The Price of success

And other Stories

Dominic Katana

Seaside Publishing Press

The Prcie of Success

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A catalogue record for this title is available from the Seaside bookstore

B format paperback ISBN
978-9914-358-149

Printed and bound by
Seaside publishing Press, Malindi
Seaside Press Printers
seasidepublishers@gmail.com
Tel: +254715068004/+254787767231

EDITORS NOTE

Success is often glorified as a destination, an emblem of achievement, wealth, and recognition. Yet, the journey toward it is rarely as simple or as glamorous as it appears. ***The Price of Success*** delves into the sacrifices, struggles, and resilience behind the triumphs we so often admire from afar.

In this book, readers will explore the stories of individuals who dared to dream big, who faced setbacks, doubts, and personal costs, yet persevered. It challenges us to look beyond the accolades and question: What are we willing to give in pursuit of our goals? How do we balance ambition with integrity, personal well-being, and relationships?

This collection is not just a celebration of success it is a candid reflection on the dedication, discipline, and sometimes the sacrifices that underpin it. May it inspire, caution, and motivate all who turn its pages to pursue their own paths with eyes wide open, hearts determined, and a deep appreciation for the journey as much as the destination.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my English teacher, Mr. Saro, for his dedication, guidance, and constant encouragement. His passion for teaching and belief in my ability have greatly shaped my writing journey, and I have learned so much from him.

I also take this moment to appreciate myself for the effort, resilience, and determination it has taken to come this far and complete this book. The journey has not always been easy, but every step has been worthwhile.

To all readers and aspiring writers, I extend my heartfelt thanks. May this work inspire you to pursue your dreams and one day write your own book.

Finally, I wish to thank Madam Wahu for her unwavering encouragement, especially during moments when I had lost hope in my writing. Her support gave me the strength to continue and believe in myself once again.

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FORTUNE FAVORS THE PATIENT

Once, there lived a farmer named Dzimwage in the village of Karimangula. He was a kind and humble Black man, often seen wearing shorts. Together with his wife, Kadzo, and their two delightful children, Jeniffer and Vincent both in fourth grade, they led a simple life. Though they were not wealthy, they were content in their modest mud-and-grass home.

Their father worked as a grazer and earned a meager sum of one thousand five hundred. This income was not enough to support his family, and he often had to wait until the end of the month to settle their bills.

When Dzimwage's salary was delayed, he struggled to meet his financial obligations and frequently quarreled with creditors. This caused him great stress, especially when it came to paying school fees and providing daily necessities like food.

Unfortunately, his wife did not fully comprehend his struggles. If he failed to provide a lavishing meal, she would become upset and remain angry throughout the night. To avoid conflict, Dzimwage often slept outside the house, enduring countless mosquito bites. Despite the discomfort, he preferred this to the

tension indoors. Many mornings, he would skip breakfast and go straight to work, only to return home in the evening to be greeted not with concern, but with the question, “What’s for dinner?”

Despite his efforts, their poverty persisted, and eventually, his wife left him and their children. Determined to reconcile, Dzimwage followed her to her new home, hoping to win her back. However, she refused to listen, saying she could not waste her life with a poor man. Though hurt by her words, Dzimwage accepted her decision and returned home to care for their children.

As Dzimwage drove home, his mind was consumed by his wife’s words. They had been together from the very beginning, yet now she wanted to end their marriage. The realization weighed heavily on his heart.

He arrived home at 7:30 p.m., overwhelmed with sadness. At the door, he was warmly welcomed by his daughter, Jeniffer, who had prepared a delicious meal for him. Though grateful, he ate quietly, lost in thought. After finishing his meal, he took a bath and retired to bed, heartbroken.

The next morning, Dzimwage prepared breakfast for his children and got them ready for school. They would reunite in the evening after school and work. The children attended classes during the day, came home for

lunch, and then went for tuition until 4:00 p.m. afterwards; they hurried home to complete chores before their father arrived home. The children cherished their time spent with their father.

Despite their hardships, the children remained resolute in their pursuit for knowledge. Dzimwage, too, was determined to give them a better future. He sacrificed his own comfort, often going hungry and wearing worn-out clothes, just to save money for their schooling.

As the years passed, the situation became increasingly dire. By 2008, the children were in eighth grade. Dzimwages lost his job. His employers had sold their animals to cope with their own hardships, leaving him without work. He was determined to provide for his family, but was faced with the challenges of finding new employment. Dzimwage's worries deepened as he wandered the streets, lost in thought.

"Why was I even born if I have to face such problems?" he muttered to himself. Yet he refused to give up, recalling the adage, *"The darkest hour is just before the dawn."*
He continued to search for employment, determined not to lose hope. Just when he was about to lose all faith, he received a call from a new number while sitting under a tree at his home.

Surprised but undeterred, he answered the call.

“Hello, this is Lucie from Midodoni, near your former workplace. Can you come see me?” she asked.

“I’m at home,” he replied.

“Please come to my home,” she insisted before hanging up.

Dzimwage wondered about the reason for the call, but he decided to follow her anyway, hoping to find some answers. As he made his way, he couldn't help but wish for a job along the way.

When Dzimwage arrived at Lucie's home, they were having breakfast as a family. He was warmly welcomed and served breakfast before having a private conversation with Lucie.

"Good morning, Dzimeage! Please, join us for breakfast,"

Lucie greeted him with a smile. "Thank you, Lucie. I appreciate it," Dzimwage replied gratefully.

After breakfast, Lucie offered Dzimwage a job to look after her cattle. She promised to pay him a monthly salary of ten thousand shillings.

“I need someone to take care of my cattle. Would you be interested?” she asked.

Dzimwage thought about his family and the low salary, but he knew it would still make a difference for him.

“Yes, I would. Thank you for the opportunity,” he said gratefully.

Lucie went on to explain the rules of the job, which ran from 8 am to 4 pm. Dzimwage promised to follow them diligently. "I will do my best to fulfill my duties," he assured her. Before leaving, Dzimwage asked if he could pay for a packet of flour in advance. Lucie readily agreed and went to her shop to get it for him.

"Here you go, Dzimwage. Consider it a welcome gift," she said with a kind smile. Dzimwage was touched by her generosity.
"Thank you so much, Lucie, I am truly grateful," he said sincerely.
"You're welcome. It's the least I can do," Lucie replied with a warm heart.

Dzimwage returned home overjoyed, his children eagerly awaiting his return. They were overjoyed to see their father, having missed him dearly. He greeted them with love and presented them with a packet of flour. Together, they cooked a meal and ended the day contently.

The next day, Dzimwage got his kids ready for school and went to work as usual. He loved his job and his life

started getting better. But he decided to upgrade and purchased a bicycle to ride to work instead of walking.

As the days passed, the children's father realized that their heavy workload was hindering their education. He decided to find a wife who could assist with the household chores, in hopes of providing the children with more time to focus on their studies. However, before bringing his new partner home, he shared his life story and the reasons behind his decision to marry. After listening to him, she sympathized and promised to support him unconditionally.

On a pleasant Monday evening, Dzimwage decided to take a different route from work to visit his dear childhood friend, Kathali. The two had been inseparable during their formative years in primary school. As he rode along, he came across a vast forest, bigger than any he had seen before. Intrigued, he attached a light to his bicycle and ventured in, eager to explore its depths.

As he pedaled deeper into the forest, Dzimwage stumbled upon a small ravine. There, he spotted a large paper bag hidden away. Despite feeling a surge of fear, he left his bicycle and approached the bag. However, as he got closer, he couldn't shake off the sense of unease. It was getting late, and he was all alone in the forest. Yet, his curiosity got the best of him, and he couldn't resist the temptation to see what was inside.

With trembling hands, he reached for the paper bag. To his astonishment, it was filled with money. His heart raced with excitement and fear as he tried to make sense of it all. Who would leave a bag full of cash in the middle of a vast forest? The place was deserted, and Dzimwage couldn't shake off the unsettling feeling that surrounded him.

After standing there for what felt like ages, Dzimwage made a bold decision. He took the bag, carried it out of the forest and securely fastened it to his bicycle. He then hurried home.

He found the door locked and his family fast asleep. He lined his bicycle against the wall and knocked, his wife answering the door. He was served and after enjoying his dinner, his wife asked about his unexpected late arrival.

Dzimwage fabricated a story, claiming he had to work overtime.

His wife believed him, as he had never lied to her before. As she prepared the basin for his bath, Dzimwage sneaked out of the house and carefully hid the bag he had brought home. After his shower, he went to sleep peacefully.

As the sun rose, he prepared for work, his heart full of excitement and hopes the promising changes ahead. He

hummed a tune, expressing his gratitude to the Almighty for his blessings. His melody echoed,

"My tomorrow will surpass.
No matter the obstacles I face,
No matter the trials,
No matter my tears,

For I am certain, deep in my heart,

That my tomorrow will indeed be greater than today."

As he returned home in the evening, he continued to sing the same song until he reached his doorstep.

"My tomorrow will be greater than today.

No matter what I encounter,
No matter what I witness,
No matter what crosses my path,
No matter how I shed tears,
One thing I am certain of, deep in my heart,

My tomorrow will be greater than today."

He warmly greeted his family, filled with joy to see them doing well. He then swiftly checked on his concealed bag, finding it still in its place, bringing him a sense of relieve.

One beautiful evening, as he strolled through the streets of his village, he overheard a group of men whispering about a daring bank heist. His ears parked up and his heart raced as he listened to their hushed conversation. They had pulled off the perfect heist, but were now faced with a major problem; they couldn't remember where they had stashed the stolen money.

Dzimwage's curiosity was piqued. He couldn't believe his luck. The same forest where he had stumbled upon a mysterious bag filled with cash was the same forest where these thieves had hidden their loot. His mind raced with possibilities as he imagined the amount of money that could be hidden in that forest.

Without wasting a moment, Dzimwage rushed to his family to share the tantalizing story of the lost bag. Little did he know, he was about to embark on the adventure of time.

"My dearest wife, do you recall the day I arrived home later than usual and you asked me why?" Dzimwage began, a hint of regret lacing his tone.

"Yes, my darling, I do," his wife replied with understanding.

