



THE ENGAGEMENT

WHAT
WILL IT
TAKE TO
SEPARATE
THEM?

K. KIMUYU

THE ENGAGEMENT

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PROEM

I know your life is vast and there are things you dream and yearn for. I hope you find reflections of yourself in this book. I hope you enjoy *The Engagement* as much as I enjoyed penning it.

To my heroes: My Dad, Julius Kimuyu and my Mom,
Hannah Njeri.

To my editor Shiku Ngigi. Sometimes you get lucky. I did.

To my readers who validate my pen week after week on
Kisauti.

The path that is available to us is to be human, to do art,
and to fly far higher than we've been taught is possible. –

Seth Godin

CHAPTER 1

HE WAS a man in his mid-thirties and at the peak of his career, with a beautiful fiancée to garnish the entire look, yet he had an aspect of loneliness about him. He stabbed his cigarette on the rim of the iron bar at the balcony and threw the butt in the waste bucket and heaved a sigh. It was almost dusk at the Sand Resort in Mombasa. The sun was going down creating that spectacular, alluring paste that resembled Pablo Picasso playing with a brush.

"Honey, aren't you going to join us?"

"I will be there in a moment."

"What is more important out here than your own engagement party?"

He stared at the ocean. The waves were rising in huge mountains and crashing into each other like gladiators in the colosseum. In the far distance a little boy was running with his kite but the wind was too strong and it snatched

it away and the little boy ran after it and disappeared into the horizon.

"The sunset. Don't you think it's beautiful?"

Lily moved from the door to where her fiancée was.

"More beautiful than your wife?"

She was in a purple evening gown with an empire waist that fell from her tiny waist onto her wide hips like a bell, giving her a fairy tale, princess look. It was strapless, revealing her soft shoulders and collarbones. Collarbones that were moody. Sometimes they appeared to be soft and delicate, other times they appeared to be as sharp as an axe.

Resting on the apex of her shoulders was a soft oval face with spaced out eyes, a duchess nose and full lips. She had an uncanny look to her. She looked like a woman who could pass as a business mogul and a woman who could pose on the cover of a lingerie magazine as a spicy mistress.

"Come," she took his hand. "The guests are getting worried, they want to see you hand-in-hand with your wife."

"Wife to be." He muttered under his breath.

CHAPTER 2

OYUNGA SCANNED the ballroom. It was all an act. It was a big movie scene and every character had their notes. The guests holding their martinis and neat whisky's chattering. Women in their short dresses. Some married, others there to make sure their husbands didn't stray. Bachelors in sharp suits and bespoke watches darting their eyes around, looking for something to warm their beds for the night. Waitresses arching their backs at the point of breaking them and flirting with faces bright with smiles, perhaps to woe the young bachelors or perhaps to get better tips.

"Oyunga, where have you been, everybody is waiting for the man of the moment."

Arigula flashed a smile and punched his friend on the arm with a soft fist.

"You've decided to leave bachelorhood, eh? I'll tell you this, it better be something your heart wants because this is no bed of roses, my man."

Arigula's wife was now craning her neck wondering where her husband had gone too. A short woman whose height was only equaled by her temper, which was even shorter.

"I think you've got bigger fish to fry than the end of my bachelorhood, my guy." Oyunga chirped as the tiny little thing tottered to where they were and nudged Arigula's arm.

"I was worried sick," she barked. "Don't do that again," she continued as if scolding a wayward child.

She was not completely at fault, she had reason to worry. Arigula had; had his fair share of infidelities in Nairobi and they were now in Mombasa. The natives called it Mombasa raha. Girls in tiny garments that made them look more naked than dressed were in plenty and she had a mind to make sure her husband was not sampling anything that wasn't home cooked.

"Darling, I'm here beside you where I have always been." Arigula the smooth talker said.

“Sorry for budging in like this, I’m sure you understand that a woman in love is a dangerous thing?”

“It’s okay June, a woman in love is a beautiful thing.”

“Congratulations to both you and Lily, you make a damn sweet couple. If it got any sweeter, I’d have diabetes.” Arigula jumped in and his wife swatted his arm. “Stop it!” She whispered but both Oyunga and Lily had heard and Arigula lowered his head embarrassed.

“Thank you Arigula,” Lily said with a half-smile and tapped him on the shoulder to save face.

“Nice meeting you,” June said, while pulling her husband away by the arm like an errant child.

CHAPTER 3

“OH MY God! Oh my God!”

Rachel penguin-ran in her Burj Khalifa high heels and tight yellow clubby dress towards Lily and embraced her tightly, almost breaking her frame.

“I can’t believe you’re getting married. She pulled her away from Oyunga and held both of Lily’s hands on hers and brushed her eyes over her as if seeing her for the first time, then broke out again, this time her feet doing a small jig as if she was pressed to pee. “Oh my God! Oh my God!”

Lily went the entire nine yards, stretching her arm out almost dislocating her shoulder to flaunt her engagement bling which sparkled like a shooting star. “Eighteen carat diamond. He got it for me in Dubai.” Of course the story kept being tweaked depending on who she was talking to.

"Oyunga you lucky, lucky son of a gun. Ulijinyakulia rangi ya thao, top layer eh?" Rachel chortled in a *coastish* accent. "Huyu hapa hurulaini."

Oyunga blushed. "Asante."

"Oh my God! I forgot. Meet my other Friend, Marion, she's in advertising. Lily, this is Marion, Marion—Lily. Oyunga this is Marion. Marion—Oyunga." If at that moment you told Rachel that, that introduction would be Marion's and Oyunga's undoing, she would have smacked you in the face with a brick and called you crazy.

Marion stood awestricken by her friend's energy, she had never quite gotten used to it. She lifted her eyes shyly and they locked with Oyunga's and she felt as if his brown eyes were searing right through her, unbuttoning her soul. She froze momentarily, the magnetic spark making her tipsy. She steadied herself and looked away, reminding herself that he was an engaged man, a man who was out of bounds. She gave both of them a soft hug and knew she couldn't hang around, scared of what would happen if the spark gripped her again.

"Congratulations you two, it is a pleasure. Rachel has told me a lot about you and I'm glad she was not exaggerating on the picture-perfect bit."

"Thank you," Lily said her face impassive, as if she were seated in a casino playing poker. Oyunga was glad that Lily was the one who responded. He felt that if he was the one who did, he would have gone an extra mile and added a, "You look quite dashing yourself," on top of the thank you. She did look dashing. She was in a white, off-shoulder skater dress, black heels which she complemented with a pearl necklace and cream chandelier earrings. She was a chupalla away from looking like Lupita Nyong'o. Her hair was trimmed short and she had an angelic face. The kind of face that is attractive regardless of whether it is happy or experiencing sorrow.

"I will stretch my legs and let the couple enjoy itself. Au revoir!" And damn were they beautiful legs. Long and sexy. Flowing on and on like a river of chocolate.

CHAPTER 4

THEY WALKED around the room doing the ritual that a lot of people did so well. Grinning, just enough to convince people that they were genuinely happy. Shaking people's hands firmly and patting them on the back when they went in for a hug to assure them they were inviting.

The questions kept coming, Oyunga found them dull and tedious. One in particular kept being repeated. "How did you guys meet?" Someone would ask while holding their wine glass and Lily would go into her act. Lowering her head at first as if she were shy and proceeding to adjust her tone so that it set the scene to something out of a romance novel. If she had her way she would have had musicians with violins and pianos humming softly in the background.

"We met in Dubai's underwater zoo. I was marveling at the sheer size of the aquarium when I saw this shark approaching me, only it was a tall sculpted shark that looked as if it lived in the gym. He was in a suit, his beard unshaven and he looked at me with those smoldering brown eyes that unzipped me and for a moment my legs almost buckled. What is it you say attracted you to me again, hon?"

"Your hazelnut-shaped eyes, they were so kind and had this spark about them that I just couldn't resist."

"He couldn't stop calling me after that. You know, I thought he was one of those guys who just wanted to get into my pants so I ignored him for a while but he just kept charging at me like a bull. As if I was a bullfighter holding a muleta."
"

"What can I say, I'm a persistent guy."

"Yes, you are. A bit romantic too. I can't start telling you the number of times he sent me flowers and chocolate, over and over again and I said yes just so I could avoid cavities."

“Haha. Ladies and gents, there you have it. The way to a woman’s heart is not love or affection, its flowers and chocolate.”

