the wall, trying to steady himself, he couldn't shake the thoughts that haunted him. The thoughts of his friends—the ones who had tried to reach out, the ones who had once shared dreams with him, but now seemed to drift further away with each passing day.

He hadn't seen Mato in days. The last time they'd talked, Mato had seemed distant, as though something inside him had broken. Juma remembered the last conversation they had, the way Mato had said that he couldn't keep going on like this, that the chang'aa wasn't the answer. But it wasn't the alcohol that kept them tethered together; it was the shared understanding of the pain they all felt, the pain of being ignored, neglected and discarded. Mato had once had a dream of becoming a teacher, of inspiring young minds, but now, he was just another soul lost in the abyss.

Kendy, too, had grown more distant. The girl who had once been full of hope, with dreams of becoming a doctor, now barely left her job at the restaurant. She had resigned herself to the belief that this was all there was for people like them. She had stopped speaking about her dreams. It was as if the weight of the world had crushed her spirit and she no longer believed that she could escape.

And then there was himself—Juma. The boy who had once dreamed of becoming a mechanic, of fixing cars, of building something with his hands. But now, he had nothing left. The dream seemed like a distant memory; one he could barely recall. His hands, once eager to learn and create, were now shaking, reaching for the next bottle, the next escape.

The world around him felt like a blur. The faces of people walking by, the children laughing in the distance, the vendors calling out their wares—all of it was muffled, as if seen through a fog. His reality was a haze and the only thing that seemed real was the alcohol, the chang'aa that promised him the illusion of peace.

Juma stumbled back to the street, his thoughts swirling as the numbness began to settle in deeper. He walked past a group of young men who were gathered on a corner, talking in low voices, their faces marked by the same signs of weariness that he saw in his own reflection. They nodded at him as he passed, some of them offering quiet words of greeting, others too lost in their own struggles to care. The connections were fading and the friendships were fraying at the edges. Everyone seemed to be lost, each person drowning in their own sea of gloom.

It wasn't just the alcohol. Juma knew that. It was the escape it provided, the brief moments of relief from a world that was too

much to bear. And in those fleeting moments, when the alcohol clouded his mind, he could pretend—pretend that he hadn't been abandoned by the system, pretend that the dreams he once had, still meant something.

But the escape was always temporary. And soon, the crash would come. The anger, the frustration, the regret; it would all return and with it, the knowledge that there was no real way out.

Juma didn't know how long he had been wandering the streets when he found himself at the familiar pub again. The same faces, the same weary faces, the same escape. It was all so predictable. He sat down at a table just behind the door, the darkness around him swallowing him whole. The alcohol would dull the edge of his pain, but it could never truly erase it. His friends, the ones who had once been his family, were gone. Their dreams had been suffocated and their spirits had been broken, just like his own.

The laughter from the other side of the room faded into the background as Juma took another drink. It was the same cycle, over and over again—drink, escape, forget. But somewhere deep inside him, he knew that this couldn't be all there was. There had to be more. There had to be a way out of the darkness. But for now, all he could do was keep drinking, keep escaping and pretend that the hope he had once had wasn't completely gone.

Mato and Kendy on the other side of the slum visited Mzee Baraka's other den and met his wife preparing the den to start-off the day. As they were about to sit down, Baraka's wife shook the gallon she used to mix Chang'aa with and in it came out 5 big rats-the size of a small cat. The rats looked happy as

if they were co-workers with her. They jumped in all directions and one of them jumped into Kendy's chest and entered into her light, loose blouse that had now transformed into the shape of a gown, after wearing it daily for many years. Kendy made a loud scream out of her weak voice.

Mato stepped forward to help but he could not hold his legs on the ground and fell down on Kendy's feet. The rat managed to get its way through Kendy's skirt and vanished into the gutter making her shake her bonny legs violently. Baraka's wife pretended not bothered by the incident but Mato was left wondering to himself in a low voice 'You mean this chang'aa that leaves us with gnawing pains in our stomachs the next day after we take it, is possibly because the rats poop and maybe urinate in it'.

Kendy also feigned not to hear anything and was now yearning for a drink to quench her anxiety after the drama with the rat. She quickly grabbed a half-full glass of chang'aa that Baraka's wife gave each of them as welcome drink but possibly as a bribe not to spread the news about the rats they had witnessed in her brew.

Chapter 5: The Cartels and Corruption of Doom

The streets of the Kibanda slum had always felt like a labyrinth to Juma, the twists and turns familiar yet full of shadows. But

on this particular evening, something was different. The air had a strange weight to it, a tension that hung between the shanty buildings in Kibanda slum like an invisible fog. He wasn't sure what drew him into the alley that night, but he couldn't ignore the nagging feeling in his gut—the feeling that something was off.

Juma's feet moved almost instinctively as he walked down the narrow street, weaving between trash cans and abandoned carts. The streetlights flickered overhead, casting long shadows that seemed to stretch like dark fingers reaching out. He had come out for another drink, another moment of escape, but tonight, there was a gnawing curiosity that kept him moving.

As he neared the end of the alley, he heard voices—low, murmuring voices that didn't quite reach the surface of the street. The sound was muffled, but there was something about it that pulled him in, like a magnet drawing him closer. He stopped, pressing himself against the side of a crumbling building, trying to make sense of what he was hearing.

At first, he thought it might be a simple exchange—a quick business deal between the vendors and suppliers of chang'aa, the illegal alcohol that had become the lifeblood of his neighbourhood. But the voices grew clearer as he shifted closer and the words, he overheard sent a chill down his spine.

'...if we want this to keep running smoothly, we need to make sure the cops stay away,' one voice said, low and steady. 'They're getting restless, asking too many questions.'