"But do you know the true reason for my delay?" Dzimwage probed, his voice heavy with remorse.

"I am uncertain, but I remember you mentioning that work had kept you occupied," his wife responded, her concern evident.

"I must confess, my love, I was not entirely truthful with you. As I was cycling home, I came upon a vast forest and stumbled upon a paper bag concealed in a ravine. My curiosity was piqued, so I ventured further into the woods and discovered it was filled with money. I stood there for what seemed like an eternity, pondering who could have left such a fortune in the depths of the forest. But alas, there was no one in sight, and I could not resist the temptation. I took the bag, placed it on my bicycle, and hastened home," he continued, his remorse palpable.

"Which forest was it, my beloved?" his wife questioned.

"The one I pass by on my way to work," Dzimwage answered.

"And where is the bag now, Father?" their son Vincent interjected, eager to know.

"It is here, in our home," Dzimwage confessed, his eyes betraying guilt and apprehension.

Now both his wife and children were curious. They had all been inside the house before but had never seen the bag. The children asked which room it was in, but Dzimwage admitted that he did not want anyone to see it until he made a decision.

Dzimwage then asked his children to retrieve the bag from inside the house. Despite their thorough search, the bag seemed to have vanished. Even his wife joined in the search, curious about it's whereabouts. It was quite puzzling, as the bag was easily visible. Eventually, they located it and brought it outside. The bag had been inconspicuously tucked away unnoticed by all.
When the bag was brought out, Dzimwage called for his wife and asked her to bring a sleeping mat so they could place the bag on it. He then instructed her to open the flap of the bag. As soon as she opened, a hush fell over the group. They were all taken aback by what they saw inside something truly remarkable and unexpected. They couldn't believe their eyes and gasped in astonishment.

Inside the bag was a "wonder of wonders" a sight that left them speechless and a little shaken. They began counting the contents but lost track due to the large amount of money. Determined to get it right, they persisted until they finally arrived at the correct total. It

was an amount they had never encountered before, and they were understandably perplexed. Nevertheless, they continued counting until they reached the correct amount.

Once they had concluded the meticulous task of counting the substantial sum of KSh 6,000,000, they dutifully returned the occurrence to its designated bag and carefully concealed it within the confines of their abode. As a cohesive unity, they commenced a discussion regarding the most prudent course of action to maximize their new found fortune. After much contemplation, they collectively resolved to invest in endearing assets, namely rental properties, commercial establishment, and land in order to secure a perpetual stream of revenue.

As time passed, Dzimwage began searching for real estate in his village. He successfully acquired multiple parcels of land and proceeded to develop rental properties on each of the purchased sites. Additionally, he constructed a six-room apartment at his own residence, fully equipped with modern amenities. As a result, of his efforts, Dzimwage became the wealthiest individual in his village, causing some to speculate that he had gained membership into the Freemason.

Despite his former reputation as a poor and overlooked man, Dzimwage's sudden success and prosperity were evident to all. However, he was consumed by his business ventures and realized that in order to ensure

their success, he needed to leave his job. Although he had hired employees to assist him, he understood that his full attention was necessary for the growth and prosperity of his companies.

Dzimwage's first wife had left him due to their poverty. She married another man who was attracted only to her beauty, not to her as a person. However, after joining him, she realized that her life had become even more challenging. Upon hearing of Dzimwage's success, she regretted her decision and wanted to ask for his forgiveness in hopes of reuniting with him. She longed to rebuild their life together.

But it was too late.

Revision Questions

1. Why did Dzimwage's initial spouse depart from him?

2. Explain why Dzimwage slept outside the house?

3. Why did Dzimwage decide to take a different route home from work?

4. Explain why Dzimwage decide to marry another wife after his first wife left him?

5. Give the reason why Dzimwage's first job came to an end?

6. Give the reason why the first wife was angry for most of the night?

7. "Why was I even born if I have to face such problems." Why did Dzimwage say these words.

THE PRICE OF SUCCESS

When I was a Grade One pupil, as a little boy, I never understood the importance of working hard in school. Missing school was what I loved most because I definitely knew that whoever was paying attention was wasting time.

I would therefore spend my time in the streets, playing with other children while most of our peers were in school studying. Sometimes on the way to school, I would simply decide not to reach the school compound. Instead, I would look for a place with big bush where I would hide until lunch time. Then I would join the others and go home as if I had also been in school.

Never did I focus on my studies. My dear mother kept telling me to work my fingers to the bone on my books, but I turned a deaf ear to her advice. I would as well tell my friends, "I'd rather confer with you than read my books."

As the days went by, I was often followed by my classmates, who would ask me, “Why do you not attend school during school days?”
“I was unwell,” I would lie. But I didn’t like this kind of talk, so I stayed away from home to avoid them.

When I got to Class Four, I disliked even hearing someone talk about school. I could quarrel with them. I would only go to school when I felt like it.That would be two or three days out of the five days a week.

One beautiful Monday morning, as I sat in the bush, my sister Zabibu and my grandmother, Hawesidi (who passed away in 2012, though this was before then), were passing nearby on their way to fetch firewood. As they were about to cross the road, they caught sight of me. That was not a good thing. I quickly devised a strategy to run away and escape, but I didn't succeed. Surprisingly, they just walked on as if they hadn't seen me. Perhaps they didn't want to waste their time with me.

At lunchtime, I returned home for food. I was served as usual and enjoyed the meal. However, just as I was about to finish eating, my grandmother sent my youngest sister to call me. I found her outside her room, under a leafy avocado tree. I greeted her and sat beside her. I knew her to be a cheerful woman who loved telling stories, but I was mistaken this time. She was there to interrogate me.

"What were you doing in that bush when you were supposed to be in school?" she asked angrily, holding my hand tightly.

"I had been sent to collect fees," I lied, "but on my way, I saw a crowd of people running by the roadside. I didn't know what was happening, so instead of joining them, I decided to hide in a quiet place and

watch. But the crowd disappeared. Then I heard voices nearby, and when I turned, I saw that it was you and Zabibu."

My grandmother looked me straight in the eyes and did something I least expected. She took her cellphone, dialed a number, and soon was speaking to my English teacher, Mr. James. She wanted to confirm my story.

"Hello, how do you do, Mr. James?" she said. "How do you do? How may I help you?" he replied. "Please excuse me for any inconvenience. I would appreciate it if you could let me know how Gabriel is performing in his studies. It has been a while since I checked on his progress…"

"Gabriel Katana?"
"Yes."
"The boy in Standard Four?"
"The very one."
"I was actually planning to call you. He has been absent from school for nearly a month now…"

‘‘I have just been asking myself what the problem might be. It is quite unfortunate that I didn't have your contact."

"But my grandson comes to school every day. How come..."
The conversation wasn't very pleasant afterwards. But it became clear to them whatever I had been doing all the while.

My grandmother was now very concerned about me. From that point on, she became quite strict with me. She was always angry and made it a habit to check my books every time I came home from school. I knew she could not read, but I found it difficult to show her the same exercise I had shown the previous day. She would literally count the pages I had written to confirm that I had done my work. However, I could not write my own exercises without attending school, so I had to be present in class. I did not want a situation where she would call my teachers again to inquire about my studies. From then on, I no longer had the freedom to choose whether to attend school or not.

She expected me to stay busy, focusing on what I had learned at school. Whenever I had too much work to complete in a day and went to bed late at night, I would oversleep due to exhaustion. In such cases, she would storm into my room to wake me up and remind me to read.

"What are you still doing in bed? The sun is already high in the sky. You ought to be studying when your mind is fresh. Time is money."

It must have surprised her that, despite all the effort she put in, my academic progress showed no visible improvement. Personally, I was not interested in absorbing the knowledge she was forcing into me. I was always busy, yet I achieved nothing. In fact, I was

even considering dropping out of school so that I could peacefully find something else to do.

When it was time for exams, I would pretend to be sick and miss several papers. After the exams, parents were given their children's results, and my parents also expected to know about my performance. However, I would lie to them and say that the teachers had gathered us for a closing assembly and announced, "Those who have not cleared their fee balances will not be allowed to receive their results. Go home, bring the school fees, and clear your balance before collecting them."

Since I almost always had fee arrears, my parents lacked the courage to ask the head teacher about my results.

This went on and on. By 2016, I was in Class Eight, but nothing had changed. I was still the same naughty young man. By then, I had grown bigger, and my grandmother could no longer control me. Even some of my teachers could not threaten me. I was taller than most of them and had developed broad biceps. I could look at someone with a cold stare, and they would be afraid. Many young men smoked bhang, and you know what a bhang smoker can do if you cross his line! So I had the freedom to do as I pleased.

In November, KCPE came, and I sat for it. I did not miss a single paper; after all, it was the final exam.

Then we all went our separate ways. Others waited eagerly for their results, but I was less concerned. I was done with school, and that was all that mattered to me.

I felt free at last, no homework, no more early morning reading. I could now go to the beach and spend the whole day there. I was also gradually developing an interest in girls. I wanted to have a girl by my side most of the time, but the good ones I admired were not easy to win over. So I spent most of November and December chasing after them.

When the results were released by the minister in charge, it felt as if our lives depended on them. Some students became local celebrities, and a few families even held parties to celebrate their children's success. I could not ignore the ongoing excitement, but I had nothing to celebrate.

My mother sent my index number via SMS to the designated code. Within minutes, a message came back. I had scored 252 marks out of 500. It was heartbreaking. My mother lost all interest in me and went about her chores as though nothing had happened. While everyone in the neighborhood was proudly talking about their children and how they had made them proud, my parents were visibly humiliated.

I felt terrible inside. The following day, I sat in my room, closed the door, and began to ask myself a bitter

question: *If I had worked hard, would I have failed the exam?* Unfortunately, the saying "I wish I knew" comes after everything has already happened. I did not sleep a wink that night. I almost went crazy.

In the morning, my mother (her name is Eunice) summoned me to her room. She was having breakfast when I arrived. I greeted her and took a seat on a plastic chair. I was cautious and ready to listen.

"Gabriel, do you know the marks you got in your exam?" she asked.