What they left out in their choreographed skit was that they met in a seedy restaurant in downtown Nairobi. Oyunga always the forlorn chap was having anxiety attacks and the medication he was getting from hospitals wasn’t helping. He got a contact from an acquaintance who knew someone who could get him the meds he needed. He ended up getting so addicted to Lily’s supply that when he didn’t get it, besides anxiety he now got tense and agitated as well.

She also left out the part about her dropping her knickers for him that very same night after they overdosed on the pills and their inhibitions left them, although Lily could have still bedded him with or without the pills because she was that type of girl. The kind of girl that didn’t play dating games when she knew all she wanted was carnal pleasure. In that regard she was a little bit like a man. She bedded both men and women and she was completely unemotional and unhinged. Even now Oyunga could not tell if she really loved him or if it was another skit.

CHAPTER 5

MARION FLOUNCED along the corridor, her round behind bobbing up and down in rhythm, her hips rising and falling as if she were auditioning for America's next top model. She was in a short blue satin skirt, black wedges and an olive green blouse. On her wrist a simple but elegant Burberry watch. Her Viktor Rolf flowerbomb fragrance permeated as she entered the boardroom.

They were all waiting for her, the customer service manager in charge of a team of eleven. She made sure that the brands they handled were well satisfied. This, for the most part, included having lunches and sending fruit baskets to the brands marketing team. She was in the business of relationships and she understood that business relationships were not built on emails but in person, with love and affection.

She sat in the boardroom and listened to five of her juniors go on a rant about a certain colleague, a certain colleague they wanted fired because, as they put it, she contributed very little and was always aloof and estranged from the team.

"We had a team building exercise the other day and she didn't even show up." Wambui egged in.

"Not to mention that we often end up shouldering most of her work." Joshua jumped on the wagon. "She needs to go."
"Rehab murmured.

"Who gave you permission to let people go, Rehab?" Marion smirked, staring knives at her. "Team, do you see what is wrong with this picture?"

They all looked clueless.

"You're all here ganging up on one person. Don't you think that is wrong? The five of you against one person, do you think that's a fair fight?" There was a silence, a silence that could sit in the boardroom and help itself to the coffee and biscuits on the table. "You know what I think, I think you've alienated her and in return she's alienated you. Call her in here."

Joshua shot out like an arrow, as if there were needles in his chair and was soon back with Njoki.

"What seems to be the problem, Njoki?" Marion said pulling up a chair for her to sit.

"What is going on?" Njoki said feeling ambushed.

"They say you're removed from your job, that you don't engage and they want to rectify it. See how they can work around it, if not through it." She paused to allow her words to settle. "You're an asset in this company Njoki, and growth to you is also growth to us."

"Ever since I came here, I have always felt like an outcast. I don't smoke and the majority, if not all, of the customer service guys here smoke. They will be at the gazebo puffing, huffing, sharing jokes and gossiping. I'm ok with that but when it comes to work, I'm not even copied in some emails and I'm excluded in a lot of meetings and like an angel I'm expected to know what is going on and deliver. Is that fair?"

"Josh, Wambui, team, anything you have to add to that?"

"What about the team building exercise we had, everybody attended except you. What's your excuse this time, huh?" Wambui shot again.

“Who goes where they’re not wanted, or rather where they don’t feel welcome?”

“Enough! Here’s what’s going to happen,” Marion barked. “You’re going to copy Njoki in all the emails and you’re going to copy me as well. She will also attend all the meetings you attend and Njoki you need to open up a bit more. Let people in sometimes. I know you’re a little bit of an introvert and if you had your way you would do everything by yourself but you will burn out if you continue like that. This work, it doesn’t end but people do.”

“Get up and shake hands and exchange hugs. I want you to start getting along and to stop thinking small. Stop thinking in terms of back-biting and meaningless gossip because that’s something I won’t entertain. I don’t want to walk these corridors and hear things like, ‘Njoki has the CS manager in her pocket or they must be relatives.’ You need to think bigger than gossip, you need to think in terms of growth. When you grow we grow.”

Njoki started clapping and the entire room was soon uproarious in applause.

CHAPTER 6

MARION SAT in her office tapping her biro on her desk, a thousand thoughts racing in her mind. There was a bouquet of flowers smack in the middle of her desk that took up almost half of the space. Beside the flowers was a big box of chocolate and a card. She had read the thing a hundred times already.

I know you felt the magnetic spark, I felt it too.

She was ruffled and bent out of shape. She wished that this would be another one of her colleagues' civil feuds that she knew how to handle but this got her hot under the collar and she didn't understand it. Why would an engaged man send her flowers?

'Maybe it's not Oyunga.'

'But who else did you have a magnetic spark with of late?'

There was a number on the card and she kept thumbing it. She had memorized it by now.

"Marion."

The CEO, Suthir Sandeep opened the door without knocking. "Can I see you in my office for a bit?"

She was used to this, the CEO calling her out of nowhere to address frivolous issues. Issues that did not have legs. She tried to put on her game face, smoothed her skirt and cat walked towards the CEO's office.

"How did today's meeting go?" Sandeep echoed, his eyes massaging her body. Despite having a wife, he had asked Marion out countless times and she had declined every time. He respected that but nobody had said he couldn't have his way with her with his eyes. 'Mmh, mhh what a meal this is.' he thought, as Marion told him the meeting went on fine. 'Fine is what you are, you pretty thing.'

"Sandeep, did you hear me? I said the meeting went on fine."

"Do I need to have a report on the same?" He tried to recover.

"I don't think that will be necessary, it was a minor feud."

"Alright, I don't suppose you will be joining us later today to celebrate the winning of the Unilever account?"

"Of course, I will drop by momentarily."

"Okay, I will see you then."

She turned and left, her boss's eyes having a feast.

CHAPTER 7

MARION WAS clumsy in the kitchen, in her house in Kilimani. She couldn't seem to do anything right. A sufuria had fallen and she had just burnt her omelet. The flowers Oyunga had bought her sat on her dining table like an omen reminding her of him. She admitted that they were pretty nice flowers. Crimson red roses, the color of passion, romance and naked lust. She held the kitchen counter with a Samson grip, as if she would fall to the floor if she let go. She had planned out her Saturday. She would have a shower. Slip into her pajamas then sit down on the couch to watch an episode of Grey's Anatomy and maybe catch up on a bit of work on her laptop.

She jumped into the shower and decided to make it a cold one. Maybe the cold drops hitting her hot skin would wash away her lewd thoughts. She toweled and lotioned up then

sat on the couch with the remote but she was restless. All she saw in the background was her phone.

She decided to pick it up and fight through it. Her first application to thumb was instagram. She clicked on the stories. Someone was talking about how things have gotten expensive, another one was showing images of groceries in the open market, some other person was showing hair tutorials and yet another had a live video but she wasn't talking, all she was doing was flashing two of her fingers and sticking her tongue out and she wondered how any of these stories were interesting.

She closed instagram and opened twitter. She loved twitter for its newsy and real time aspect and also loved it because it was a great place to source people you wanted to work with as well as have a conversation but this morning it was full of sexual innuendo. Her timeline was reeking of lust and angst and it didn't help her situation, so she shut it down and put her phone away feeling as if the entire world was conspiring to make her cave in.

She went to the kitchen and picked up a bowl of grapes and mixed it with yogurt then sat down and wiped it clean and for a moment it shut down the need to respond to

Oyunga's bouquet of flowers and box of chocolate gesture. Chocolates which she had already gourmandized shamelessly. "Should I respond?" The idea kept creeping back like an unwanted pimple on the face.

She picked up her laptop and scrolled through her email. Everything seemed okay. She was in the kind of industry where problems erupted when you least expected them to. A client might have hated the artwork, the wrong ad might have aired, a brand might be having over-the-top expectations, someone in her team might be shutting down and she had to stay abreast of all of it. There were no off days in her industry you were always on. 24 hours a day. Seven days a week.

She went to the kitchen again as if it was her sanctuary now, her phone in hand and steadied herself on the counter. She thought of calling her friend Rachel and giggled at the thought of it, imagining how that conversation would go.

"Remember the couple you introduced me to in Mombasa?"

"Yeah?"

"I think the chap has the hots for me and I'm thinking of replying to his message."