Juma's heart skipped a beat. He knew that voice. It belonged to Mzee Omari, the local chang'aa supplier who ran a small stall just around the corner a few meters from Baraka's den. The

man was a fixture in Kibanda—unofficial, but always around, always ready to supply the substance that everyone craved for. But what was he doing talking about the police? And who was he meeting with?

Juma crouched down, moving closer to the source of the voices. He pressed his ear against the cool brick wall of the building, holding his breath as he tried to listen without being heard.

‘Don't worry,’ another voice replied, rough and grating. ‘We’ve got our boys in uniform. Fujo has made it clear—no interference, as long as the money keeps flowing. We keep him happy and the booze keeps flowing.’

The name hit Juma like a hammer to the chest. Inspector Fujo. The very same man who was supposed to be policing the streets, keeping Kibanda safe from the clutches of crime and violence. The man who wore his uniform like a badge of honour.

But the reality he was hearing, the truth spilling out in whispers, was far from the image of the protector that Fujo had built for himself.

‘Make sure the next shipment is clean and we’ll keep pushing that junk into the market. The profit is good and the cops get their share. It’s all about loyalty,’ Mzee Omari continued, the greed in his voice unmistakable.

Juma’s breath caught in his throat. It felt like the ground beneath him was slipping away. The realization hit him hard—there was no distinction between the people who were

supposed to keep order and those who thrived on chaos. The alcohol, the drugs—it was all a game to them, a way to keep everyone in line, to feed off their hopelessness. Fujo, the man he had always seen as the authority, was in on it. He was part of the rot, complicit in the very system that was destroying his community.

Juma wanted to move, to run away from the truth he had uncovered, but his legs wouldn't obey him. He was stuck there, staring at the scene unfolding in front of him. The deal was being made in plain sight and yet he had never once suspected it. How many times had he seen Fujo around, standing tall in his uniform, acting like the law itself? How many times had he heard undertones that police bribery fuelled the illicit liquor business but dismissed them as rumours?

But this wasn't a rumour. This was the ugly truth, laid bare for him to see.

'They're desperate out there, you know,' one of the officers added, his voice tinged with dark humour. 'The more they drink, the more they forget. Keep them coming back. A little dependency is good for business. And the more they depend on the booze, the less likely they are to do anything that threatens our setup.' The officer continued 'I know this thing has a lot of methanol but even if we give these guys pure whisky they cannot afford and the business will not thrive. Let them drink and even if a few people died, no one has forced them to drink, it's their choice and they should bear the consequences of their choice. For us all we need is our business to thrive' "Hahaha' He ended with a sickening laughter.

Juma could not fathom that the chang'aa and other illicit alcohol brands he has been taking were being supplied under

such malicious intentions and the fact that the officer mentioned about methanol and death made his nerves freeze with fear. He wondered why would someone meant to protect their lives be the one betraying them at the expense of profits.

The words hit Juma like a punch to the gut. This wasn't just about alcohol or drugs anymore. It was about control, about a system designed to keep people in their place, to keep them distracted from the world around them. The more the youth drank, the less they questioned. The less they fought for change. They were being kept in the dark, held down by their own obsessions, while the corrupt benefitted from their suffering.

Juma's mind raced, the weight of what he had just heard settling over him like a heavy blanket. He had always known that something was wrong in Kibanda, that the system was broken, but he had never imagined it could be this bad. The very people who were supposed to protect and serve were the ones profiting off the destruction of his community. Fujo wasn't just turning a blind eye—he was actively enabling the destruction. He was part of the problem.

But what could Juma do with this knowledge? The truth was terrifying, but it wasn't something he could ignore. If he exposed what he had learned, would anyone believe him? Would they care? After all, the people in power were the ones who controlled the narrative. Fujo's grip on the community was tight—he had the police, the local politicians and even the criminals in his pocket. If Juma went public with this, he could very well become another statistic, another casualty of a system that valued power and profit over justice.

The voices in the alley began to fade, the meeting coming to an end. Juma didn't even realize it, but his hand had already tightened around the phone in his pocket. The impulse to record the conversation was there, but it was a fleeting thought. He couldn't risk it. Not yet. He didn't have enough proof and even if he did, who would he trust with it? Who could he turn to?

With a heavy heart and a sick feeling in his stomach, Juma slowly backed away from the alley, retreating into the shadows. He needed to think. He needed time to process everything he had just uncovered. The truth was too big, too dangerous to handle all at once.

Juma walked aimlessly through the streets, his mind a whirlwind of thoughts. His craving, his friends, the corrupt police officers—it all seemed to be swirling together into a single, suffocating reality. The more he thought about what he had heard, the more he realized how deeply embedded the corruption was in the fabric of his community. Fujo wasn't the only one. There were countless others in power who had sold out, who had turned their backs on the people they were meant to protect. The system had rotted from the inside out and the only ones left to suffer were the people at the bottom.

He couldn't stay silent. He knew that much. But he also knew that speaking out came with its own risks. What would happen to him? To his friends? To the few connections he had left in this world?

Juma stopped in the middle of the street, the weight of his decision hanging heavy on his shoulders. He had always been a product of his environment, swept up in the current of addiction and depression. But now, he was faced with a choice:

to continue down the path of self-destruction or to do something that might, just might, bring change.

For the first time in a long time, Juma felt a twinkle of something—hope, perhaps. Or maybe it was just the desire for something more than the endless cycle of alcohol and numbness. But it was enough to push him forward.

The corruption he had uncovered was vast and it was going to take more than just him to expose it. But he knew one thing for certain: this was a battle worth fighting. He couldn't keep turning a blind eye. He couldn't keep drowning in the same old routine. Juma had a choice to make and for the first time, he was ready to make it.