"I got two hundred and fifty-two marks, Mother," I replied.
"Mhh! That is a fail. Do you know why you failed? Can you identify even one reason that made you get such low marks? There are several children in this village who sat for the same exam as you, and most of them performed well."

"I didn't have enough revision books, Mother. That's why. I am also bitter about this performance," I said.

Mother looked at me for a long moment and then said, "Choose between repeating the class and leaving this compound. I am not ready to feed a lazy person here. Life has never been easy, and it will never be easy at least not for sluggards. So if you think you can have an easy life here, you are mistaken. Nothing good comes on a silver platter."

I was now sobbing, my tears falling in heavy drops onto the floor. A hundred thousand questions flooded my mind, stirred by a newfound awareness. They troubled me deeply, yet I could find no answers to any of them. Gradually, feelings of guilt filled my mind and tormented me.

Every night, when I lay down to sleep, I could hear my mother's words echoing and reverberating, as if they had been recorded somewhere inside me and were being replayed over and over again. I became deeply troubled. How would I change the course of my life?

I had to come up with a plan for change. I began to form friendships with those I considered achievers. They were the ones whose advice I wanted to hear, as I believed they could provide a roadmap to my success. After all, if I succeeded academically, I would have a wide range of career opportunities to choose from medicine, engineering, finance, economics, law, and more.

With such possibilities ahead, I could secure a job and determine the path I wanted to follow in life. This realization encouraged me.

The next week, I knocked on my mother's door. She was still asleep, but I knew she was well. When she opened the door, I greeted her jovially and told her my decision. "I choose to repeat Class Eight, Mother, and I promise to work hard." "That's good. I will take you to a boarding

school. I want you to have enough time for your studies. A day school won't do," she said. I had a different opinion, but I allowed her to have the final say. After all, I was beginning to learn to be submissive, obedient, and respectful.

When schools opened, my mother took me to Nzuri Petals Academy at Gongoni. We were received warmly, and I was admitted to Class Eight. The issue of lack of revision books had long been addressed, so I was good to go.

The classrooms were quiet; you could imagine there were no students at all. But when I got into my class, I was in for another shock. All the students communicated in very refined English. This felt like an unfamiliar environment to me. "What shall I do now?" I wondered. But then I remembered the adage, "Practice makes perfect." I began anew the work of seeking knowledge and that was work indeed. I would wake up at five, take a cold bath, and run to class. There, I would read and do my assignments before any teachers arrived. Breakfast would be served at seven.

I would take my breakfast very fast and go back to class for morning prep. Lessons began at eight in the morning. The teachers were very serious harsh when they needed to before this was supposed to be a centre of academic excellence.

At first, I thought this was punishment, but it got into my blood, and I started accepting and enjoying it. My performance changed suddenly when we did the exam at the end of the term.

At Nzuri Petals Academy, academic excellence is highly regarded. I was appointed a prefect when the second term opened, and this came with many privileges. I was given a special badge and put in charge of a whole department. It goes without saying that I was exempted from a number of responsibilities, such as cleaning the classroom, the dorm, and the ablution block. I felt "special" in a certain way, but I had learnt to be humble. I led a normal life.

The year must have flown like no other. November was soon here, and KCPE arrived. I was confident I had done enough, and now I could face this old opponent better than before.

We did our rehearsals on Monday. It was like a session for familiarizing ourselves with the supervisor and the invigilators. They were not bad people at all. They told us that they were not there to see anyone fail. Instead, they were there to witness our success encouraging words indeed!

Then Tuesday came. Mathematics was brought. It was as charming as any ally could ever be. Wonder of wonders! What should have made me recoil in fear proved to be as refreshing as a cup of tea. The rest of

the papers were no different: English, Composition, Kiswahili, Insha, Science, and even Social Studies! What was this?

I went home the happiest fellow. Mother must have missed me; she was so enthusiastic to see me back home. “How was life at Nzuri?” she greeted me.

“Wonderful, Mother. The exam was also the most pleasant thing that ever happened to me.”

“I see. Welcome home. I can’t believe you have made it.”

“Never mind,” I said.

She helped me with my bags and led me into the house. I was now eagerly waiting for my results.

Christmas came, and I had almost forgotten that our results were supposed to be released by the Ministry. I enjoyed myself with the rest of the family. Then Boxing Day came. To me, this was just an extension of the Christmas feasts. We prepared the head and legs of the goat we had slaughtered for Christmas, and it was lots of fun.

On the 27th, the Minister of Education, the Honorable Dr. Fred Matiang’i, released the KCPE results. My name was not mentioned. I did not feel bad. Only the top three candidates countrywide were mentioned. But the results

were out anyway. You could get them by sending your index number to a given code.

This time, Mother did not have to bother about sending my index number to the code. The head teacher called her and excitedly announced that I had passed with flying colors.

“Gabriel, eeeh! Nzuri haaa! Your son has made us proud, Mama. He got four hundred and twelve marks out of five hundred,” she said.

That was the best news I had ever heard. I knew my future was bright.

DREAMS BEYOND THE DUM

How idyllic and unburdened those early years of my youth spent at Garithe were. The recollections now fill me with melancholy, but I hold on to the hope that such happiness could somehow be resurrected. May the Divine Being bestow blessings upon my guardians, Eunice and Emmanuel, for nurturing me from my tender age until my maturity. Sadly, my father passed away in 2013 while I was in my third year at Garithe Primary School.

The epitome of my father's disposition lay within his profound benevolence and empathy. He was a man who adored his offspring beyond all other pursuits and devoted himself to instilling in them virtuous conduct.

As the youngest of five offspring, I can still vividly recall my childhood days. After a long day of tending to the cows and goats, I would return home to our humble abode. Upon my arrival, my father would ensure that we were all gathered in the compound, where he would impart upon us invaluable life lessons.

Honesty, dependability, accountability, diligence, consideration for others, and self-sufficiency were among the virtues he instilled in us. While we

eagerly awaited our mother's preparation of our evening meal, my father would regale us with thought-provoking riddles and captivating fables.

It brings back such warm, nostalgic memory to think about those meals. My mother, with her skilled hands, would prepare a wonderful dish for us: ugali that comforting, essential maize flour staple so central to our diet served alongside dandelion greens and small, succulent birds that I would gather myself during my long days out in the pasture, tending to the livestock. I would return from the grazing fields, often after a full day, bringing back the day's catch, a small but meaningful contribution to our family dinner, and my mother would cook them all together. It was a simple yet rich life, where every part of our day contributed to the sustenance on our plates.

As I sit here in quiet contemplation, my mind wonders back to the days of my youth, to a simpler time filled with carefree days and endless adventures. In particular, I find myself reminiscing about the small dam just a stone's throw from my childhood home. It was there, in the tranquil waters, that my friends and I would spend countless afternoons, armed with nothing but our trust line gear.

Oh, how we would sing and laugh as we cast our lines, eagerly awaiting the thrill of a successful catch. The sun would beat down on us, but we paid it no mind, for our

hearts we filled with pure joy and excitement. And when that long-awaited tug on the line finally came, our shouts of triumph echoed across the water, much to the amusement of any passerby.

But what made those days truly special was the knowledge that my dear mother, always the provider, would have a pot of steaming ugali waiting for me upon my return. She knew that when I went to fish, I simply had to come home with a catch. And so, as the sun began to dip below the horizon, we would pack up our gear and make our way back home, our hearts full and our stomachs even fuller.

As I look back on those cherished memories, I am filled with a sense of nostalgia and gratitude. Gratitude for the simple pleasures of life, and for the love and care of a mother who always knew just what we needed. And though those carefree days may be long gone, the memories of that small dam and the joy it brought me will forever be etched in my mind.

I therefore have vivid memories of my dear friend, Mutsono, who was in fifth grade in the year twenty-thirteen. He was one of the friends with whom I used to visit the same dam. Whenever I think of him, I cannot help but burst into laughter, even if I am alone, because of his lively personality. The young boy was greatly loved by his parents, despite their limited resources.

However, they never lost hope and remained resolute in their pursuit.

Mutsono's parents exerted great effort in their work to ensure that they could provide for their son's school fees. However, the main obstacle in Mutsono's academic journey was his lack of interest in his studies. He would only attend to school at his own convenience, and he despised all subjects, especially English. In his eyes, the word 'English' was synonymous with the antagonist in his life.

He avoided talking, chatting, or writing about the subject unless it was necessary. Instead, he often spoke with his friends in his own language until the teacher arrived, then he tried to communicate in English, but struggled.

Mutsono became a source of amusement for his peers, much to his chagrin. Even after the teacher had left the room, some girls continued to mock him. In those days, speaking in the vernacular was met with swift retribution in the form of a 'disk'-small pieces of a box distributed by prefects.

As the students gathered for the evening assembly following games, they awaited the teachers' announcements. Any students caught speaking in the vernacular was promptly punished.

Mutsono's concern grew as the situation continued to unfold. He would remain silent in class, while his peers conversed in eloquent English. Consequently, he began to skip school in order to avoid punishment.

In the year twenty fifteen, Mutsono found himself in the eighth grade, yet nothing had altered. As November rolled around, he sat for his KCPE examination, but the outcome was not as impressive as he had hoped. With a mere twenty-eight per cent in English, his total score of two hundred and fifty-two out of five hundred left him feeling dejected and insignificant. Jealously towards his classmates who excelled in their studies began to consume him.

Despite facing challenges, Mutsono never gave up. In 2016, he joined Mapimo Boys Secondary School in Gongoni.

He was determined to excel in his studies. However, he faced a new hurdle: all communication in the school was in English, with no use of vernacular. This was a difficult situation for Mutsono, since English had not been his strong subject in primary school. He wondered how he would cope.

On a beautiful Friday afternoon, Mutsono and his friends were outside their classroom, enjoying their lunch break. As they shared stories, Mutsono suddenly spoke in his native tongue. Little did he know that their English teacher, Mr. Saro, was passing by and overheard him. To

Mutsono's surprise, Mr. Saro continued on his way without saying anything. However, shortly afterward, he called him to the staffroom.

Curious about the reason for his teacher's summons, Mutsono greeted him respectfully and stood at attention. Mr. Saro then asked, “Mutsono, what language were you speaking?”