Rachel, with her over-the-top personality, would probably scream a thunderstorm, although lately she had been too busy for anyone. Her phone was always on voicemail and when you got a hold of her she often said it was a bad time and she would call you back, something that never happened. She grinned. Maybe I will just draft the text, what do I even want to tell him, isn't he an engaged man? "What are you doing?" A voice in her head chimed. "Leave it alone, if you respond you give it voice." But she had already drafted the text and punched in the number on the card.

You're an engaged man, whatever kinds of games you're trying to play, stop.

She looked at the text momentarily telling herself she shouldn't send it, then in one gush of adrenaline, she punched the send button.

CHAPTER 8

OYUNGA SAT in his office at the Sand Resort going through paperwork when the text came in. He looked at it with a self-satisfied grin. He sent her the flowers thinking that the 'how we met' skit he performed with Lily at their engagement party might as well be true somewhere.

I'm not playing any games. I'm just saying the truth.

Her text came back almost immediately.

The truth?

About the magnetic spark.

Mombasa is an extremely hot place it was nothing more than a heat wave.

Yeah right, a heat wave in an air-conditioned room?

Why do you want to complicate things?

Complicate things? I'm just saying the truth. The truth shall set you free.

I'm not going to do this with you.

What?

In fact I'm erasing this number.

She texted again after a few minutes passed without Oyunga responding.

You won't respond?

I thought you were erasing my number?

The nerve of you men.

Men?

Yeah, you think you can have your cake and eat it too?

There's a cake?

Don't act like you don't know what I mean.

I really don't. Look, I will be in Nairobi this weekend running a few errands, maybe you can explain this cake thing to me over coffee?

I won't be your mistress.

Who said anything about mistress?

You're an engaged man.

An engaged man can't have a coffee with an acquaintance who had a heat wave when she saw him?

It happened to you too, don't act like I was the only one.

So you agree that our bodies are not receptive to air conditioning? Don't you think that makes us unicorns, the more reason to meet.

I will think about it.

She followed up with another text.

No, no, matter-of-fact forget about it. I won't play your games.

Alright, if you change your mind I will be at the Flame Tree Restaurant at Sarova Panafric at exactly 10:00am on Sunday. If you want to join me for a coffee you're more than welcome.

You're wasting your time and mine.

CHAPTER 9

“YOU KNOW what to do when you get to Nairobi, don't you hon?”

Lily circled her fiancée as if she was a vulture and he were carrion while straightening his collar and tying up his tie, her L'Oreal hair scent mixed with her Dior perfume burning his nostrils. That was the difference between her and Marion, Marion was elegant but simple but Lily was in your face with a rambunctious style.

“There is about ten kilos of juice in that briefcase.”

Juice is the name they had given to cocaine.

“Make sure it gets to Frankie, he's our distributor in Nairobi. You're taking a private jet at Moi International Airport. You won't use the main entrance. You know our contact person there don't you? He will direct you to a safe entry and our pilot will be waiting for you. Do you want me to run over it again?” She whispered, her breath misting his ear.

“Do you want a bit of something to get you focused?” She stretched her leg out of her flimsy, silk lace cloth that looked like an expensive leso, grabbed Oyunga’s hand and directed it up her inner thighs pushing up one of his fingers inside her and letting out a savage moan. “I won’t take long I promise.” Oyunga pushed his finger further, brushing against brittle pubic hairs and parting away her inner lips and Lily let out a rabid beast groan of approval.

He got up, pushed her against the wall and removed the flimsy knot of the lace cloth that was tied around her waist, yanking it off her with force to reveal plump buttocks. Lily arched her waist, the dip on the small of her back and the rise of her hips resembling a valley and her legs split apart out of habit. He plunged in and out of her and she let out trumpeted moans and he wondered if his aggression was raw desire or if he was trying to prove that he was the man. A man who was in charge, a man who didn’t need his fiancée in his ear repeating a brief to him over and over again as if he were a little boy.

CHAPTER 10

SHE STOOD there, the wetness still in her thighs.

"Daddy."

A coarse sound escaped her amid heavy breathing after they were done. She bit her lower lip and watched her fiancée walk to one of the shelves, pick up a pistol and remove the cartridge. There were six bullets in the chamber. Oyunga put the pistol back together while wondering how he had gotten into the deep end of all this. He had a successful career as a chef, yet here he was smuggling drugs across counties.

"I told you, you don't need a gun, our friend has provided you with a bodyguard." They used the name 'friend,' when referring to people in position in government. Governors, senators, judges, army generals. The upper echelon were all in on it.

"How many times will I tell you I don't need a bodyguard?"

"

"It's for your own safety, hon." Her face had now turned from a face that was dripping with pleasure to one that was full of concern. "Anything can happen out there, we're not selling bread and bananas to a kiosk. This is juice, this is life and death."

"What tells you I don't understand that?" He said while tucking his gun in his waistline and covering it up with his cobalt blue blazer. "I will be back on Sunday evening. You can wait for me at the airport but I'd prefer it if you didn't, I don't want to trouble you. I'd rather you were here bathing in scented stones prettying yourself for me."

"A hundred million shillings is not little money hon, plus I'm a woman, I can multi task between picking you up at the airport and prettying up in scented stones, don't you agree?" He knew that if she had her way she would be accompanying him to Nairobi. She was the kind of person who wanted to micromanage everything but he had a feeling that she had more pressing business in Mombasa that she didn't want to let on. He picked up the briefcase that had the juice and kissed her on the forehead.

"See you Sunday evening."

CHAPTER 11

THE MOVEMENT at the airport had gone on without a hitch. He sat in the private jet fingering his phone, talking to Frankie. He had heard tales of him but never gotten the chance to meet him. Frankie, also known as Artur, was feared by all the drug barons in Nairobi because it was said he had the strength to split a man's head clear off its neck, the same way a kid disjoints her plastic dolls. He wanted the meeting to happen immediately he landed so that he could meet Arigula in the evening and have enough time to clear his conscience before meeting Marion on Sunday morning. Marion? He wasn't even sure she would show but something told him she would.

It was quarter to 3:00pm when the wheels of the private jet kissed the tarmac at Wilson airport. The meeting was scheduled at four in an open place in Nairobi. That was the style of the Shemeji cartel, everything was done in broad

daylight because they believed in the art of hiding in plain sight, and after all, if anything went wrong they had people in big positions in their pocket. The pilot steered the plane towards a designated area where a grey Land Cruiser was waiting. Oyunga got in and the wheels turned with a screech towards Mombasa road.

"How's the weather in Mombasa? I'm told it's ever hot and the women are ever naked."

"The weather is fine." Oyunga was staring into the dead, cold eyes of Frankie. A big chunky guy who quite frankly looked a bit clumsy. His tree-trunk arms and bull-like neck made him look like an amorphous blob of meat.

"You see, Oyunga, that's why a man like me can't live in a place like Mombasa because quite honestly I'd fuck my way to death. I have to stay here with Nairobi women. Money, money, money that's all they ever think about. You'd think they're good at making it but no, only spending it."

"You should settle down."

"Not every man is cut out to settle down. Can you imagine me in a room with one of these bimbos asking me for money so she can go party, I'd break her neck."

Oyunga wanted to tell him that all the women can't be bimbos but he felt he was a man who thought that his opinion was the law and so he just laughed it off. He was not here to be a feminist, he was here for business and if the gods were good he would be having a beer with his friend later in the evening and breakfast with Marion the next morning and back in the arms of his seductive, nefarious fiancée same day that evening.

He pushed the briefcase on the table, "Ten kilograms of pure juice."

"And that's a hundred million Kenya shillings as requested, could have been more if you asked. But God gives you what you ask for."

He didn't know if that was in reference to God or to himself. They shook hands.

"Be careful with that briefcase now, good friend. It's especially risky for a man like you, you know, an unguarded man, to be walking around the streets of Nairobi with such a hefty amount of dough."

CHAPTER 12

HE NOW had the money in his hands. It was risky but he thought that it was risky either way. It was either money or juice. They were both things of great value but few people knew what to do with juice while every Tom, Dick and Harry knew their way around money.

He clutched the briefcase a little tighter and made a call.

"Did you put the stash where I asked?"

"You made sure it was my room, lower drawer, right?"

"Nobody suspected you, huh?"

"Alright."