The battle wasn't over. It had only just begun.

Chapter 6: The Last Straw

The night was suffocating, heavy with heat and the stench of alcohol. Juma stood in the alleyway, watching the chaos unfold around him, yet feeling completely removed from it all. His body was drained, his mind foggy from a day of endless drinking, each bottle consumed serving only to numb him further. He had long stopped trying to make sense of the world

around him—it was easier to drown in it than face it. But tonight, something felt different. There was an underlying tension in the air, something that Juma couldn't shake, a growing awareness that, somehow, things had gone too far. As he straddled his legs in the dark streets, he met with a man carrying a sack of what looked like a heavy load. Behind him were two other men walking faster to catch up with him. Suddenly, Juma heard them shout 'stop there and bring the food you are carrying, otherwise, if you resist, we will kill you now'. Juma was terrified and stopped by the road side to watch with bated breath and deep fear. The man with the load did not talk but quickly dropped the bag down with a thud sound. It burst releasing a substance with a pungent smell of something that smelled like human waste. The man thereafter, took to his heels and vanished into the darkness. The substance splashed into the two men's clothes and left them cursing bitterly for their greed to attack the man carrying a filthy substance that they had thought was food. Juma thought of it and realised that the man was a local carrier boy 'exhauster' that helped dispose waste at a small fee for a chang'aa drink.

Juma walked quickly from the danger that he had witnessed and his eyes scanned the path ahead of him with caution. The usual crowd had gathered in the alley behind the shop at the small roundabout, where they bought their chang'aa. The sounds of laughter mixed with the occasional argument, as people stumbled in and out of the shadows, looking for the next hit of oblivion. The alcohol, the violence, the dejection—it was a toxic mix, one that he had come to expect but never truly understood.

'Hey, Juma! Over here!'

He turned at the sound of his name. It was Mato, his once-close friend, now little more than a ghost of the person he used to be. Mato's eyes were bloodshot, his face gaunt and his clothes looked like they had been through a week's worth of abuse. Still, there was something desperate in his voice that made Juma pause, something that made his heart clench.

Mato staggered toward him, the faint trace of a smile tugging at the corners of his lips. 'Man, you wouldn't believe it,' he slurred. 'The stuff they've got now, it's like... it's like nothing I've ever tasted before.' He held up a plastic bottle, half-full with a concoction that looked too thick, too dark to be anything safe.

Juma frowned, a sick feeling settling in his stomach. 'What is that, Mato? That stuff looks dangerous, man.'

Mato just laughed, a hollow, empty sound that echoed in the night. 'It's the best, Juma. You got to try it. You'll see. You won't regret it.'

Juma stepped back, suddenly feeling a chill despite the oppressive warmth of the evening. He knew that look in Mato's eyes—the reckless abandon, the desire to escape from everything, to drown out the pain that had consumed them both. It was the same look he had seen in his own reflection too many times. But this time, something inside him stirred, a faint but distinct sense of alarm. He didn't want to be here. He didn't want to be part of this madness anymore. But what else was there?

Before he could respond, the sound of coughing echoed through the alley. A few people looked up, but no one moved. It was one of those sounds that didn't demand attention, not

in this place. But this time, something was different. The coughing grew more intense, more ragged. It wasn't the typical result of a drink gone wrong; it was something worse.

Juma's eyes widened as he looked toward the source of the noise. It was Kendy, another friend who had fallen prey to the same vicious cycle. She was doubled over, clutching her chest, her face contorted in pain. The bottle she had been drinking from slipped from her hands and shattered on the concrete.

The people around her didn't move to help. They just stood there, looking away, as if to pretend it wasn't happening. The indifference in the air was suffocating.

'Kendy?' Juma's voice cracked as he stepped forward, his legs suddenly feeling weak. He rushed to her side, his hand on her back. 'Kendy, what's wrong? What did you drink?'

She barely looked at him, her eyes glazed, her breathing shallow. She let out a weak laugh, one that sent a jolt of panic through Juma. 'You were right, Juma,' she whispered. 'We're all just... fading away. I can't... I can't stop.'

Before Juma could respond, she let out a final, violent cough that turned into a strangled gasp. Her body went limp and Juma caught her just in time before she hit the ground. His heart raced, a cold sweat breaking out across his forehead as he checked for a pulse. There was nothing. No breath, no heartbeat.

For a long moment, time stood still. Juma's mind went blank as he stared at Kendy's lifeless body, her face contorted in pain even in death. He felt the weight of her death, of their

collective demise, settle heavily on his chest. He had known this was coming, had seen the warning signs, but he had never imagined it would hit so close to home.

Mato who also witnessed Kendy die in their presence, could not stop shedding tears and was deeply torn. He couldn't even stand up and you could feel his heart beat with a thunderous sound.

A few onlookers finally stirred, but none of them moved to help. They just stood there, murmuring to each other, whispering their thoughts as if they had seen it all before. As if this was normal.

But it wasn't normal. This wasn't just another casualty in the war they were fighting—it was a glaring reminder of the destruction they had allowed to take root in their community. This wasn't just a problem with alcohol or drugs. This was a systemic issue. A cycle of loss of hope that the system—society, the government, the police had allowed to continue unchecked. And now, it had claimed another soul.

Juma's stomach churned. His hands were shaking. He had watched so many of his friends slip away into jones, into oblivion. But Kendy... Kendy had been different. She had dreams. She had hope. And now she was gone.

In that moment, something inside Juma snapped.

He stood up slowly, his legs unsteady beneath him and turned toward the group of people who had gathered. He could feel his heart pounding in his chest, the anger building with every

breath he took. He couldn't hold it in any longer. He couldn't stay silent.