Mutsono, hesitant to admit his mistake, lied and said he was speaking English. However, Mr. Saro was not fooled and reminded Mutsono of the school’s rules. Feeling guilty, Mutsono apologised and asked for forgiveness.

But Mr. Saro was firm and said, “You know the consequences of breaking the rules. Now you must be punished. Bring the cane and follow me.”

With a heavy heart, Mutsono followed, knowing he had to face the consequences of his actions.

Mutsono was given a punishment by his teacher for speaking in vernacular during class. He was instructed to go outside and learn where to be caned as the sun shone brightly in a clear blue sky. With his classmates reading inside, Mutsono felt lonely and bored.

As he completed his punishment, he could not help but wonder if he would have received the same punishment if he had spoken in English. Regretfully,

he thought to himself, “I wish I had known,” knowing that it was too late. From that moment on, Mutsono vowed never to use vernacular again.

He finished his punishment at five o’clock, just in time for the evening assembly. He returned the cane to the staffroom and joined his classmates for the assembly.

After the assembly, Mutsono approached the teacher who had given him the punishment and apologized, promising to only speak in English from now on. "That's good to hear," the teacher replied. Still curious, Mutsono asked, "But why is English so important in our lives?

The teacher explained, "It connects people from different regions, cultures, and backgrounds. For students, English provides easy access to modern education, technology, and international opportunities." Mutsono exclaimed, "Wow! Thank you for your explanation, sir. I now understand the importance of English."
Graciously, the teacher responded, "You are most welcome."

From that day on, Mutsono’s curiosity for English was sparked. He embarked on a new journey in pursuit of education. Rising at five o’clock every morning, he would take a cold shower and sprint to school. It became his routine to draft his own compositions, complete assignments, and read aloud from storybooks

to his classmates. He would also seek feedback from his teacher before the official lessons began at eight.

During break time, he would retreat to a peaceful spot to review the material taught in class. After the evening assembly, before heading home, he would approach his English teacher and request additional homework. Speaking English had become his greatest passion.

On weekends, Mutsono would often visit Amoeba Primary School near his house to review his studies. He would start with grammar and then move on to other subjects until lunchtime. After lunch, he would return to the school for evening studies until 5 p.m. He was diligent in his studies and never let a weekend go by without reading. Additionally, he received extra tuition from a teacher named Mr. Nassir, who lived in Garithe, during school breaks.

Mutsono's performance led to a sudden improvement in his English abilities. As a result, many teachers befriended him and began calling him "English Man" or "A Small Dictionary." He was delighted with these nicknames.

In 2019, Mutsono was in his fourth year of high school and was doing much better than before. He had improved his English fluency and was even appointed as a perfect. In November, he eagerly approached the KCSE exam, viewing it as a piece of cake. To his

delight, he received a B+ in English, a subject he had previously struggled with. Despite the overall mean grade being a C+, he was overjoyed with his results. His former classmates, who used to mock his poor English skills in primary school, were now envious of his achievement.

After receiving his academic certificate, Mutsono realized that he could achieve even more in life. However, due to a lack of funds for school fees, he was unable to enroll in college in the year he was supposed to.

Despite this setback, he remained determined. His proficiency in English, which he had developed by passing the subject and being able to confidentially speak in front of others, sparked a newfound interest in reading story- books, magazines, and other English materials. He would often have a dictionary by his side while reading to fully understand the content.

As time passed, Mutsono's English improved and he gained knowledge from various books. He reflected on his past, recalling his struggles in primary school. However, when he entered high school, he worked hard and achieved great success. This realization motivated him to believe that he can achieve even greater things in life. Reading books written by people like him realize that he too can write his own.

Mutsono eagerly sought the company of achievers, drawn to their words. He met Mr. Kioko, a deputy at Mapimo Boys in Gongoni, and shared his dream of becoming a writer. Mr. Kioko encouraged him not to give up, citing successful writers as inspiration.

Mutsono's heart swelled with joy at Mr. Kioko's words, thanking him and wishing blessings upon him. As he left, Mr. Kioko surprised Mutsono with a book *(A Book of Models for Writing)*. Mutsono skipped home with excitement, enjoying his lunch before settling under the Mwarubaini tree to read. With each page, new thoughts flooded Mutsono's mind, fueling his dream of becoming a writer.

Mr. Kabilali, the principal of Mjanaheri Secondary, was the second person to encourage Mutsono. He congratulated him on his ideas and urged him not to give up on his dream.

Mutsono started writing his first short story, *"The Price of Success,"* in October 2019 while he was staying in Borabora. To avoid distractions, he retreated to Mapimo Boys Secondary, where he had completed his secondary education.

He spent his mornings writing and returned home for lunch. Despite being his first attempt at writing, he persevered and completed his story on November 13th, 2019. The book was then edited by fellow author, Mr.

Samuel, on November 29th. The first person to read his short story was Mr. Saro, who approved of his writing.

This particular encounter served as a valuable lesson for Mutsono, as it revealed to him that the concept of impossibility is merely a figment of one's imagination, and can easily be overcome with self-believe and unwavering determination. Additionally, he came to the realization that true poverty does not exist in this world, as every individual possesses the potential to transform their circumstances and lead a fulfilling life. The root cause of perceived poverty lies in the lack of willingness to make necessary sacrifices in pursuit of one's goals aspirations.

YOU MAKE YOUR BED, YOU LIE ON IT

I have distinct memories of my childhood, especially when I was five years old and lived with my mother in the village of Ramada, where she was born and raised. However, she was married in Garithe. I fondly recall spending time with my grandfather, Tsawe Mapenzi, and my grandmother, Hawe Mapenzi, during the farming season. They would often share traditional tales with me, and I was delighted to learn from their wisdom and knowledge.

The farm was situated approximately an hour's drive from my grandparents' residence. My mother and grandparents would spend the entire day at the farm, returning in the evening. Due to my young age, I was unable to accompany them; as a result, my mother would leave me in the care of my grandparents' grandchildren. We would spend our time playing together while they tended to their work. Upon their return, they would always bring with them a jar of their homemade traditional relish. In the evenings, before supper, my grandparents would regale me with tales of our culture and heritage.

We would gather around a roaring fire while the owls hooted in the distance. Despite my fear of the nocturnal birds, I would find solace in my mother's presence.

The other children living near my grandparents' place had a delightful habit of gathering during the evening hours, beating drums, singing, and dancing to traditional songs together. It was a joyous occasion, as we all eagerly awaited my grandfather's role as the narrator. He would impart valuable lessons on leadership and teach us good manners to help us navigate our relationships with others. If anyone had a question, they would raise their hand and patiently wait for the answer. After our discussions, we would ensure each other's safety by walking together until everyone reached their own homes.

In the same village, there resided two inseparable friends by the names of Mercy and Furaha. They were both Class Eight students at Ramada Primary School, a government institution. Mercy had a brown complexion and a full figure, and she was known for her kind and attractive nature, which made her highly sought after in the village. Every garment she wore seemed to fit her perfectly, as if it had been tailor-made for her. Furaha, on the other hand, was remarkably beautiful, tall, and also had a brown complexion, with a petite frame. Their parents showered them with love and provided for their every need, a fact they were not fully aware of. Despite their privileged upbringing, the two friends held divergent views.

Mercy had a strong inclination towards her academic pursuits, thus she preferred reading over spending time with her parents. On the other hand, Furaha lacked interest in her studies and would rather create disruption in class than engage reading. During lunch, she would eagerly hurry home and often arrive late for the evening study sessions.

Despite occasionally choosing to remain in school all day to complete assignments, Mercy often dedicated her evenings to doing extra work and bringing her books for assessment before the commencement of evening lessons. Following the conclusion of prep, she would promptly return home and assist her mother with household chores. Prior to supper, she would diligently review the material covered during the day, ensuring a thorough understanding before retiring for the night.

In the morning, she would wake up early and prepare herself for school. After completing her preparations, she would cook porridge for breakfast. If there was a shortage of flour, she would eat leftovers and pack some for later, carrying it with her to school. During her lunch break, she would look for a quiet place to eat her meal. Once she had finished, she would return to her classroom and begin studying and practicing writing until the teacher arrived.

Her friend would be absent from school when her parents had not provided her with any funds. She would often say, "I cannot attend school without adequate finances for short breaks, long breaks, and lunchtime." Despite the constant reminders from teachers and parents regarding the value of education, she chose to disregard their advice.

It was not that Furaha was a tedious student; rather, it was because she did not fully dedicate herself to her studies. Despite attending school at her own convenience, they remained close friends. On weekends, Furaha would often visit Mercy at her home, where they would have breakfast together and then proceed to wash the utensils. Afterwards, they would go to the nearby dam to fetch water for the animals, carrying a bucket on their heads. They would also spend time grazing the animals until lunchtime, when they would return home for a meal. Whenever Mercy reminded Furaha to study, she would likely divert the conversation to other topics, hoping to steer Mercy away from their studies and towards more enjoyable conversation.

On a lovely Monday evening, Mercy was on her way to the farm to retrieve homemade relish that her grandmother, a beautiful and plump Black woman named Dama Mboya, had sent her. Along the way she encountered her friend Furaha, who was sitting beneath a baobab tree. Mercy was curious as to why she was alone.

"Greetings, my friend.

How are you?" Mercy asked. "I am well, thank you," Furaha replied.
"Why are you here all by yourself?" "I am feeling stressed about my studies," Furaha admitted.
"What seems to be the issue with your studies?" Mercy inquired.
"I do not have the motivation to continue with my studies," Furaha confessed.
Mercy wanted to offer her some advice, but due to the limited time, she asked Furaha to continue on her walk. Eventually, Mercy arrived at her destination and returned home safely.

As Mercy arrived home, her grandmother's demeanor was one of anger and impatience. "Why did you take so long?" she demanded, her tone accusatory. Mercy struggled to find the right words to explain herself. "I met a classmate on the way," she began. "They seemed upset and alone under a tree, so I stopped to check on them."
However, her grandmother was quick to reprimand her for ignoring her assigned task. "You should have completed your errand before attending to personal matters," she scolded. Feeling remorseful, Mercy apologized for her mistake and thanked her grandmother for forgiving her. Filled with joy, she promised herself never to make the same mistake again.