He entered the hotel he was staying in and said hello to the receptionist. He was also in the Shemeji Cartel's payroll. He entered his hotel room and reset the safe's password then keyed in his own digits, removed the money from the briefcase he was carrying and put it in his bag then shoved

the bag in the upper cupboard and locked it with a simple key. He then got to the lower drawer removed stacks of counterfeit money and arranged them in his briefcase and shoved it in the safe. It was a trick Lily had taught him. The cartel members were not to be trusted, they were always double crossing each other. You couldn't really trust people like Frankie, people who could fuck their way to death and snap a girl's neck simply because she asked for partying money, now could you?

After doing his assignment, Oyunga went to the pool deck and asked for a neat whisky. He put a fire his cigarette and sat there puffing rings in the air, wondering how many kids that briefcase of cocaine would ruin. How many would have to steal to afford a hit and how many would be killed because they couldn't pay up. He puffed a thick ring of smoke in the air and felt anxiety engulf him like a dark cloud. He dug in his pocket and put two of his special pills on his tongue and washed them down with his whisky and the anxiety left him almost instantly. He crashed the cigarette on the ashtray as a silhouette approached from the distance.

"Arigula my guy, how are you doing?"

Arigula was in a beach shirt, blue jeans and sandals. His cheeks looked oily and he had that aura of a man who had something heavy lifted off his shoulders.

"What are you doing in Nairobi, I thought you're an engaged man?"

"Business my friend, business."

"Business huh, what is this business? Are you opening a restaurant here or what?"

"Something like that, but you're shining man, you're in a beach shirt in Nairobi at night, June must be doing something right, eh?"

"Ah, I'm a bachelor now. I just left that marriage life, I needed my piece of mind."

"Jesus, Arigula has it even been five days since the party?"

"It's not a bed of roses Oyunga, hope you have buckled up. How is Lily?"

"Lily is okay, we're pushing through."

"And are you sure you're here for business and not chasing some tail?"

"Come on Arigula you know me better than that. Have a beer on me."

They talked for a while in that way men do. Just talking on the surface and never really delving into issues because of the fear that it would expose their insecurities. It got late and Arigula excused himself and Oyunga was left staring at an almost empty bar. He thought for a while and decided to go to the hotels relaxation parlor and get a massage.

"Not deep tissue," he said.

He was in no mood for pain. The world, people, places, were full of pain and he did not want to add to that. He wanted something calm and soothing and as the masseur kneaded his body, he escaped into oblivion and found himself moaning the name Marion.

CHAPTER 13

OYUNGA HAD a cold shower, wore a grey suit, black shirt and his Bell and Ross luxury watch. He had breakfast—Scrambled eggs and juice—then passed by a quick-mart shop and bought a box of chocolate, took a taxi and headed towards Flame Tree Restaurant.

He was seated having a glass of mango juice at exactly quarter to ten. He busied himself with the newspaper which was full of election brouhaha. He wondered why elections in Kenya were such a circus. It was never about issues but more like a reality TV show. Aspirants pulling ridiculous manifestos out of thin air. Money flooding the economy, inflation shooting up. He shook his head because even a kiosk was run better, but then, he thought the fruit didn't fall far from the tree because here he was, supposedly a 'good citizen' smuggling drugs across counties.

He flipped through the newspaper but there was nothing more but acres and acres of jaded journalism whose first sentence said they were just looking to submit an article for the week because it had become routine and after all, food needed to be put on the table. He shut the newspaper, folded it into two halves and looked at his timepiece. It was thirty minutes past 10:00 am. 'She isn't coming,' he thought and started getting up to leave.

"Look who is all antsy, ready to go?"

Marion approached from behind in a light lime romper that made her eyes look like windows to heaven.

"Well, I was waking up to pull a chair for the fair lady. Aren't you always bickering about how there are no gentlemen left nowadays? But seriously, I thought you were not going to show?"

"Well, I had time to kill and I thought why not?"

He touched her hand after she sat down and he felt dizzy, unsure if it was her Marc Jacobs perfume intoxicating him or her sweet voice which left her lips like a Beethoven symphony. Their eyes locked but this time neither of them looked away. The sexual tension was turbulent like a boat

in a storm and for a minute Oyunga forgot about Lily and drug dealing. 'I can start my life from zero with her and maybe I can be happy.'

"It's nice to see you, you look dashing."

She lowered her eyelids, "As do you. Lily is doing a good job. How is she anyway?"

"Like every engaged girl, excited."

She steadied herself on her seat and struggled out of her denim jacket and in doing so she pushed her chest out in that way girls do and injured Oyunga without even knowing it.

"It's too hot today, or is it just me?"

"If you're feeling hot in Nairobi then you'd have to remove all your clothes in Mombasa."

She laughed. "You know I never even got to ask what it is you do for a living. You might be a drug dealer for all I know?"

"Haha, a drug dealer? Maybe I should try my hand at it. I bet I'd be good at it, maybe even make Pablo Escobar look like a shadow in comparison."

She chuckled.

"Tell me Marion, is this what you do, go around having heat waves with men in Mombasa. Men you don't even know?"

She smiled, eyeballed him again and held his stare as if challenging him. The face-off feeling like electricity coursing through both their veins. "Depends on the man, I guess." She said, a naughty smile curling on her mouth.

They talked for a while and when Oyunga looked at his watch it was heading to 2:00pm. His flight was scheduled for the next hour.

"Is something the matter?"

"My flight leaves in the hour, and oh, before I forget, I got you something."

Oyunga reached for the gift bag that was seated beside him and passed it to Marion.

She took a peek. "Thank you, I see you're on a mission to give me cavities."

"Haha you have been living with your sweet self all this time yet here you are without cavities. I think you will be okay."

Marion's mouth curled into a toothy grin as they both got up and hugged. The hug lasted a minute too long.

"We must stay in touch."

"I agree but only as friends."

"Of course. Friends, friends."

CHAPTER 14

WHILE OYUNGA was having breakfast with Marion, two men were at the reception desk of his hotel. One had a scar on his face. Not the kind of scar you get after you run into a tree or bruise yourself after a fall, no. The kind of scar that suggests brute force. The scarred man was in a black leather jacket, black pants and black boots and he resembled the undertaker in every way while his accomplice was lean in a gentle kind of way. He seemed to be the talker, a case of Lincoln Burrows and Michael Scofield. Brute and smarts working together for destruction.

The receptionist seemed to know the two guys.

"I understand there is a gentleman staying here by the name..." Smarts passed a note across the desk, it was known that walls had ears.

"I haven't seen such a name in our system." The receptionist said, playing a little bit of hardball, not knowing that he was only endangering his life by doing so. He knew exactly what was going on, after all he was in the Shemeji cartel payroll but he was greedy. He thought he might as well get a little bit more money out of the interaction.

The brute groaned in a coarse voice.

"You don't understand, we were sent by..." Smarts passed another note.

"I don't understand at all."

Smarts laughed because he caught onto what was going on. The receptionist was trifling and he just wanted money. Smarts gave brute a look and he got into his pocket and came out with ten thousand bob and gave it to the receptionist.

"Oh, now I remember the name, I have seen the face too, here is the keycard. I have reset the safe's password. Hope you enjoy your stay and please put in a good word to Frankie for me."

"Will do, will do." Smarts said almost in a whisper while leaving the reception desk.

They got into Oyunga's room and without wasting time they opened the safe, got the briefcase out, put the counterfeit money they had brought in their bag in the briefcase and put what they thought was genuine money in their bag. They then locked the safe and left the room, but just before they could leave the hotel, smarts went back to the reception desk.

"Hey good old pal, happy news, our boss just called and he would like to talk to you today, now actually."

The receptionist's eyes shone with excitement, his face folding into a rugby ball like grin. He hurriedly got his things and followed them into the tinted black Noah. They drove into a dark alley. The receptionist was the first one to get out. "So, where is he?" He chirped, his voice shaking with nerves, and a rivulet of sweat breaking on his forehead as brute got out of the Noah and the next sound that followed was a bullet firing out of a silencers holster and the receptionist on the asphalt with a pool of blood beside what had been his head.

Smarts jumped out of the Noah approached and rummaged the receptionists pockets and got the ten thousand bob he had given him.

"You're a talker, nobody likes a talker."

CHAPTER 15

WHILE OYUNGA was entertaining Marion and Frankie's men were entertaining the receptionist, Lily was dressed up in a raunchy, short leather skirt and fishnets, rummaging her wardrobe for a whip. She was meeting the head of the Shemeji cartel. A man who was only referred to as the faceless man. Besides being a drug kingpin he had fetishes and Lily was usually the one who satisfied them. She didn't think of it as cheating, on the contrary, she was simply doing her job. Besides, favor from the head of the snake could only mean favor for her and Oyunga.