'You don't get it, do you?' he yelled, his voice raw, his words coming out in a guttural roar. 'You all just stand there and watch while we die, one by one. Kendy's gone! She's dead! And you all just... just stand here like it's nothing. This isn't normal! This isn't how it's supposed to be!'

A few people shifted uneasily, but none of them spoke. They all knew it was true, but the truth was too painful to face.

Juma's mind was spinning, the weight of his words sinking in. His chest tightened with the force of his emotions and he took a step back, his mind racing with thoughts of everything that had gone wrong. The government, the police, the schools, the church—they had all failed them. Everyone had turned a blind eye. They were all complicit in the destruction of the youth, in the slow decay of hope.

'Where are the police when we need them?' Juma shouted, his voice breaking. 'Where's the government? Where's the help? They promised us that things would change, that we wouldn't have to live like this. But they lied! They've all lied to us. We're just... just pawns in their game. And look what it's cost us.'

His words echoed in the alleyway, bouncing off the walls as he spoke the truth, he had been too afraid to say before. The anger inside him boiled over and for the first time in a long time, he felt a spark of something real. Something raw.

'Enough!' Juma shouted again, this time addressing the others around him. 'We've all had enough. Look at us. We're dying

here and for what? So, they can keep making their money off of our pain? So, they can keep us in chains, locked in this cycle of addiction? They are giving us poison deliberately'

For the first time in what felt like an eternity, Juma felt like he had a voice. And the more he spoke, the clearer the words became. 'We need to break free. We need to stop relying on them, stop relying on this killer alcohol, on drugs. We need to stand up. We need to do this together.'

The silence in the alley was deafening. Juma's words hung in the air and for the first time, he saw something in the eyes of the people around him. It wasn't just apathy. It was fear. Fear of breaking the chains. Fear of change.

But there was something else in their eyes too. A spark. A glitter of hope.

'Juma's right,' Mato said, stepping forward. His voice was shaky, but it was real. 'We can't keep doing this. We need to get out. Get out before we all end up like Kendy.'

Juma turned to face him and for the first time in a long while, he saw the old Mato—the one who had dreams, who had hope. He wasn't lost yet. He wasn't gone.

It wasn't too late. It couldn't be.

In that moment, Juma realized that change was possible. But it wasn't going to come easily. It wasn't going to be handed to them. But the first step had been taken. They had to speak up, they had to fight. For themselves. For each other.

Kendy had died, but her death wasn't in vain. It had sparked something in Juma—something that was too big to ignore. He wasn't going to let them die in silence anymore. He wasn't going to be silent anymore.

He would fight. For Kendy. For Mato. For Musa. For all of them.

Chapter 7: Unity for Change

The days following Kendy's death were a blur of confusion, grief and anger. Juma couldn't remember when he had last felt such a rush of emotions all at once. The anger was still raw, still gripping his chest as tightly as it had that night. But now, there was something else—a sense of purpose, a need to act, to make a change, to do something meaningful with the pain he carried inside.

The next few days were spent in quiet conversations. Word had spread fast through Kibanda slum and beyond about what had happened, about Kendy's overdose and the things Juma had said in the alley. Some people whispered in disbelief, others shrugged it off, but there was a quiet shift. Juma could feel it in the way people started to look at him differently. There was fear in their eyes, yes, but there was something else too. Something deeper. A sparkle of something resembling hope. Maybe, just maybe, things didn't have to stay this way. Maybe they didn't have to live in the suffocating cycle of addiction and moral decay.

For Juma, this small shift was all the encouragement he needed. He gathered his closest friends together—Mato, Shiro,

Wambui and some of the others who had been part of the scene for years. They had all seen too much, lost too much. It was time to act. Musa who had now lost his mind completely could not even understand anything they said. He was a potential patient for the local mental hospital but no one cared to take action and instead they continued to serve him a drink when he appeared at their dens and later chase him like a dog when he starts to mumble to himself and at times being violent.

One late afternoon, they met behind the small shanty that served as their usual meeting place. The sun had just begun to dip below the horizon, casting the area in a hazy orange glow. Juma stood at the front, his hands shoved deep into the pockets of his jacket, looking at the faces of the people who, like him, had been lost in the darkness.

‘I know you’re all tired,’ Juma began, his voice steady but raw. ‘Tired of being stuck in this mess. Tired of watching people die, watching ourselves die little by little. Tired of watching our friends waste away while the people who should help us—our leaders, the police, the government, turn a blind eye. But it’s time we do something about it. Time, we take control of our lives again.’

There was a moment of silence. Mato, who had been quiet for the past few days, shifted uncomfortably, his hands fiddling with the empty bottle in front of him. He looked up at Juma, his eyes filled with uncertainty but also something else—determination.

‘Yeah, Juma,’ Mato said, his voice thick with emotion. ‘But what can we really do? It feels like we’re too small. There are so

many of them—the police, the politicians, the guys who sell the alcohol. What chance do we have against them?’

Juma nodded, understanding the scepticism in his friend’s voice. He had felt it too—the overwhelming sense of powerlessness that had kept him locked in the cycle of drinking and numbing himself. But now, after seeing the truth and understanding the depth of their suffering, he knew there was a way forward.

‘We start small,’ Juma said, a spark of fire beginning to light in his eyes. ‘We start with ourselves. We start by reclaiming our lives, by getting ourselves and our friends out of this mess. We educate. We talk. We don’t let anyone keep us silent anymore. This—this thing we’re caught in, it’s not just about alcohol. It’s about everything. The system. The lies. The corruption. We’ve been lied to for too long and it’s time we demand accountability.’

Shiro, who had been watching Juma with quiet admiration, spoke up. ‘You’re saying we start a movement?’ she asked. Her voice was soft, almost hesitant, but there was a spark of something in her eyes—a glimmer of the hope that Juma had felt earlier. ‘We... we talk about what’s happening here? Tell people what they don’t want us to say?’