In November of 2008, the KCPE examination took place. For those who had prepared for it, the exam seemed quite manageable.

On the other hand, those who had not studied may have found the exam to be challenging due to their lack of familiarity with the material and lack of strategies to recall answers. Following the release of the results, it was revealed that Mercy had achieved the highest marks, scoring 452 out of a total of 500.

On that day, she was filled with immense joy and her mother was equally delighted. "I am beyond pleased, my daughter. Your marks are truly outstanding," her mother exclaimed. To this, Mercy replied, "There is no need to worry, mother. I worked tirelessly for a better future." Her mother expressed her pride in her daughter's exceptional performance.

Furaha, who unfortunately did not achieve satisfactory academic results, was unable to proceed to secondary school. Despite her parents' urging for her to repeat the class, she made the decision to remain at home. Eventually, she agreed to marry a man from the nearby village of Adu, but the union was short-lived as she quickly realized that life there was exceedingly challenging.

After a mere month, or as the locals would say, 'one moon,' she made the difficult decision to leave her husband and return to her village. However, due to her naivety and vulnerability, she was often preyed upon by unscrupulous men in her community. They would make false promises of marriage, but as soon as they

had taken advantage of her physically, they would discard her, leaving her heartbroken and deceived.

The following year, Mercy was accompanied by her mother to attend Secondary school at Moi Kadzonzo. The teachers were elated with her exceptional results and thus, she was admitted to form one. Her mother was overjoyed to witness her daughter's acceptance into the school.

In class, upon observing the diligence of her peers, she continued to persevere and eventually achieved commendable results, perhaps even surpassing their efforts. She made sure to study with utmost determination, setting a prime example for her fellow students. The teachers began to take great pride in her outstanding performance, resulting in them treating her as a peer.

She not only exhibited exemplary qualities of leadership, but she was also bestowed with the prestigious role of prefect, entrusted with the task of guiding her classmates while the teachers were away in the staffroom. The mere thought of this achievement filled her with an overwhelming sense of elation! Undoubtedly, her fellow students would have been disheartened if they were not fortunate enough to have her as their leader in the classroom.

She found a great joy in 2011 as she knew it was the year of her final examination and she was confident of

achieving excellent results. She developed a routine of reading for thirty minutes before going to bed, which helped her broaden her knowledge and stimulate her creativity. She even made it a practice to wake up in the middle of the night and immerse her feet in a basin of water to stay alert while reading. This consistent reading habit allowed her to acquire new skills that surpassed her previous abilities.

As November finally arrived, Mercy began to make the necessary preparations for her highly anticipated KCSE. Despite the looming pressure and expectations surrounding the exam, she remained steadfast in her unwavering believe in herself and her abilities. With a determined mindset and an unrelenting drive, she tacked the exam with all her might, determined to excel and secure her rightful place in the University of her Dreams.

To Mercy, the KCSE was nothing more than a mere piece of cake. She approached it with confidence and determination, never once allowing any doubts of fears to cloud her mind. With every question she answered and every hurdle she overcame, she felt a sense of accomplishment, knowing that she was one step closer to achieving her goals.

Upon completing the KCSE, Mercy could not contain her joy and excitement.

However, she also felt a tinge of homesickness, longing to be reunited with her beloved family. Therefore, she

decided to stay back and finish her preparations before returning home.

When she finally reached home, Mercy was overjoyed to see her family thriving and doing well. The sight of their smiles and the warmth of their embrace filled her heart with an indescribable sense of happiness and contentment. She knew that she had made them proud and that she had succeeded in her endeavors.

Upon Mercy's arrival, her parents, filled with great enthusiasm, eagerly awaited the sight of their beloved daughter. As her mother embraced her with a warm hug, she couldn't contain her excitement.

In her hands, she held a three-legged chair, a gift from her mother to Mercy. Taking a seat, Mercy's mother asked, "How was school life, my dear?" To which Mercy replied, "It was quite good, mother."

Her father equally thrilled to see his daughter enquire about her exam. "How did you fare, my child?" he asked. "It was surprisingly easy, father," Mercy replied with a smile. Her mother then took her bags and led her to their home.

Eagerly anticipating her results, Mercy couldn’t wait to see how she had performed. The following year, she went to collect her results and was overjoyed to discover that she had achieved a mean grade of B+. With a skip in her step, she made her way back home.

Her friend Furaha, who had a tendency to slack off in her studies, was in awe of Mercy's excellent exam results. She couldn't help but feel regret for not putting in more effort and wished she had taken her studies more seriously.

THE COURSE OF LIFE

Many people mistakenly believe that living well means having luxurious cars. However, a truly fulfilling life is about having good health, meaningful relationships, purpose, and happiness. People often struggle to achieve a good life by trying to imitate others instead of embracing their own individuality.

It is crucial to live authentically in order to attain genuine satisfaction and fulfillment. Some may even give up on life because of this, as all their efforts toward success end in failure.

Allow me to extend my profound counsel to those who have succumbed to the dismal realities of their lives, who have resigned themselves to defeat and relinquished all hope, convinced that they are mere pawns in the game of life and that their existence is nothing but a constant battle against the forces of misfortune. These individuals have reached the point of surrendering to their predicaments, believing that their efforts are futile, as they are constantly faced with failure and disappointment.

Some may even go as far as to suggest that they have been cursed, that their lack of success is a result of malicious witchcraft.

I implore you, dear reader, to carefully ponder my words, for though I may not boast of great wealth or scholarly achievements, I am well aware that I may be the least erudite among my peers. Nevertheless, the truth remains immutable. Every individual possesses the potential to evolve into a virtuous, successful being and ultimately lead a fulfilling life. The idea that one is destined to a life of mediocrity and misery is a fallacy, for each and every one of us has our own unique form of wealth, one that is determined by our personal accomplishments and triumphs.

While I understand that not all may subscribe to my sentiments, I implore you to contemplate my reasoning. Allow me to elucidate my point with a hypothetical scenario featuring two individuals, B. Gonzi and Mutsono.

B. Gonzi is a man of considerable wealth, possessing a luxurious Mercedes-Benz and the grandest house in his community. Conversely, Mutsono may not even own a motorcycle; yet, when he reflects on his past, he realizes that his present situation is far more prosperous than his previous circumstances. Merely a year ago, he resided in a humble abode constructed from mud and grass, but today, he lives in a magnificent structure made of bricks and steel. From

his perspective, he has made significant progress, and in his eyes, he too is a man of wealth, albeit of a different kind.

My point is that one should never underestimate others simply because they may not possess material possessions or financial abundance. Each individual has their own form of wealth, one that is determined by their personal achievements and progress. Moreover, I firmly believe that no poverty in this world cannot be overcome through sheer determination and sacrifice. I speak from personal experience, for if someone had told me in the past that I would be where I am today, I would have scoffed at the notion. Yet here I stand a living testament to the power of perseverance and hard work.

I implore you, dear reader, to take my words to heart and never underestimate the potential of yourself or others. In this world, wealth is not solely defined by material possessions but by the success and progress one attains in their journey through life. Finally, never mock someone's circumstances, for it is possible that someday you may find yourself in the very same position.

Our family consisted of five members, including three sons and two daughters. As the fourth child, I have fond memories of our humble lifestyle. Our parents, Sidi and Katana, were not affluent; thus, we were only

able to have one meal per day instead of the customary three. Due to our parents' financial constraints, I possessed only a single outfit, which I wore for all occasions not by choice, but out of necessity. As a result, I was given the nickname "Nguomoja."

We had a solitary abode constructed from earth and thatched with *makuti*. The dwelling was of such poor quality that during rainfall, water would seep through, drenching us throughout the night until daybreak. At that time, my father was a fisherman, while my mother was in a state of flux regarding employment.

My siblings, the eldest named Nazi and the second-born named Vincent, were pursuing their education at that time. Nazi was a student at a university in Uganda, and her tuition was covered by a benefactor. She was enrolled in a teacher training program. On the other hand, Vincent was attending a polytechnic in Gongoni, where he was studying automotive mechanics.

My sister, Peris, who was the third-born, was a student in Standard Six at Garithe Primary School. At that time, I was a second-grade student at a private school called Toto Junior in Garithe. My brother, the lastborn, whose name is B. Gonzi, was not yet of school-going age during that period.

On certain occasions, my father would venture to the nearby shore in pursuit of a bountiful fishing trip. However, he would return to our humble abode with no single catch to boast of, leaving our family to retire to bed with nothing to satisfy our growling stomachs.

On the rare occasions that he did manage to catch a fish, he would often choose to sell it to a local resident named Laly, who unfortunately passed away in 2011, in order to procure a small amount of flour. This situation can be most aptly described as a predicament within a predicament a double conundrum of sorts.

As time elapsed, we were faced with challenges in maintaining our academic standing due to the recurring predicament of being dismissed for failure to settle our tuition fees. This unfortunate situation arose from the financial constraints experienced by our parents, leading to extended periods of absence from school until the required payments were made.

These hiatuses would often endure for two to three months, greatly hindering our education in comparison to our peers who had the privilege of attending classes regularly and dedicating themselves fully to their studies.

This went on and on as time passed, and our family's story continued to unfold over the course of the following year. Our beloved family member, Peris (the third child), had successfully completed her studies up to

the seventh grade. She had worked tirelessly to excel in her studies, and her hard work paid off, as she achieved top grades in all her subjects. Meanwhile, I had also made significant progress as I advanced into the third grade at a government school in the lively town of Garithe. Our youngest sibling, B. Gonzi, had also embarked on his own educational journey at the esteemed private institution of Grace Junior in Garithe.

Our family's unwavering hope and determination had always been to provide the best education for our children. However, despite our efforts, Peris' academic pursuits were abruptly halted due to financial difficulties. It was a heartbreaking moment for all of us, especially Peris, who had dreamed of becoming a doctor one day. But we did not lose hope, and we continued to support and encouraged Peris in every way we could. In an unexpected turn of events, Peris found herself entering into the sacred bond of matrimony with a gentle- man by the name of John.