A long, dark Mercedes Benz with a Kenyan flag picked her up from their Bungalow in the north coast and within the hour it was getting parked in a manor ranch with government guards saluting them as the gates opened. "He's waiting for you in his study," the butler or was it the concierge said as she entered the door. She had long given

up on knowing who was who because the faceless man kept changing his servants like you would clothes. She approached the door to the study and loosened her black long robe, inside it packaged all manner of sins.

"You took your time," a voice behind the chair boomed.

"A lady getting ready is no easy task."

"Well, you think a lady getting ready is nothing easy, try being the vice president."

"I never said being the vice president was easy."

"Have you watched that show Game of Thrones, Lily?"

He got up from his throne of a leather chair and walked to the wall his hands deep in his pockets and stared at a painting of the map of the world.

"Yes, in bits here and there."

"Well, being the vice president is a little like being the hand of the king, you do all the drudgery while the king has all the fun."

"You're going to be king soon, you know, just another five years."

"Yes, yes and you will be right beside me as my queen."

He paused and walked towards Lilly. A short man whose face gleamed of wealth like a radioactive metal. He was in black pants and a white shirt whose sleeves he had rolled up to his arms. He almost looked like Lily's little brother. Those were the wonders of the world. The leaders looked nothing like leaders and the led were the ones who looked like they could lead.

He got close to Lily and she bit her lower lip and dropped her dark robe on the floor. "You look exceedingly gorgeous," the vice president whispered into her ear and she purred.

CHAPTER 16

OYUNGA GOT back to his hotel room, got his small key from his pocket and got the money from the cupboard. He didn't bother with the safe because he felt that, that would just eat into his time. He checked out of the restaurant, this time being attended to by a lady.

He got himself a taxi, it was a style he was quickly adopting. Using anonymous taxis instead of cartel-provided cars which he felt were easily traceable and he never could tell what traps they housed. He made a few calls and was told that the private jet was ready to go and it would be airborne in exactly fifteen minutes with or without him. "Direct orders from the faceless man." The voice in the phone cried. It was such things that made him know that he was just another pawn in the circus. Someone expendable, a guy who would be six feet under if the faceless man gave the order.

“Step on the gas, I’ll pay you triple for your trouble.”

He got there five minutes to his fifteen minutes curfew and sat on one of the leather chairs in the private jet, a glass of whisky on his hand. He was flooded with thoughts. He saw wasted kids in alleys, bodies in graves and overdosed people with networks of tubes in hospitals and the vividness of the daydream almost made him scream. He went back to his pocket and came out with two of his special pills and washed them down with the whisky as the plane touched down at the airport in Mombasa.

Lily was waiting for him. She was in dark blue fitting jeans, white converse shoes, and a Mickey Mouse tank-top that just stopped shy of her belly button. She had done her hair in a ponytail and had those extended eyelashes stuck in her face that gave Oyunga the eerie feeling of her head flying off whenever she blinked.

“How are you hon?” She kissed him on the lips, “I hope the jetlag is not too bad?”

“It was a short flight. I’m a bit exhausted but that’s all.”

“That’s a big bag,” She whispered as they got inside their Land Cruiser.

"You think the money will be enough for the wedding?"

"More than enough, but aren't we giving seventy percent of it to the faceless man?"

"I spoke to him and let's just say we can keep fifty percent."
"

"Fifty percent? How do you go off getting favors from this shadow of a man, or is there something you're not telling me?"

"Come on hon, this is no time to be jealous, the faceless man is a generous man, he knows our wedding is in the horizon." Her tongue glossed her cherry-red lips. "Plus you know my tongue is very smooth."

"Well, let's hope he stays generous and your tongue gets smoother than an egg shell because I could really use its smoothness tonight."

She laughed.

"You bet, but about the wedding, I'm thinking we do it next month?"

"Next month, isn't that too soon?"

"Don't you want to put a ring on it as soon as possible?"

"Aren't we living together, aren't you already behaving like a wife and I like a husband? We're practically married aren't we?" He said as they got out of the car and entered their bungalow.

"I want it solemnized. I want that certificate and that white gown and envy from all my girlfriends. I'm a typical girl, Oyunga."

"Okay, okay but just know I'm going back to Nairobi next week," he paused thinking of a quick lie. "I bumped into my friend and there's a restaurant there that is worth investing in."

"A restaurant? Don't we have enough money and shouldn't you be worrying about our wedding instead of a restaurant?"

"What do you mean a restaurant, and don't we have enough money? This is a good deal. One of those once-in-a-lifetime opportunities and I feel it will slip out of our grip if we don't close it quickly."

"And you can't close it here, or have one of our people do it for you?"

"Come on honey, you know I'm a hands on person." He said while moving close to her, reducing her tone to almost a whisper and grabbing her backside. "We have to get the paperwork going, see the place, see what we can do with it, things like that."

"How about I accompany you?"

"Honey, don't you trust me, do you want word to go round that I'm a whipped man." He said then kissed her lips softly.

"And how long will this trip of yours be?" She mumbled while unzipping his pants.

"I'll go on Wednesday, work on the deal on Thursday and Friday and come back on Saturday."

"That's a long time?"

"Well, good things take time honey."

She was not stupid she could tell something was up, something other than her fiancée's manhood.

CHAPTER 17

MARION SAT behind her desk with one hand supporting her chin and the other tinkering with a biro. She was just from a meeting with a client who was dissatisfied about everything. She was dissatisfied about the artwork concepts, the TVC and the radio spots. If you asked Marion she would have told you that the client was also dissatisfied with the sunshine and the clouds the day had to offer.

Ad agencies and client relationships were a lot like human relationships, when the relationship wasn't working the party that wanted out brought all manner of excuses to the table. She was of the opinion that if a client wanted to leave there was nothing you could really do but let them go. You could call Rembrandt to do their artworks and they would still be dissatisfied.

She swiveled on her chair wondering whether she should do an email to Sandeep and tell him the client would leave

sooner or later and it was better to cut their losses now before the client pulled the plug and they were left with egg on face. Marion felt that she had made sure her client got the very best from their agency. She had a feeling that after the client left they would realize that the grass wasn't always greener on the other side and they would soon be back.

She steadied her chair and started putting her points down when her phone buzzed.

Guess who is in town?

You just left for Mombasa last week?

Well, I can't seem to be able to stay away from a certain someone.

Your wife?

I don't have a wife.

You're engaged?

She's called a fiancée.

Isn't that the same thing?

How's dinner this evening?

She thought for a moment and decided that she could use a break to unwind from the pressure of dealing with clients who didn't know what they wanted. Clients who thought ad agencies were charity organizations and clients who thought they knew everything even though they had outsourced a third party to work on their behalf. She thought for a moment and realized she also needed to put Oyunga on the straight and narrow path. Whatever it was he thought was going to happen between them wasn't going to happen while he was still engaged to be married to another woman.

Pick you at your office at 6:30?

That's a bit early for me.

Alright, meet me at Om Café Dada Street, at 8pm?

That works.

CHAPTER 18

WHILE OYUNGA was texting Marion, Lily was on the phone with Frankie. She knew Frankie was volatile but she also understood that sometimes it was necessary to work with your enemies to accomplish a goal.

"Lily, long time no see. I heard you got engaged. Are you still as beautiful as I remember you?"

Lily and Frankie had a bit of history. They had done assignments together and let's just say during assignment breaks, things had happened. Lily never really enjoyed Frankie because he was never sensual. He made love to a woman the same way he handled an AK-47.

"I need a favor from you Frankie."

"Favor from me? You know I don't just give out those to anybody, sweet cheeks, but for you I'm willing to bend the rules."

"Oyunga is in Nairobi."

"Don't mention that name to me Lily, you know the very thought of knowing you're with someone else repulses me.

"

Besides being angry about Lily's relationship Frankie was also nursing injuries of being outfoxed by Oyunga.

"Come on, you're a big boy don't tell me you're the type to get jealous, plus that was a long time ago."

"A long time ago but I still remember it like it was yesterday."

Lily might have hated her encounter with Frankie, but Frankie had loved every minute of it. She was the first woman to put up a fight. The first woman to resist his dominance and he found that quite attractive.