‘Yes,’ Juma said firmly. ‘We call it ‘Reclaiming Lives.’ We start by talking to people—our friends, the younger generation, everyone who’s been caught up in this. We educate them on alcohol abuse, show them how it’s not just a personal failure. It’s a system designed to keep us down. We show them the truth and then we show them how to fight it. We hold ourselves accountable too; because we’re all part of it. It’s time

we stop blaming everyone else and take responsibility for our actions.'

Wambui, who had also been quiet the entire time, looked up, her face thoughtful. 'But how do we get people to listen? The police won't want us talking about them and the government... well, they don't care about people like us. They've never cared.'

Juma took a deep breath, feeling the weight of her words. He knew she was right. The powers that be had always ignored the people who lived in the slums. But that didn't mean they couldn't make a difference.

'We start small,' Juma repeated, the words coming easier now. 'We talk to the youth. We get them in on this, make them understand that this is about more than just alcohol. This is about their lives. Their future. We hold meetings—open sessions, discussions. We create a space for them to talk about what's really going on. We give them a platform to speak out. It's not just about stopping the drinking. It's about changing the whole system.'

The idea took root quickly. The group met every day, planning what they would do next. They started small, organizing small gatherings in the alleys and open spaces where they had spent most of their lives. The first meetings were small, just a handful of people, but that didn't matter. The message was getting out. Slowly but surely, they began to draw in more people—young men and women who had been drinking away their hopes, their futures, but were now ready to listen.

Juma found himself growing more and more energized by the work they were doing. He and his friends took turns speaking at the meetings, sharing their stories of addiction, of loss, of

the system that had kept them in chains for so long. They spoke about the deception they had witnessed, the police officers who took bribes to look the other way, the government officials who promised change but only took advantage of their suffering. The more they spoke, the more the group grew.

At one meeting, Wambui stood up to speak for the first time. Her voice was soft, but it was filled with a power that took Juma by surprise.

‘I’ve been stuck in this cycle too,’ she said, her hands shaking slightly as she held the microphone. ‘Drinking, trying to forget about the things that hurt. I used to think I’d never get out of this place, that it was my fault, that I was just weak. But now I see—it’s not just us. It’s all of us. We’ve been used. We’ve been fed lies by the people in power. They’ve turned our pain into their profit.’

The crowd was silent as Wambui spoke, but as she finished, a wave of applause erupted. For the first time, it wasn’t just an echo of the past. It wasn’t just a moment of recognition—it was the beginning of something bigger.

The more people joined the movement, the more it became clear that they weren’t alone. There were others who were just as tired, just as angry, just as ready for change. Juma and his friends weren’t just talking about drinking anymore. They were talking about justice. About accountability. They were talking about the future they had been denied and the future they were going to reclaim.

The movement was still in its infancy, but the momentum was undeniable. Each meeting, each conversation, felt like a small victory in a long battle. They were no longer passive victims of

a broken system. They were agents of change, fighting for their lives and the lives of those who came after them.

It wasn't easy. There were setbacks, of course. The police occasionally showed up at their meetings, trying to intimidate them into silence. But each time they were met with more voices, more resolve. And the community around them began to listen. Slowly, things began to shift.

Juma looked out over the crowd at one of their larger gatherings, watching the faces of the youth, the faces of those who had been overlooked for so long. He saw hope in their eyes—a kind of hope he hadn't seen in years. A hope that wasn't just for themselves, but for the generations to come.

This was just the beginning, Juma knew. They had a long way to go. But for the first time in his life, he felt like they could do it. They could reclaim their lives. Together.

And as the evening wore on, with people speaking, listening and coming together, Juma realized that in this small victory, in this moment of unity, they had already won. Not against the world, not against the system. But against the apathy that had once held them in its grip.

The battle was far from over, but they had taken the first step. And that was more than he had ever dared hope for.

Chapter 8: Hope in Action

Juma could hardly believe the shift that had begun to take place. The small group of young people who had gathered in dark alleyways and forgotten corners, once drowning in their fondness for alcohol were now lighting fires of hope in places that had long been ignored. What had started as a whisper—an idea that had seemed impossible—was now growing louder, rippling through the heart of Kibanda slum. A movement was taking shape and it was fuelled by the very people who had once been the forgotten casualties of the system.

The days after their first public meetings had been filled with determination. Word had spread quickly and the ‘Reclaiming Lives’ movement gained traction. But it wasn’t just the youth who were taking notice. Slowly, quietly, the older generations—those who had long been resigned to the status quo—began to show up at their gatherings, sitting at the back

and listening. They were tired, sceptical, yes, but there was something in the air now. A glimmer of hope, or maybe just the faintest trace of the idea that change was possible.

Juma, along with Mato, Shiro, Wambui and the others, kept their momentum going. They met daily, organizing more sessions, distributing pamphlets and speaking at the heart of the community—schools, churches, local markets—anywhere they could find a group of people willing to listen. But they weren't just preaching. They were connecting with people in ways they had never imagined. They were inviting their community to join them in confronting a system that had for too long kept them under its thumb.

And then, something extraordinary happened.

It started with Pastor Karanja, the same pastor who had once turned a blind eye to the youth drowning in alcohol outside his church. For years, he had given his weekly sermons, filled with hope and faith, but never once had he taken action. But Juma and his group had reached out to him. They didn't go there demanding change, but asking for help. They explained the urgency, the depth of the problem and how the youth felt abandoned.

At first, Pastor Karanja had been cautious. He had listened but remained unsure. 'The church has its own struggles,' he had said. 'We cannot just turn the entire mission into one of politics or social movements.'