John was a skilled mechanical technician, and he was employed at the prestigious Mombasa Cement Limited, located in the bustling and vibrant city of Mombasa. From the moment we met John, we knew he was the perfect match for Peris. He was kind, hardworking, and shared the same values and aspirations of our family.

John welcomed Peris into his loving family, and together, they built a beautiful life filled with love, respect, and support. Although Peris had to put her

dreams of becoming a doctor on hold, she found a new passion in supporting John in his career. She also continued to pursue her education through online courses, determined to never give up on her dreams.

Our family may have faced challenges, but we never lost hope. And in the end, it was love that brought us all together-and made our family even stronger. Peris' marriage not only brought her happiness, but it also brought our family a new son, brother, and a true blessing.

Despite the many obstacles and trials our family faced, I remained resolute in my pursuit of education. Our financial struggles were no secret in our small village, and unfortunately, they became a source of ridicule for us. The villagers would sneer and gossip, mocking our inability to afford our children's education.

Tragically, my sister Peris was forced to drop out of school and marry at a young age, adding to the humiliation and shame our family endured. The reality was that we simply could not afford to provide for our children's education, leaving us with no choice but to resort to early marriages as a means of securing their future.

Despite the harsh and unforgiving circumstances, I refused to let go of my dream of obtaining an education. Every day, I would rise with the sun and work tirelessly

to make ends meet. I would attend school in the mornings, return home during lunch for a brief respite, and then head back for evening tuition.

More often than not, I would come home to an empty table, with no food in sight. Without a moment's hesitation, I would rush back to school, my stomach growling in protest until the evening when I could finally have a meal. This was the harsh reality of our situation, but it did not deter my determination to excel academically.

My life was turned upside down when my father passed away from tuberculosis in 2012. I was only in fourth grade at the time, and the news of his death left me reeling. It was as if a part of me had been ripped away, leaving behind a gaping hole that I could not fill.

The days that followed were a blur of grief and confusion. I could not understand why my father, who had always been there for me, was suddenly gone. It felt like a nightmare from which I could not wake.

But amidst the chaos, my mother emerged as a beacon of strength. With my younger brother just starting first grade and me still in a lower grade, she had to face the daunting task of providing for us on her own. Despite her own struggles and uncertainties, she refused to let

us fall apart. She soldiered on, determined to give us the best possible life.

My mother's resilience and determination taught me a valuable lesson that even in the darkest of times, there is always a glimmer of hope. She showed me that no matter what challenges life throws our way, we have the strength within us to overcome them.

And so, I carry on, with my mother's unwavering love and support guiding me through life's ups and downs. Though my father may no longer be with us, his memory lives on in the lessons he taught me and the love he instilled in our family. And for that, I will be forever grateful.

My brave mother took a bold step in creating and selling *makuti* to sustain our basic needs and support our education. I sincerely pray for the Almighty's blessings and long life to be bestowed upon her. Every morning, she would rise with the sun and walk for two hours to Gongoni, undaunted by any obstacles. Despite the challenging journey, she remained determined to fulfill her responsibilities. Whether it was pouring rain or scorching sun, she would return home at dusk, her unwavering resolve shining brightly.

The year was 2009, and winds of change were sweeping through my life like a hurricane. As I

embarked on the eighth grade, I could not help but feel a sense of excitement and anticipation for the future. My brother, the indomitable B. Gonzi, was now in Class Five, and together, we were determined to conquer the academic world.

We were two peas in a pod, united by our insatiable thirst for knowledge and the pursuit of excellence. We were disciples of education, firm believers in its transformative power and the boundless possibilities it could bestow upon us. With this ethos in mind, we would rise at the crack of dawn, braving the frigid morning air for our daily ablutions. With renewed vigour, we then proceeded to school, eager to begin our day and seize every opportunity it presented.

As we entered our classroom, we were greeted by the familiar aroma of books and the sound of scribbling pencils.

We quickly settled ourselves and immersed ourselves in our studies, determined to complete our assignments before the official commencement of lessons at eight o'clock. But our thirst for knowledge could not be quenched by mere assignments. During recess, B. Gonzi and I would retreat to a secluded alcove, using our precious moments to recapitulate and reinforce our understanding of the day's lessons.

But our pursuit of excellence did not end there. Even during recreational periods, we made sure to

capitalize on every opportunity to broaden our minds and sharpen our intellect. When the school bell tolled, signaling the end of the day's activities, B. Gonzi and I would linger for supplementary study sessions, resolute in our determination to utilize every minute productively.

On weekends, we temporarily set aside our books to attend church with our peers from the neighborhood. We prayed for success in our studies, fully aware that with diligence and determination, we could achieve all that we aspired to.

Following the service, we would return home, eager to assist our mother with household chores. As the day drew to a close, B. Gonzi and I would retire to our respective chambers, but not before dedicating several hours to reviewing our studies with utmost diligence and concentration.

The year 2009 may have been deemed unremarkable by some, but for B. Gonzi and me, it was a year of metamorphosis, enlightenment, and unwavering tenacity. Though we were young, our zeal for knowledge and our steadfast commitment to our studies set us apart. As we drifted into slumber each night, we were aware that we were drawing closer to the fulfillment of our aspirations. The future was ours

for the taking, and we were ready to conquer it with all our might.

Our team's performance soared to new heights. We were overjoyed and amazed by our progress, never expecting to be in such a strong position. This only fueled our determination to continue pushing ourselves, knowing that even greater success was within our reach.

In November, I embarked on the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) with the determination to achieve extraordinary results. To my delight, the exam presented minimal challenges, allowing me to perform with ease. My heart swelled with joy and determination as I tackled each question. I am grateful to the divine for guiding me through the exam flawlessly. After completing the exam, I returned home with a sense of fulfillment and satisfaction.

Upon arrival, I was greeted by my mother, who was busy preparing our midday meal. She welcomed me with a warm smile and offered to help me carry my belongings to my room. As we walked, my mother asked about the exam, and I happily shared my positive experience. She showered me with well wishes, and I thanked her sincerely. Now, I eagerly await the release of my results with hope for a favorable outcome.

In the eleventh month of that very year, my dear brother Vincent triumphantly completed his mechanical studies, earning a highly coveted certificate. My heart was filled with pure elation, and I wholeheartedly commended him, exclaiming, “Bravo, my brother!” To which he humbly responded, “Your words carry great weight, and I am immensely grateful.”

Before Vincent secured his new job, he resolved to become a proficient fisherman, using a fish trap to secure his daily sustenance. It was a strenuous task, but one that brought him a sense of purpose and satisfaction. He would venture to the waters every day, tirelessly casting his net to catch the elusive fish. And oh, the fruits of his labor were plentiful, for his dedication provided him with the means to support both his family and himself.

But such was his devotion to his newfound trade that he would often spend the night by the shore, guarding his precious catch from potential thieves. As the moon shone brightly above, Vincent would peacefully slumber on the sandy beach, his mind at ease knowing that his hard work would not go to waste.

As the days passed, life began to take a turn for the better. No longer were we subjected to the pangs of hunger, for our humble abode now boasted three meals a day. And with the additional income from Vincent's

fishing endeavors, we were able to upgrade from our meager dwelling to a modest mud house with a single room. It was a small but significant improvement, one that filled us with immense joy and gratitude.

The transformation in our circumstances did not go unnoticed by our neighbors, who were in awe of the remarkable progress we had made. From a state of destitution to two houses, our impoverished situation had taken a turn for the better, all thanks to Vincent's unwavering determination and hard work.

In that same year, on December 18th, my sister Nazi returned from Uganda after completing her teaching course. The moment was filled with overwhelming joy that almost caused me to fall over. My mother embraced Nazi warmly, expressing her disbelief at her sudden return.

“Is it really you, Nazi? I can’t believe you’re finally home!” Mother exclaimed, tears of joy in her eyes. “Yes, Mom, it’s me! I missed you so much,” Nazi replied, tears also forming in her eyes.

B. Gonzi offered a plastic chair for Nazi to sit on, and they engaged in conversation.

Mother asked Nazi about her experience in Uganda. “So, how was your time in Uganda? Did you enjoy

teaching there?" Mother inquired, eager to hear about Nazi's experiences.

Nazi's face immediately lit up as she began to share her stories. "It was amazing, Mom! The students were so eager to learn, and the community was so welcoming. I learned so much from them too." Mother smiled, happy to see her daughter so passionate about her experience. "I'm so proud of you, Nazi. You've made a positive impact in the world."

Nazi reciprocated the sentiment with a warm embrace. "Thank you for always supporting me, Mom. I'm happy to be back home with you and the family."

The mother came up with a plan to celebrate Nazi's graduation, and we agreed to it. We invited our neighbors and had a wonderful time. They were amazed when we threw an unexpected party, after previously being laughed at for our poverty. On December 25th, we rejoiced in the fact that everyone had survived another year. We slaughtered a goat and joyfully celebrated Christmas.

As January approached, I eagerly waited for my exam results. When they finally arrived, I was ecstatic to see that I had scored 398 out of 500. I couldn't help but smile as I made my way back home.

My sister Nazi asked me, "How did you do on your exam?" I replied, "I got 398 out of 500!" Nazi

exclaimed, “That’s amazing! Congratulations!” Just then, our mother came back from fetching water and asked, “What’s all the excitement about?” Nazi answered, “Mom, Mutsono got his exam results, and he did really well!” Our mother smiled and asked me, “Is that true, Mutsono?” I proudly showed her my score and said, “Yes, Mom. I got 398 out of 500.” Our mother hugged me and said, “That’s wonderful! I’m so proud of you.” I thanked her and said, “Thank you, Mom. I couldn’t have done it without your support.”

In the quaint village of Garithe, I was cordially welcomed into Ngomeni Secondary School, a government institution renowned for its exceptional education. Despite our financial constraints, my family tirelessly searched for the ideal secondary school for me the previous day. Fortunately, destiny led us to Ngomeni Secondary School, where I was enrolled in Form One.

As soon as I set foot on the school premises, I was greeted with open arms and embraced by the entire school community. The teachers, staff, and students’ exuded kindness, and warmth, making me feel immediately at ease. I was almost as though I had been a part of the school for a number of years, rather than just arriving on my first day.