"Let's get down to business Frankie, are you going to help me or not?"

"Go on sweet cheeks, shoot."

"Oyunga is in town, I need him tailed. I need a report on everywhere he goes and with who. I need a report on everything he does while there. If he sneezes I want it in the damn report."

"You don't trust your lover boy there, sweet cheeks? Aren't you two engaged, mistrust is not the best foundation for a marriage." He said with a laugh.

"Just do the damn job Frankie."

"Hey, hey, watch your tone and what's in it for me?"

"Name your price?"

"I don't want money, I have enough of that."

"Then what do you want?"

"A night with you."

She thought for a moment, it never stopped to baffle her how most men could do almost anything when sex was on the table. She smiled because she had the ability to keep sex just sex and she was also not opposed to using her body if it got her what she wanted. People used their skills to get things, their contacts and networks to go places why not bodies?

"Consider it done."

CHAPTER 19

OYUNGA SAT at Om Café with Marion. He was in an ash grey shirt, black khakis and brown loafers and around his neck a brown scarf. He looked like a model out of a page in GQ magazine. Marion looked like a sexy teacher in her yellow crop top, neon a-line skirt and mustard rubber shoes.

"Come on Marion you can't be serious." Oyunga egged.

Marion was saying that she had never eaten arosto with bananas on one big plate like they were doing now.

"You must be very spoilt Mari."

"No, no, no, I'm the only child and nothing was handed to me, I have had to work for everything I have but men think otherwise. When men see you up there on top of the corporate ladder they think you must have slept with an entire football team to get there." She paused and stared at Oyunga and got lost in him as he got lost in her.

"We have to get serious Oyunga?"

"I'm all for getting serious."

She laughed.

"Not in that away, what we're doing is wrong."

"What?"

"Whatever we're doing here. This has to stop."

"We're in too deep Mari, we might as well swim."

"We're not in too deep."

He held her hand.

"What is it going to take?"

"You're engaged."

"I can get out of an engagement."

"I don't know Oyunga, men say one thing and do the other. You know you can't have your cake and eat it too and I wouldn't be comfortable being with someone who is set to be married. It's like you're going through a crisis and I'm the petrol propelling your speed boat.

"Alright, I will think about it. Let's change the subject."

"How is work?"

He wondered if he should tell her that he sold ten kilos of pure cocaine the other day and got a hundred million Kenya shillings in return. He wondered if he should tell her that he's a drug dealer and he moonlights as a chef just to keep up appearances. If he should tell her that the cartel he works for is responsible for ninety percent of the drugs in Kenya and sometimes it eats him up to the point of suicide but then he has these little special pills that keep him sane.

"Work is great. I'm working on a new menu and crossing my fingers that it picks up."

"How comes I have never tasted your food, Mr. Great chef?"

"My food? You could taste my food if, I don't know, you invited me to your place and allowed me to take over your kitchen."

"I could invite you to my place but I know you will start other things that I don't think an engaged man should be starting."

"I promise to behave."

They got up and started walking towards the door. In the corner of the restaurant there was a lean guy in a black jacket who was pretending to take selfies but on close inspection he was taking pictures of them. Outside, there was another one in a black t-shirt and military pants who took their photos as they entered Marion's Toyota Harrier, he got inside a jeep and tailed them as they drove towards Kilimani.

CHAPTER 20

THEY SAT on the couch to eat the buttered chicken that Oyunga had made.

"This is really good," Marion tee-heed in between mmmhs and ahhs.

For a minute Oyunga had thought he might have forgotten how to cook. At the Sand Resort his work had been reduced to managerial. While in their house in Mombasa they had their own cook even though they rarely ate in the house. They were always being invited to events and to people's houses. People who needed favors, people who wanted to get their foot in the business.

"I'm glad you're enjoying it," he said, put his plate down and moved closer to her but Marion swatted him away like you would do a mosquito.

"No, Oyunga we decided this was not happening."

She got up and moved to another couch and picked up the TV remote.

"What do you want to watch?"

"I want to watch you."

"Come on be serious?"

"What do you have?"

"Well we could watch Grey's Anatomy."

"Jesus Christ, Mari, I'd rather talk about the books on your bookshelf?" He got up. "Do you read a lot?"

"I do actually, I always have a book in my bag."

He picked up a book on the shelf. "Hmm... The Fault in our Stars by John Green." He put it back and pulled out another one, "Milk and Honey by Rupi Kaur, you don't read African literature, do you?"

"I do, but I feel as if the community of African writers is too sensitive, they're always wrangling about not being acknowledged by Europe yet clamoring for that European prize, what is it called, ah, yes The Caine Prize for African Writing. I mean, just write spectacularly and people will read you regardless. Besides, art is universal the cultures might be different but humanity isn't."

"Nice speech, so who is your favorite author?"

"Currently or of all time?"

"Of all time."

I would have a hard time picking between Mario Puzo, Scott Fitzgerald and Donna Tartt, you?"

"Anthony Bourdain, but I guess that has a bias on food." He put Rupi Kaur's book back after brushing through the pages. "You want to say you don't have anything else we can watch, not even an animation?"

"I think I have a Trevor Noah standup?"

"Okay, put him on."

It was late after the standup was over and she got up to prepare the master bedroom.

"See you in the morning. One more thing, how do you like your eggs, sunny side up or scrambled?"

"Scrambled, and thank you for everything Mari, I mean it. I had a great time.

"Me too, Oyunga. Me too."

Marion went to bed but she couldn't sleep. She had put on a good act of swatting Oyungas hand away but she was

really burning to be touched, to be caressed and to be ravished. It had been quite a while and for the most part all her energy was immersed in her work but having a man in the house reminded her that she was a sexual being just like any other person. Indecent thoughts flooded her. She writhed and tossed and turned her body crying out for Oyunga the same way lungs cry out for oxygen. She thought about going to the guest bedroom but stopped herself from the thought of how desperate she would look. On the other side of the wall Oyunga was snoring. "No" for him meant "no." If he were like other men who thought "no" meant "yes" and "yes" meant "yes" he wouldn't be snoring he would be lighting up the sheets with Marion.

CHAPTER 21

MARION WALKED into the guest bedroom carrying scrambled eggs and juice on a platter like Oyunga had requested. She was in a silver night gown that revealed traces of her nipples. She walked barefoot into the room. The radio was on, music was filtering in through the speakers in low volume and Rihanna and Drake's *Work* was playing: *'...If you had a twin I would still choose you, I don't wanna rush into it, if it's too soon. But I know you need, to get done, done, done, done if you come over...'* Her heart did a jig, she felt as if Oyunga was whispering those very words directly into her ear.

"Oyunga, Oyunga, where are you?"

"I'm in the bathroom."

The heaviness of his Luo accent brought her to life and made her nipples stand erect and her female delicacies throb like a heartbeat. She had been restless all night and

she felt the mere sight of Oyunga would make her knickers combust into an inferno, only she wasn't wearing any.

"What are you doing in the bathroom?"

"Having a shower or picking apples. I can't decide which one it is."

"Are you almost done?"

"No, I just started a few seconds ago."

Her skin felt hot and sticky. Her breathing grew erratic. She placed the plate of scrambled eggs and juice on the dresser. Slipped out of her night gown revealing an ocean of dark chocolate skin, smooth as velvet, tremendous breasts and a lusty figure. She pushed open the bathroom door and Oyunga's mouth fell to the floor and his manhood almost hit the ceiling.

CHAPTER 22

ON THE flight back to Mombasa, Oyunga was in a state of nirvana. He could still feel Marion's hands caressing his head, going down to the nape of his neck and squeezing his muscles. He could still feel Marion kissing his lips and sinking to her knees to take his manhood in her mouth almost making him detonate like a nuclear warhead. He was a man who could last long at least with Lily but with Marion it was a different kettle of fish. He found himself spilling his seed after the fourth thrust and only lasted a bit longer on the second and third round.

We should have used protection, he thought. He then thought he could trust Marion, he also thought he could trust his fiancée. His fiancée who was waiting for him in the house with a smile.

"How was the trip, hon?"

"Ah, the trip was fine."

"Did you close your restaurant deal?"

"You know how these things are, it's a process. It will take more time than I thought."

"Oh, that's a shame. Come and sit. The cook made something for us to eat, I know you're exhausted and hungry."