But Juma had remained patient. He had shared the stories—the stories of friends lost to alcohol, of the children who never saw a way out, of the hopes suffocated by the choking haze of dependence on chang'aa. Juma reminded Pastor Karanja of his

duty—not just to preach hope, but to live it. To embody the very change, he spoke of.

It was a slow, careful process. The church began offering spaces for meetings and slowly, members of the congregation started showing up at ‘Reclaiming Lives’ sessions. Pastor Karanja began to speak out more forcefully, not only about spiritual redemption but about the very real struggles of the community. His sermons began to touch on the power of collective action, of standing together to fight the things that held them all back.

There were setbacks, of course. Some members of the congregation resisted, arguing that this was not the church’s role and the church might get backlash from politicians if it criticized them. Others felt uncomfortable with the idea of confronting the corrupt officials who had helped sustain the illicit alcohol trade since the police always fought back. But the momentum of the movement, driven by the youth and supported by those who truly believed in change, was undeniable.

The next step came from a most unexpected place—an unlikely ally who had been watching from the sidelines.

Nashon, a journalist from a local newspaper, had heard rumblings about the ‘Reclaiming Lives’ movement. At first, he had dismissed it as just another short-lived protest. But something about the youth’s passion caught his attention. He began attending their meetings, standing quietly in the back, taking notes and observing. The stories of their pain, their suffering and their resilience struck him deeply.

He was a journalist, yes, but he was also a person who had grown tired of writing about the same corrupt stories—about the government officials, the police and the underhanded dealings that seemed to dominate every corner of life in Kibanda slum. He longed for a story that wasn't just about corruption and the anger he had felt but one that showed that something could be done.

And so, he made a choice. Nashon reached out to Juma and the others, offering to cover their movement in a series of articles. He promised them that he would tell their story, not just of suffering but of hope and the fight to reclaim their future.

The articles began to circulate. They were not sensationalized pieces designed to provoke outrage, but rather deeply human stories. Nashon's words highlighted the youth's struggles, their determination and their call for accountability. They weren't just victims anymore—they were fighters, advocates and leaders.

With each new article, more people joined the movement. The ripple effect was incredible. Ordinary citizens who had never seen themselves as part of the problem began questioning their own roles in perpetuating the system. Church leaders, teachers, business owners—people from every corner of Kibanda—began to ask, 'What can we do to help?'

But with the growing momentum came the inevitable backlash.

Inspector Fujo, the corrupt police officer who had once turned a blind eye to the illegal alcohol trade, felt the heat of the movement's growing influence. He was a man built on bribes and shady deals, a man who had thrived in the shadows, preying on the youth he was supposed to protect. But now,

with Nashon's articles exposing the systemic bribery within the local police force and with the community beginning to speak out against the injustices that had kept them down, his days of unchecked power were numbered.

Inspector Fujo tried to retaliate on the actions of Juma and his friends. He attempted to intimidate Juma and the others, warning them that they were overstepping out of their boundaries. He even tried to sabotage their meetings by spreading false rumours about their movement and threatened to arrest Mato, Juma, Shiro and Wambui. But each time, the community rallied together. Each time, they grew stronger. Mato, Juma and Shiro were quite determined, they marched to Mzee Baraka's den and demanded him to produce out all the chang'aa gallons from his hidden store.

On seeing the gallons, Mato flashed back on the day Kendy and himself witnessed the rats pop out of a gallon at Mzee Baraka's den like it was their haven. Juma stepped forward and took one gallon and started draining out the liquid inside. The others joined in and one after the other, all the gallons were emptied. The community around noted the commotion and came out to witness. To their amazement, every gallon had not only filthy sediments but also an assortment of coins, pins, clothe rugs and many unimaginable rubbishes. Mato could not hold a nausea feeling after what he had seen and suddenly ejected out a pool of vomit. He could not think of the years he had drank from the same gallons, bottle after another and the harmful things he had gulped down into his stomach.

One fateful day, Fujo's web of corruption finally was unravelled. Journalist- Nashon's articles, coupled with testimonies from people who had been silenced for years, painted a damning picture. It was revealed that Fujo had been

on the take, profiting from the illicit alcohol trade and turning a blind eye to the drug networks that had flourished under his watch. The stories of bribes and backroom deals flooded the public consciousness and the pressure on the police department became too much to bear.

Faced with growing public outcry and the undeniable proof of his wrongdoings, Fujo was arrested. His downfall sent shockwaves through Kibanda slum and Kanaish city at large, but it was also a clear signal to the youth: change was possible.

With the fall of Inspector Fujo, the police department rose into action on the brew sellers, a bulldozer was sent in the slum and many Chang'aa dens fell flat in a day. Many wondered what had taken them so long to open their blind eyes on the menace that had claimed so many lives.

The corruption and cartels that had once seemed too entrenched to ever dismantle was now crumbling. The victories didn't come easily, but they came. And as Fujo's arrest made headlines across the city, the 'Reclaiming Lives' movement found itself at the centre of a new wave of activism. The community began to demand more from their leaders. They held politicians accountable. They asked for better resources for rehabilitation. They demanded an end to the corrupt practices that had long enslaved them.

The last few months had been a whirlwind. What had started as a small, desperate plea for change had become a full-fledged movement—a movement that was no longer just about the youth reclaiming their lives, but about the entire community reclaiming its dignity and future.

Juma stood at the front of one of their larger meetings, surrounded by hundreds of young people, many of them wearing the same weary faces he had seen months ago. But now, there was something different in their eyes—a spark, a fire. They weren't just asking for change anymore; they were demanding it.