The school itself was a marvel to behold. The buildings were impeccably maintained, and the

classrooms were furnished with state--of--art technology and resources. I was filled with eagerness to embark on my academic journey in such a nurturing environment.

As the days elapsed, I swiftly acclimated to my new school and forged strong relationships with my classmates. The teachers were not only devoted to our academic achievements, but they also took the time to personally familiarize themselves with each student. It was evident that the school's motto of "education with a heart" was truly exemplified by every member of the Ngomeni Secondary School community.

In retrospect, I am appreciative of the financial constraints that led me to Ngomeni Secondary School. It was undoubtedly the best decision my family could have made, and I am immensely proud to be part of such a remarkable institution. My journey at Ngomeni Secondary School may have commenced with a few challenges, but it was replete with love, support, and boundless opportunities.

As the hot sun beat down on the dusty of Gongoni, a glimmer of hope arrived in the form of Nazi, a strong anddetermined woman with a heart of gold. She had just begun working at the government secondary school, and little did she know, she was about to change the lives of two siblings forever.

My brother and I had always dreamed of a better life, but with our father gone and our mother struggling to make ends meet, it seemed like an impossible dream. However, as soon as Nazi came into our lives, everything changed. Not only did she become our guardian angel, but she also became our savior.

When her steady income, we no longer had to worry about being sent home from school due to unpaid fees. We were able to attend classes without any distractions, and our grades improved drastically. My brother, who was in his final year of primary school, was able to focus on his studies and excel in his exams, earning him a spot in a prestigious high school.

But Nazi's generosity didn't stop there. She had plans to open a cereal shop for our mother in Gongoni, providing her with a stable source of income. And within just five months, her dreams became a reality. Not only did she purchase a large piece of land in Malindi, but she also hired a skilled farmer to take care of her cattle.

But that wasn't all. Nazi, with her unwavering determination and hard work, she built a beautiful three-room house for our mother, who was overjoyed and grateful beyond words. And for herself, she built a magnificent five-room house, a symbol of her success and a true testament to her resilience.

As I look back on those tough times, I am filled with gratitude for Nazi's presence in our lives. She not only provided us with financial stability but also taught us the importance of perseverance and never giving up on our dreams.

Nazi's journey from a humble teacher to a successful landowner and businesswoman is a true inspiration. And as for my brother and me, we are eternally grateful for her love, kindness, and determination, which have changed our lives forever.

In January 2011, Vincent's life was finally transformed into one filled with immense happiness. His dream job as a mechanic at Mombasa Cement was no longer just a yearning, but a reality. And within the next year, he not only bought a small plot of land in Borabora, but also established his own garage in Gongoni and even hired an employee. The days of being ridiculed for our poverty were long gone; now, those same individuals came to us seeking employment. This was a testament to the saying that the darkest hour is just before the dawn.

During my senior year of high school in 2013, I was determined to excel and make a lasting impression at Ngomeni Secondary. With a focused and driven mindset, I dedicated myself to my studies, knowing that this was my final chance to leave a mark and set an example for future students. I spent countless hours at school, staying late to read, finish assignments, and

recap on what I had learned during the day. At home, I would often arrive late, but my family couldn't understand why. I would quickly shower, have a late supper, and then continue studying before bed. In the morning, I would wake up early, eager to read for another thirty minutes before getting ready for school.

The air buzzed with anticipation as the KCSE exams drew near in November 2013. While my peers panicked, I remained composed. I had dedicated countless hours to practicing past papers, tackling difficult questions with determination. My confidence radiated, fueled by my unwavering believe in my abilities.

My motivation stemmed from a deep desire to break the cycle of poverty that plagued my family for long. They had subject to ridicule and judgement, but I refused to let their circumstances define me. I knew that acing the KCSE would open doors to top colleges and pave the way for me to pursue my dreams. With hard work and prayer, I was determined to make it happen.

My heart swelled with pride as I thought about the future ahead. Poverty would no longer hold my family back. I could already see opportunities waiting for me, beckoning me towards as a brighter future. And as I sat down to take the exam, I knew that God was on my side. With unwavering faith and perseverance, I was confident that my efforts would be rewarded. And

indeed, they were. When the results were announced, I couldn't help but smile. Poverty no longer had a grip on my family. We were destined for greatness.

When the results came out, I was jumping for joy when I saw that I had gotten a B (minor) as my overall grade. It was the highest grade I had ever received in high school! I immediately went to thank my teachers for all their help and support.

"Mr. Dominic, I got a B in my exams!" I claimed.
"That's amazing, Mutsono! I'm so proud of you," Mr. Dominic replied with a smile.
"I couldn't have done it without your help and guidance," I said gratefully.
"You worked hard and paid off. Well done," Mr. Dominic said, patting my back.
“Thank you, Mr. Njuwe, for all your extra classes, they really helped me understand the subject better," I said to my English teacher.
"I'm glad I could be of assistance, Mutsono. Keep up the good work," He replied back.

I left the school that day with a sense of accomplishment and gratitude towards my teachers. I knew I couldn't have achieved this without their support and encouragement.

In 2014, I began my journey at Kilifi University (Pwani University) to pursue a comprehensive four year teacher training program. As a newcomer to the university environment, I faced challenges in

understanding the subjects. However, instead of giving up, I persevered and worked harder to overcome my difficulties.

I knew that my academic performance would greatly impact my future opportunities, so I remained determined to excel. I dedicated myself wholeheartedly to achieving my goals. After four years of hard work, I proudly received my certificate, having successfully met all the requirements. The immense happiness I felt upon receiving my certificate was shared by my mother, who was proud to see me one step closer to my dream of becoming a teacher.

While I waited for employment in a prestigious government secondary school, I found myself taking up a teaching position in a nearby private institution. To my delight, I was warmly embraced by my colleagues and students, who welcomed me with open arms. With a sense of purpose and dedication, I imparted my knowledge to my young pupils, who were thoroughly satisfied with my teaching methods.

As a single individual with no financial burdens at home, I decided to open a back account in the bustling town of Malindi. With each passing month, I diligently saved a portion of my salary, watching with gratification as my nest egg grew.

However, I did not let my money sit idly in the bank. Instead, I utilized it to help those in need by lending it to them at a modest interest rate of 10%. This proved to be a lucrative venture as some borrowers were unable to repay the loan on time and would return with the agreed upon interest, thus generating additional income for me.

In the year 2019, I was offered a prestigious teaching position at Marereni Secondary School, a highly esteemed government institution where I had previously completed my teaching practice. My exceptional teaching skills garnered admiration from my colleagues, and even the principal recognized my potential to become an outstanding educator.

I humbly accepted the position and vowed to impart my students with an unparalleled education. The principal was pleased with my determination and warmly welcomed me as a new member of the teaching staff. Filled with gratitude, I thanked the heavens for making my lifelong dream a reality.

My unwavering passion for the English language, which I have nurtured since my early days in primary school, served as a driving force for me to impart this subject to my students.

My relentless pursuit of excellence paid off, as not only did my students thoroughly enjoy my classes, but they also excelled in the subject, surpassing even my own achievement.

After three long years of fervent prayer, my heart's deepest desire was finally granted: a plot of land in the breathtaking paradise of Borabora, where I could envision building a loving home for my future family. In awe of God's faithful provision, I purchased the land and embarked on the journey of constructing my dream abode.

But the blessings did not end there. As I continued to lend my hard-earned money to others, it returned to me in abundance, accompanied by generous interest. Instead of spending it, I chose to let it grow in the bank, knowing that it would serve as a bountiful resource for my future family's needs. With this financial security, I could ensure a comfortable and fulfilling life for my children, providing them with the best education and opportunities. My heart overflowed with gratitude toward God for showering me with the precious gifts of a home and financial stability for my beloved family.

This also served as a testament to my neighbors, particularly those who once mocked our poverty and said we would never succeed in life.

Looking back, I feel a sense of sadness as I wonder what would have happened if I had given up on my studies and stayed at home due to our difficulties. But then I remember that every challenge has a purpose,

and I am grateful that I persevered. Despite the discouraging words of our neighbors, I knew that hard work and determination were the keys to overcoming obstacles.

Now, as I look toward the future, I am confident in my abilities, and I know that I shall enjoy the fruits of my labor with my family by my side.

I hope to inspire others who may feel like giving up or doubting themselves, reminding them that no one is destined for a life of suffering and that anyone can achieve their dreams by believing in themselves.

THE VANISHED GENTLEMAN

Long ago, in the village of Jilore, there lived a diligent gentleman named Madaba. He was joined in holy matrimony to his beloved spouse, Kahonzi, and together they were blessed with three children: Dama, Karembo, and Changawa. Madaba worked as a maize grinder, with his workplace situated close to their home. However, his modest income often presented challenges for the household.

Despite this, their familial bond remained unbreakable, and they always extended unwavering support to one another. They were devout in their faith in the Almighty and held onto the belief that even if sustenance was scarce today, tomorrow would bring better prospects. They remained grateful for their blessings and looked ahead with optimism toward a more promising future.

Mr. Madaba was a diligent man, rising at 8 a.m. to embark on his daily journey of providing for his beloved family. After a long day's work, he would eagerly return to the warm embrace of his home by 4 p.m., ready to fulfill his duties as a devoted husband and father.

However, despite his strong work ethic, Mr. Madaba had a weakness for alcohol. No matter how fatigued he might be, he would often make a stop at a nearby club on his way home. There, he would spend hours in the company of his drinking companions, blissfully unaware of the passing time or the eerie surroundings of the nearby forest. The haunting hoots of wise owls were of little concern to him, as long as he remained in a drunken state of contentment. To Mr. Madaba, nothing else in the world could compare to the simple pleasure of having a drink in hand.

Mr. Madaba bumped into his long-lost friend, Kirao, at an exclusive club one night. They hadn't seen each other in ages, so Mr. Madaba suggested they catch up over a drink. As they chatted and laughed, time flew by, and they ended up spending the whole evening together. Feeling grateful for their friendship, Mr. Madaba insisted on treating Kirao to multiple rounds of drinks. The night was filled with joy and contentment, but as the clock struck midnight, they bid each other farewell and headed home. Knowing it was not safe to ride his bicycle in the darkness, Mr. Madaba walked it carefully, steadying it with his hands.