Her fiancée had her spasms of pleasantness, but he felt that she was going a little overboard with it today. He decided to play along and get everything he could from it because such moments were ever fleeting.

They sat down and ate hot pork with pilau. And afterwards she opened a bottle of Merlot and led him to the bedroom. She had missed him after all and there was no need for Marion to come in between them. She had urges and she needed them fulfilled.

"How was it?" She asked him after he finished pumping and was breathing heavily beside her.

"I don't know, good I guess."

"Good you guess? Better than that heifer Marion, I'm sure."
"

His eyes flew wide open. This was his window to leave her but he was like every other man.

"Honey I know how it looks, but it's not what you think."

"No need to apologize."

"Let me explain."

"No need for that either, as we speak our people are headed to Kilimani to take care of that problem, let that be the final mistake you make huh, hon? Otherwise I won't be so lenient next time.

"Take care of the problem?"

"You didn't really think I would let some parasite make a fool of me and you, did you, hon?"

"But she's your best friend's friend."

"Who slept with my husband, you think I care about some friendship after that?" Lily said full of spite and Oyunga knew she wasn't bluffing. He shot out of bed, picked his phone and ran to the balcony, locked the door behind him and called Marion. She picked on the third ring.

"You have to get out of there Mari."

"Hi Oyunga, you just woke me up, how was your flight?"

"Marion, Listen, you have to get out of there as quickly as you can."

"Why, what's wrong?"

"You won't understand, I'll explain everything tomorrow."

"What is happening Oyunga, I'm not getting out of this house if you don't tell me what's going on."

"I'm a drug dealer Marion, a drug dealer." He was panting.

"Lily has discovered what we were up to over the weekend and she has sent hit men to eliminate you, do you understand? You need to get to safety as quick as possible. Listen, forget about your car it might be wired with explosives. I'm sending my contact person, he should be there in less than ten minutes. He will be in a red sedan..."

"What is happening Oyunga, a drug dealer? Hit men? Red sedan? How long do I have?" She said in a panic.

"Listen Mari don't panic, if you panic you won't be able to act. You have to stay calm and think clearly. You have very little time Mari, you have to move. They could be there even as we speak."

Marion felt as if she was dreaming. She got up and quickly wore a denim jacket over her purple night dress and

slipped into flat shoes. Picked her handbag and limped outside after knocking her knee against the coffee table.

It was raining torrents. Thunderstorms were booming and strips of lightning flashing in the distance. She was going to die she thought, if not from the hit-men from being electrocuted by lightning. She was running now, soaking wet trying to avoid the road even though it was completely lit up by street lights. As she ran a car in the distance flashed its headlamps and came to a stop. She almost screamed in fear but it was the red sedan Oyunga had phoned her about. She got in and the car turned around, drifting on the slippery road.

CHAPTER 23

“DON'T WORRY, I have been sent by Oyunga.”

A voice on the driver's seat, scratchy and rough, droned. She couldn't make out the driver. He was wearing a hat and his face was completely masked in tinted glasses.

“Thank you,” she said amid short breathes.

They hadn't even driven for a hundred yards when they passed a dark Noah. The Noah slowed down, made a U-turn and started chasing them.

Marion realized they were being chased after the black Noah hit the red sedan on the bumper, making the car hurtle off the road and throwing her from one side of her seat to the other, almost knocking her out of the windshield.

She let out a blood curdling scream.

“Wear your seatbelt, madam.” The driver said casually as if they were having mango juice in Nairobi’s traffic.

The car was now skidding from side to side on Argwings Kodhek Road and Marion kept doing the rosary, her face contorted in fear when the Noah hit them from the side and the red sedan sped out of the road almost hitting a street light and plunging into a ditch but the driver managed to steer it back into the road.

“I’m getting really tired of this.” The driver muttered.

Marion had a deer-in-the-headlights look. She was now frozen stiff resembling an inanimate thing. They were now speeding on the stiff slope that is Valley Road and she felt as if the wheels were coming off. The driver accelerated and swerved as the Noah came at them in full speed, ready to smash them to a stop. He swerved again and pulled the handbrake and the sedan came to an abrupt stop, did a ninety degrees turn and he put the handbrake down and stepped on the gas towards Ralph Bunche Road while the Noah flew in full speed towards Valley Road.

“Madam are you okay?”

"Have we lost them?" She said, her body skittish with nerves.

"They won't be finding us for a while, I'm dropping you in a safe inn downtown. I will make arrangements for your flight to Eldoret and I will be back early tomorrow morning to pick you up. Try and have some rest, Miss."

CHAPTER 24

IS THIS what we're doing? Do you really love that heifer that much that you're willing to compromise our relationship for her?"

"She doesn't deserve to die for my mistakes, break up with me and leave her out of it."

"There are no breaks in this relationship Oyunga, you're in this till the end."

"I'm not in anything," he said while packing clothes on a bag. "I'm a chef remember? Not a drug dealer. I can get out anytime I want."

"And who do you suppose will supply you with your little special pills huh? What do you think the faceless man will do when he hears you opted out? Do you think he will smile and send you a fruit basket and a dismissal letter? A bullet in between your eyes Oyunga. A bullet. That's what you will get."

"I'll take my chances."

"What about our wedding Oyunga?"

"Wedding? Get married to a woman who doesn't think twice when it comes to killing another human being?"

"You're the one who cheated not me."

"People break up over cheating they don't kill."

He was now getting out of the door and she decided not to chase him. "He will be back. He will be back." She told herself.

CHAPTER 25

I COULD have died Oyunga, I could have died." Marion called, frantic.

"My contact person has told me you got away unscathed. I had a boulder in my chest at the thought of something happening to you."

"Oyunga."

"Are you okay?"

"They could have killed us."

"The person who picked you up is a very good friend of mine, he's arranging your flight to Eldoret."

"They could have killed us Oyunga, and for what? For what?"

"

"Listen to me carefully Mari, they will probably go back to your house and ransack it to get clues on where you will

have gone too, so you can't use your card because they can easily know your whereabouts if you do."

"Why are you doing this to me Oyunga? I was perfectly happy without you."

"Listen to me Mari, you've got to listen to my contact person and don't give him a hard time because the more time we waste the easier we make it for them to find us. Are you already in the hotel?"

"Mmmh hmmm." She said, deluged by everything that was happening.

"Keep warm Mari, I'm taking a flight from Mombasa to Eldoret. I will meet you there and we will figure this out."

Oyunga knew it wouldn't be long before they contacted all the airports so he knew he had to move fast. As far as Lily was concerned he was just cooling off, taking a break like the way you do when a job becomes too overwhelming but as far as he was concerned he was done with all of it. The drugs, the pretense, ruining people's lives, he was done.

He thought for a moment that he could open a small restaurant and live well and in peace, somewhere like Kisumu. The cartel's virus had not yet spread there. He and

Marion could have a real chance to start over, he thought as he headed towards the airport.

CHAPTER 26

“**W**HY DID you do this to me?”

Marion was punching Oyunga on the chest in small sporadic movements.

“I was perfectly fine Oyunga, I was perfectly fine.”

“I’m sorry Mari, I didn’t know my fiancée was cuckoo.”

“What now Oyunga, what now?”

“For now I can’t be Oyunga and you can’t be Marion.” He handed her an ID and a passport, new and crisp. They looked as if they had just been minted from the factory. He had gotten them made a long time ago just in case things got dicey and he and Lily needed to disappear. She was now called Zawadi and he was Bakari.

“The photos are not as clear so I think you can get away with impersonating Lily for now. Come, we need to buy a

second hand car, something that can drive for a long distance.”

Marion was pulling her hair out. She felt as if she was in a horror movie she hadn't cast for.

“Oyunga, I thought you were a chef. Why should I even believe that this is for my own good, and not another one of your cartel's twisted schemes?”

“The name is Bakari. Thank you very much.” Oyunga grinned but Marion had no time for jokes.

“I can't believe you're making jokes. This is my life you're playing with Oyunga, why?”

“Look Mari, drugs are everywhere in Kenya and the Shemeji cartel are the suppliers. The cartel goes all the way up to government officials with the head someone only known as the faceless man. I'm just a pawn in all this, what would be the benefit of me saving you only to give you up again?”

“And your contact person?”

“A very good friend of mine, he'll make sure to make it look as if we've disappeared from the face of the earth for a while until things cool off.”

They walked to a car yard and got a Toyota under their new names. "I hope you're ready for a road trip, Zawadi?"