'We've come a long way,' Juma said, his voice steady, his words filled with a quiet power. 'But this is just the beginning. We have to continue to fight. Not just for ourselves, but for the generations that will come after us. We have to rebuild our future, brick by brick. And we can do it. Together.'

The crowd erupted in applause and Juma looked around, his heart swelling with pride. The battle wasn't over. But for the first time in years, he could see a path forward. The youth of Kibanda slum had found their voices, their strength and they were no longer afraid to use them.

In the face of corruption, in the face of addiction, in the face of a society that had forgotten them, they had chosen to rise. And that was something no one could take away.

Hope was no longer just a dream. It was in action. And as Juma looked out over the crowd, he realized that hope had become their collective reality.

Chapter 9: A New Dawn

Months had passed since the last meeting in Kibanda, but the ripple effects of the 'Reclaiming Lives' movement were still being felt. Juma, now a figure of quiet leadership, stood at the heart of a community that had once felt lost, hopeless and fractured. It wasn't just the government or corrupt officials who had been called to account—it was the entire way of life that had allowed such despondency to flourish unchecked. Yet, amidst the successes and the victories, Juma knew that the fight was far from over.

It had been an unexpected journey, one that started with the broken, staggering footsteps of a young man battling mania for alcohol. But now, as he stood tall among his friends and peers, Juma understood the profound truth that transformation was not a single event—it was a process, a continuous struggle that demanded commitment, persistence and courage. The people who had once been drawn into the downward spiral of drugs, alcohol and hopelessness were now reclaiming their lives in ways they never thought possible. And that wasn't just about breaking free from this capture—it was about rewriting their future. The real Zombies of a place that had seemed like a Zombie-land have now redeemed themselves from a near death situation, lost their dear ones to a bottomless pit of infatuation with alcohol, but are still resurging with great hope to a new dawn of being champions for sobriety and responsibility.

Juma's journey had been personal, but it had also become collective. The 'Reclaiming Lives' movement had inspired not

just a generation of youth, but their parents, teachers and community leaders. It had sparked conversations that had long been avoided, debates that were once deemed too dangerous or uncomfortable to have. Through their actions, Juma and his friends had not only battled their own demons but had also confronted a corrupt system that sought to profit from their pain.

It was a slow, painful process, but the changes were undeniable. The government, once indifferent to the cries of its people, began to listen. In the wake of Inspector Fujo's fall from grace, public outcry demanded accountability from those in power. Anti-corruption watchdogs emerged from the shadows, emboldened by the grassroots resistance that was rising from the heart of Kibanda. Local politicians, once emboldened by their deals with corrupt law enforcement, had begun to reconsider their alliances. The cracks in the system that had once seemed impenetrable were now widening and change was not just a dream but an ongoing reality.

But Juma's mind often wandered back to the people he had lost. Friends like Mato, who had been his closest confidant during the darkest days of his devotion to drinking still struggled. Mato had made strides, attending rehab, finding a job, but the scars of his past were still fresh. And Wambui, who had once been the bright spark in their group, was now dealing with the aftermath of an abusive relationship that had nearly broken her spirit. Despite the progress they had made as a community, the weight of enslavement with substance abuse, trauma and disillusionment was not easily lifted.

Juma knew that true recovery was not a straight line. It had been hard to get here and it would be harder still to stay on the path. But that was the point, wasn't it? Life wasn't about

finding perfection or seeking the elusive goal of 'having it all together.' It was about getting up after each fall, learning to lean on each other and discovering new ways to build a future despite the odds. That was what they had done—and what they would continue to do.

Sitting in one of the local parks, Juma glanced around at his friends—Shiro, Wambui, Mato—and the others who had stood by him through the hardest of times. Their faces had changed. They had changed. No longer did they look like the broken, lost youth who had once wandered the streets, trapped in their cycles of addiction. They now looked like the warriors they had always been. There was a quiet strength in their eyes, a clarity in their voices. And though they were not finished—none of them were—the battle was now theirs to win. Together.

The movement continued to grow. They had established a community centre that provided a safe space for young people to talk about dependency with alcohol, mental health and the realities they faced every day. It wasn't much, not yet, but it was a start. There were job training programs being set up, partnerships with local businesses who were beginning to see the value in investing in the youth. There were even scholarships now available for those who had once been doomed to the streets.

The community centre took Musa to a mental hospital for treatment and rehabilitation and after a year of intensive treatment, he started to show signs of recovery.

One day, Juma's thoughts were interrupted by a voice calling his name. It was Nashon, the journalist who had played such a pivotal role in their fight. Nashon had stayed with them throughout the movement, documenting their journey and

sharing their story with the world. He had become not just a journalist, but a true ally.

‘Juma,’ Nashon said, catching his breath as he sat down beside him. ‘I’ve been thinking. There’s something big coming. I’ve spoken to a few people—both in the media and in the political circles—and they’re ready to take this further. They want to give your movement a platform on a national stage.’

Juma felt a surge of hope mixed with anxiety. This was it—the chance to expand their reach, to influence a broader swath of the country. It was a chance to make their voices heard not just in Kibanda and Kanaish, but across the nation. But with that kind of exposure came a new set of challenges. They had fought hard to get this far, but the battle was always ongoing.

‘I’m not sure we’re ready for that,’ Juma admitted, his voice filled with doubt. ‘This has been hard enough as it is. What if we fail? What if the system eliminates us for going deeper into uncharted waters.’

Nashon smiled, the expression in his eyes one of understanding. ‘Juma, this is what we’ve been preparing for. The whole point of this movement has been to empower people like you—people who know what it feels like to be overlooked and forgotten. You’ve already changed your community. This is just the next step. But you won’t be alone. You never were.’