As Mr. Madaba made his way back home, he came upon a serene forest filled with a sweet, perfume-like scent. Intrigued, he stopped to see where the fragrance was coming from. To his surprise, he saw a stunning

woman he had never laid eyes on before. She had long hair, beautiful brown skin, and wore a choker necklace. Mr. Madaba couldn't help but wonder who she was. As he was about to continue on his way, the woman began to follow him. With trembling hands, Mr. Madaba stood still, curious to see what would happen next.

The woman approached him with a smile, her laughter ringing through the air. Mr. Madaba was taken aback by her joyous demeanor. She greeted him and asked, "Do you know me?"

Mr. Madaba replied honestly, "No, this is the first time I've seen you."

The woman then asked, "But how do I know you?"

Mr. Madaba was at a loss for words. The woman then proceeded to tell him everything about his life—where he lived, the number of children he had, and even where he had been that very night. Everything she said was true, leaving him stunned.

Mr. Madaba stood speechless.

The woman and Mr Madaba were still in the midst of their conversation, their voices carrying softly through the peaceful forest. The woman had revealed that she was on her way to her grandmother's house in the quaint village of Mugumoni. However, she had

gotten lost and couldn't recall the route back. She had spent the entire day trying to retrace her steps, but the sweltering sun had drained her energy and left her disoriented. With no means of returning home, she sought refuge in the tranquil forest for the night. However, upon hearing some voices, she decided to investigate.

Fortunately, it was Mr. Madaba, a kind and gentle man who had stumbled upon her. Unfortunately, even he was unaware of the route to Mugumoni. Nevertheless, he offered her a place to stay for the night and suggested they strategize their next move in the morning. The woman, grateful for his benevolence, readily accepted his offer, and together they proceeded toward Mr. Madaba’s humble abode.

As the effects of the alcohol began to wear off, Mr. Madaba was able to ride his bicycle with ease. He even offered to carry the woman on his bicycle as they journeyed home. However, along the way, Mr. Madaba noticed that his bicycle seemed to be getting heavier and heavier. Despite the increasing difficulty, they managed to reach a point where the bicycle’s tyre went flat. He had no choice but to stop and fix it before continuing their journey.

To their surprise, they arrived at Mr. Madaba's home. He carefully parked his bicycle against the wall,

knocked on the door, and ushered the woman inside. The next morning, Mr. Madaba awoke to find himself perched high up in a mighty baobab tree, all alone. Disoriented and confused, he struggled to recall his whereabouts and the event of the previous night.

Mr. Madaba's family had been waiting for him since the previous day. They knew that he always stopped at the club for a few drinks before heading home from work. However, this time he hadn't come home on the previous day and even on the following morning. This worried his family because it was not like him to not come home, even if it was later than usual. They were concerned about his safety and started looking for him.

His wife gathered all the villagers and shared the story about her husband, Mr. Madaba. They decided to work together to find him. They went to his workplace and asked his colleagues, but no one had any information about his whereabouts. Despite their efforts, they couldn't find him for three days.

During those three days, his family sacrificed and struggled to find him, but they had no luck. They were anxious and worried about what could have happened to Mr. Madaba.

On the fourth day, Mr. Madaba’s wife decided once again to seek the help of their fellow villagers in finding her missing husband. This time, she came up

with a new plan. She lit a large fire at their home, hoping that the smoke would catch the attention of people living nearby. As the flames grew higher, the villagers began to gather, curious about the reason for the signal.

The village elder, who was known for his wisdom and leadership, was among the crowd. He was shocked to hear that Mr. Madaba had gone missing and that no one knew his whereabouts. He stood up and addressed the people, expressing his concern and urging them to come together to find a solution.

The elder then suggested that they send one of Mr. Madaba's children to his grandmother's village, Karima-Ndaazi. The journey would take about four hours, but it was necessary to seek the advice and guidance of the matriarch. The child was sent off with a clear message: to explain the situation to his grandmother and return with a plan to find Mr. Madaba.

As they waited for the child to return, the villagers prayed and hoped for a positive outcome. They had faith that the grandmother, being a wise and experienced woman, would come up with a plan to locate Mr. Madaba. They were determined to find him, and with the help of the entire village, they were confident that they would bring him back home safe and sound.

The young child embarked on a journey to his grandmother's house on foot, under the blazing sun and clear blue sky. Despite the dangerous forests he had to pass through, he never gave up. Carrying a pot of water and some ugali with dandelion, he would stop at a peaceful spot to rest and refuel before continuing his journey.

Along the way, he encountered various wild animals that could have harmed him, but he prayed to God for protection and pressed on. Despite feeling exhausted and, at times, on the verge of giving up, he remembered the words of the villagers who had entrusted him with the task of bringing back information.

As he journeyed on, he suddenly found himself dozing off due to fatigue. In his sleep, he heard the sounds of two lions fighting nearby, which terrified him. Waking up, he hastened his pace and even jogged through the forest, ignoring the eerie cries of the hooting owls.

Finally, he reached his grandmother's house, where she was sitting on a three-legged chair, telling stories to her grandsons. After being warmly welcomed, he shared his journey with his grandmother and wasted no time in explaining the reason for his visit. She scolded the villagers for not informing her sooner

about the lost man, as she could have helped him from the very beginning.

She then retrieved a tightly wrapped black nylon paper bag and instructed her grandson to give it to the village elder when he returned home. She was confident that the elder would know what to do and that the lost man, Mr. Madaba, would be found. As a sign of her determi- nation, she even promised to go on a week-long hunger strike if Mr. Madaba was not found.

Filled with hope and gratitude, the child happily made his way back home, eager for his father to be found.

The child hurried home, aware of the limited time and the dangers of traveling alone through the forest at night. Despite his haste, he took care to hold on to the advice his grandmother had given him. He arrived at the village around 5:30 p.m., greeted by a relieved and happy crowd. The villagers were certain that his grandmother, being a wise and experienced woman, would have given him sound guidance.

The child greeted the villagers and then proceeded to share the wisdom passed down to him.

“Good evening, my dear villagers. I trust you are all in high spirits,” he began.

“We are more than just high-spirited, my child. We are eager to hear your news,” the villagers replied.

“I have done my best to ensure a successful outcome,” the child proudly announced.

“Well done, our boy!” the villagers exclaimed, applauding and congratulating him.

Filled with joy, the child then took the village elder aside and presented him with the contents of his grandmother’s message. The elder’s face lit up with happiness as he read the message, knowing that everything would turn out well.

He returned to the crowd and reassured them that there was no need to worry about Mr. Madaba, who had gone missing; he would be found in no time. The villagers were overjoyed to hear this news and thanked the child for his efforts. The elder then gathered some villagers and set out on a journey, guided by the contents of the message.

As they travelled, the villagers sang traditional songs, hoping for the safe return of Mr. Madaba. Eventually, they came upon a baobab tree, and the message instructed them to stop and look up. To their amazement, they saw Mr. Madaba perched high up in the tree. They called out to him and helped him descend safely. He was weak and hungry, having

gone without food for almost four days. The villagers brought him back to the village, relieved and grateful that he had been found.

It was a day of great rejoicing for the villagers when they returned home with Mr. Madaba, for they had long abandoned all hope of ever finding him. It was almost unreal, a surreal dream come true, as they laid their eyes upon him, alive and well. Tears of joy flowed freely from the eyes of some, while others were overcome with emotion. Mr. Madaba's return was indeed a course for celebration.

But amidst the joyous occasion, it was clear that Mr. Madaba was not in his right mind. His thoughts were jumbled and confused, rendering him incapable of communicating or even thinking coherently. Yet, the villagers were simply elated to see him alive after being missing for four days. His wife, Kahonzi, quickly prepared some meagre porridge for him to drink, hoping it would revive his energy. To everyone’s surprise, Mr. Madaba drank the porridge like a child, a clear indication that he had not eaten anything during his days of absence.

The next morning, Mr. Madaba’s condition had not improved much, but he was able to utter a few words to those around him. As the days passed, his mind gradually regained clarity, and he was able to communicate much better.

As soon as Mr. Madaba was able to speak clearly, his wife extended a warm invitation to the villagers to come to their home so that he could share what had transpired during his time away. The villagers eagerly accepted the invitation, brimming with curiosity and happiness.

In fact, they decided to pool their resources and purchase a large male goat to slaughter in honor of Mr. Madaba's homecoming. The goat was sacrificed, and a grand feast was enjoyed by all, grateful for the safe return of their dear and neighbor.

Thereafter, the villagers gathered under a tree at the village compound, eagerly awaiting the return of Mr Madaba. He had been missing for several days and everyone was curious to know what had happened to him. Mr. Madaba was seated at the center, surrounded by the villagers, and began to speak in a polite manner.

“Greetings, everyone, I trust you are all in good health,” he said with a warm smile. “I am grateful for this opportunity to address you all. I understand that you have important matters to attend to at home, and I am but a simple man, but your kindness and concern for one another have brought us together, and for that, I am truly thankful. May God bless you all.”

The villagers responded with a round of applause.

“I would like to share with you all what happened to me. As I was on my way home from work one evening, I decided to stop at the club for a drink, as I often do. There, I ran into an old friend whom I had not seen in quite some time. We caught up and had a few drinks until midnight, when we bid each other farewell and went our separate ways. As I was walking, I stumbled upon a peaceful and serene forest. I noticed a pleasant aroma and saw a beautiful young woman emerge from the trees. She informed me that she had been searching for her grandmother’s house all day but had unfortunately gotten lost. The scorching sun had taken its toll on her, so she decided to spend the night in the forest and figure out a plan in the morning.

I could not leave her alone in the forest, so I offered to take her to my home for the night. We could then discuss a plan together in the morning. However, after that, everything is a blur. I do not recall how I ended up here or what happened to me. My mind is still in a state of confusion,” Mr. Madaba explained in a polite tone.

The villagers listened attentively, nodding sympathetically. They were relieved to see Mr. Madaba safe and sound. They thanked him for sharing his story and promised to assist him in uncovering the truth of what had transpired. With that, they all bid each other good night and returned to their homes,

grateful for the safe return of their friend and neighbor.