Juma stared at him, the weight of Nashon’s words settling in. It wasn’t just about one man or one moment. It was about a collective—a people who had been battered by circumstances but had found the courage to rise again. It was about the youth who had been written off, now writing their own future. It was

about the long journey, step by step, toward something greater than they had ever imagined.

And as Juma stood to leave, joining the group of young people gathered for their latest session, a sense of peace washed over him. There would be more battles. There would be more setbacks. But there would also be more victories.

As the sun set over Kibanda, casting a golden light across the city, Juma sat quietly, his gaze drifting across the cityscape of Kanaish. The streets, once a battleground of enslavement and distress, now hummed with the quiet energy of something new—something that had been sown deep within the heart of the community. The journey had been long and the scars of the past were still visible, etched into the very fabric of the city. But as Juma reflected on how far they had come, he couldn't help but feel a glimmer of hope rising, faint but undeniable.

The 'Zombie Generation,' as they had once been called, had been written off by society, their lives deemed disposable. They had been the forgotten youth, the ones who had slipped through the cracks of a broken system, swallowed whole by habit of drunkenness, manipulation and a society that failed to provide for them. But now, in the quiet moments of reflection, Juma knew that the story of their generation had not ended in tragedy. No, it was a story of transformation.

The bonds of friendship that had been forged in the fires of adversity now served as the bedrock upon which they were building a new future. What had once been a circle of broken people—trapped in cycles of addiction and **disconsolateness**—had become a tight-knit community, united by a shared purpose. The pain that had once kept them tethered to the shadows had now become their strength, their reason to push

forward, to fight not just for themselves, but for those who had not yet found their way.

Juma thought of his friends—Mato, Shiro, Wambui—and the countless others who had joined the movement. Their faces, once marred by hopelessness, were now radiant with purpose. They had become more than just survivors of their circumstances. They had become agents of change, living proof that even in the darkest corners, there was the possibility of redemption.

In the months since the movement had gained momentum, Juma had witnessed transformations that filled him with awe. He remembered the first time they had come together to speak out against the forces that had held them down. They had been so unsure, so afraid of what the world might do to them. But now, they stood tall, their voices firm and their hearts steadfast. They were no longer the ones waiting for someone to save them. They were the ones who had picked up the pieces and were now showing others the way forward.

The 'Reclaiming Lives' movement had blossomed beyond anything they could have imagined. What had started as a small group of young people, gathering in alleyways and parks to share their struggles, had evolved into a powerful force for change. They had created a community centre, a safe haven where people could come to talk about alcohol abuse, mental health and the challenges they faced every day. More importantly, it was a place where they could learn to dream again—to believe that they deserved a future, that they could create a future.

Juma's own journey had been one of unimaginable pain and loss. The distress that had once held him in its grip had nearly

destroyed him and many of his friends had not made it out. But he carried them with him, the memories of those who had fallen, as a constant reminder of what was at stake. They had been the casualties of a system that had failed them, but they were not forgotten. Their lives had been the catalyst for a movement, a beacon of light that now called to others, offering them a chance at a new beginning.

The darkness that had once surrounded them still lingered, like a shadow that refused to retreat fully into the past. There were still nights when the temptation to fall back into old habits felt overwhelming, when the weight of the world seemed too much to bear. But even in those moments, Juma knew that the strength they had found in each other was unshakable. They had built something far stronger than feeling addicted, stronger than the moral decay they had fought so hard to expose.

The battle was far from over. The system that had perpetuated their suffering was still entrenched; its roots dug deep in the fabric of society. Corruption still festered at every level and the struggle for justice was ongoing. But now, there was a light—small, perhaps, but bright enough to cut through the darkness. And as long as that light shone, there was hope.

Juma stood, his heart swelling with a quiet pride. The movement they had started was no longer just about fighting for their lives. It was about fighting for a future—one where no young person would have to grow up in the shadow of obsession with harmful alcohol, no community would have to suffer the weight of sinfulness and indifference and no dream would ever have to die.

In a quiet corner of the community centre, Juma watched as a group of young people—many of them just beginning their journey out of fixation by alcohol—gathered around. They were talking, laughing, sharing stories of how they had turned their lives around. There was a sense of camaraderie, a bond that went beyond friendship. They were a family now, bound not by blood, but by a shared experience, a shared commitment to something greater than themselves.

‘How does it feel to be part of something like this?’ Wambui asked him one afternoon, as she joined him by the window, watching the others.

Juma smiled, his voice steady. ‘It feels like the start of something new. Like the seeds we’ve planted are finally beginning to grow. And when they bloom, they’ll change everything.’

Wambui nodded, her eyes reflecting the same determination that had brought them this far. ‘We’ve seen what it’s like when we don’t have a voice. Now we’re giving it to others.’

Juma’s heart swelled with gratitude as he glanced around the room, at the faces of people who had become his family. Through their unity and resilience, they had become more than a movement. They were a living testament to the power of transformation, the ability of people to rise from desperation, to build from nothing and to create a future where hope was not just a fleeting thought, but a lasting truth.

In the years that came, the ‘Reclaiming Lives’ movement continued to grow. Its influence spread beyond Kanaish, inspiring other cities, other communities, to rise up and fight for their futures. It was a long road and there were many

battles ahead. With each new person who joined their cause, with each story shared, they were forging a new path, one that would no longer be defined by predilection for alcohol and hopelessness, but by courage, unity and the unshakable belief that redemption was possible.

Juma and friends would face obstacles, but all along, they felt ready. Ready to face whatever came next. Ready to lead, to walk beside each other as friends and to continue planting the seeds of a new future. A future where they all had a place, a purpose and a chance to live the life they had always dreamed of. And in the end, that was the true victory. Not just reclaiming their lives, but giving others the courage to do the same and feel the same.

Hope was alive—and it had become their collective reality.