"Where to now?"

"To Kisumu, a remote place called Ndukiya. Do you like fish, Zawadi? I hope you do because that is all we will be eating for some time now."

"And what will we do in Ndukiya, Oyunga, start a Kebab cafe that doubles as a drug depot?"

"I wouldn't mind some tilapia kebab for starters, I'm starving."

She shrugged. "I just want a shower and some rest Oyunga, just a shower and some rest, since the truth it seems is hard to come by."

"I have told you everything I know."

"And this money we're using?"

"Remember the time I came to Nairobi? This is the money I got from the deal I made."

"Drug money?"

"Well, it bought us a car and it's going to make sure we stay alive while we figure things out and get some good tilapia kebab while at it."

"God help us." Marion said while she did the rosary.

CHAPTER 27

WHAT HAPPENS when my relatives or my workplace try to reach me?" Marion howled as the car shook and heaved as they left the tarmac and entered another road that didn't seem fit for pedestrians, leave alone motorists.

"Relatives? Parents?"

"I was brought up by a single mom. She passed, but I have uncles."

"You're a clever woman Mari, I'm sure you can come up with a story for your workmates, plus I figure uncles are never that invested in anything to do with relatives, especially things that involve effort."

"What about you?"

"Haha. Look who is pretending to be concerned about my affairs?"

"What happens when your family calls you, or is it part of the cartel?"

"Family?"

"Yeah."

"I'd appreciate it if we didn't talk about my family."

"So that's how it works huh?" Her hands were crossed under her breasts and she had a scornful look on her face. "I break down my entire family tree for you and you say nothing about yours?"

Oyunga was staring dead ahead. The car's windshield was now hitting a low hanging branch.

"It's just something I prefer not to talk about. Maybe someday I will tell you about it."

There was a silence, before Marion spoke again.

"What about my friends?"

"Rachel?"

"Yes, Rachel."

"She's always coming around to visit Lily and I haven't seen her lately, how is she?"

"I haven't spoken to her either, she's been crazy busy."

He relaxed his muscles. One hand was on the wheel and the other on the gear and he looked at Marion still in her nightgown which was tucked all the way up her thighs revealing her bruised knee.

"Are you okay?"

She looked at him with her lips closed tightly together and furrowed her brow in resentment.

"Do you think busy, has become a thing nowadays, like a status symbol of some sort?" He said getting back to the Rachel topic.

"How?"

"You have to be busy all the time in today's world, otherwise it feels as if you're not working."

"Busy doesn't always mean productive, it might mean poor planning or you're avoiding someone."

"Exactly my point."

"You should leave this drug business and become a management guru, you have the knack for it."

Oyunga laughed.

"I loved my job you know, I used to lead a team, I used to get mail, people used to call me madam."

"I like how you talk about it in past tense that says you're committed to this and you love being alive a little more than I thought."

CHAPTER 28

FOUR MONTHS had passed. They got a small piece of land in Ndukiya and built a shack. There was a small stream behind the house and a few yards up the stream was Lake Victoria. Marion was doing a decoupage of a flower on a pot she was molding using the clay in the river.

"That's an incredibly decent pot."

"Thank you, it's called art and craft."

"Haha is it something you've always done?"

"I like to create and mold things it calms my soul and quiets my mind."

"No, I mean would you have preferred to be in the arts sculpting than in advertising?"

She laughed.

"Well, right now I'm living with a drug kingpin so I don't know what I would prefer."

"I'm serious?"

"Advertising is also an art Oyunga: creative concepts, branding, strategy. They all require imagination. Of course most days are routine but other days feel like a blank canvas begging you to leave your footprints."

She got up slowly and poured water from a mtungi and washed her hands then reached for a piece of cloth and proceeded to dry them.

"I know this wasn't what you asked for Mari. I know it hasn't been easy living with me; groping in the dark, not knowing where this will lead us. Telling your uncles you flew out, resigning. I know it has been hard."

She smiled and held Oyunga's hand. A lot of things had been going through her head when they first came to Ndukiya. She was here with a drug dealer who she knew very little about, besides what he was telling her and she was almost going berserk but her heart softened as days wore on. Oyunga handled her gently, like a flower and that peeled back her layers and revealed an enchanting vibrancy she didn't know existed.

"Oyunga, don't worry too much about the past. Thank God for this moment, for the blessing he has given us amidst all the chaos around us." She said, now rubbing her tremendous stomach.

"Did you finally find out the baby's gender or are you still headstrong about leaving it a mystery till birth?"

"I couldn't help it. I confirmed it this morning during my routine checkup."

Oyunga was still awed that even with her tremendous stomach, she could still take the Toyota and drive to Kisumu city for checks ups. Oh, how she protested when he volunteered to take her.

"Is that why you're glowing like this?"

"It's a boy Oyunga, a boy."

Oyunga got up grinning and crashed to the floor and rubbed Maris stomach. "You're going to be as clever as your mom and as athletic as your dad aren't you?"

We should tell somebody about this good news, if not my uncles, your family."

"My family?"

"Yes your family."

Oyunga got up. "I'm an orphan Mari, an orphan. My parents deserted me when I was very young." He sat down and bowed his head and hunched his shoulders. "I was on the streets till a Good Samaritan came by and took me to a children's home. I was only twelve and to me he is the only family I have."

"Is he the contact person?"

"Yeah"

"I'm sorry."

"My mother or whatever you would call her came to visit me a few months ago and I sent her away, because where was she when I was going hungry, getting rained on, wearing sacks for clothes, people treating me like scum. Where was she?"

"She is still your mother Oyunga. You should at least give her a listening ear. Hear her side of things."

"No Marion, She is a stranger. Dead to me, you hear me. Dead."

Marion resolved to put the issue on pause for the moment. She would crawl back little by little until Oyunga caved in. She was the result of a single mom and she cherished the

love of a mother. She knew what it meant and she wanted the man she loved to know how that kind of love felt as well.

"Enough of that Mari." Oyunga barked "We should celebrate this son that God has blessed us with."

"I agree."

"In the evening, let's take a walk along the shores of Lake Victoria. Have roasted fish and coconut juice and be grateful for life."

When evening came they found themselves on the shores of the lake walking side by side while holding hands. Oyunga shirtless in shorts and Marion in a swimsuit and a loose lace gown. Her stomach bulging out: talking, poking fun and laughing loudly. But in the distance someone was watching them. A woman in a dark bui bui. Lily.

CHAPTER 29

“YOU NEVER told me how you got into this drug dealing bedlam?”

“Huh, not even a whisper?”

“I think I would remember a whisper that involved drugs.”

“Well, I have always had these anxiety attacks, I think it’s something to do with abandonment issues. They got worse as I grew older and hospital medication wasn’t helping so I was introduced to someone who sold this special pills that took the attacks away.”

“Lily?”

“Yeah Lily. I became a regular customer and we started dating. At the time I wasn’t a chef yet and I needed some quick money and that’s how I was sucked in. At first I was enjoying it because it was something novel but then thoughts of the people who were being misused by these

drugs started pummeling me. The anxiety attacks got worse and the worse they got the more pills I took.”

“And now?”

“Shouldn’t you know the answer to that question, aren’t you with me all the time.”

“I don’t know, sometimes you’re with your cigarettes.”

“Is that you being sarcastic, I thought sarcasm was my thing?”

“I guess this is what they mean when they say someone is your rib, you become part of their skin you start behaving like them, one more month and I will be a fully functioning drug dealer.”

They laughed heartily. They were moving to Kisumu city. Oyunga was smoking less and he didn’t need his special pills. They were happy even though the day was gloomy. The sun had been swallowed behind dark clouds and there was a suffocating humidity in the air. It had been over six months and even though Oyunga was conscious about the cartel tracing their money he thought they had gotten out of its radar. He needed somewhere Marion could run for checkups now that the baby was almost here. They also

needed a modern house with amenities, a comfortable place with fewer mosquitoes than Ndukiya.

They had just unpacked and Oyunga was sitting on the couch, back from scouting buildings that he was thinking of renting space in.

"I think I can now go back to being a fulltime chef. Thank you Mari for being so patient with me."

"I didn't think I would grow to love you so much. I'd thought I'd resent you every day of my life but sometimes life surprises you."

"Are you still burning to go back to advertising?"

"I would like to go back to it but I guess I have to lay low, partly because of the baby. Maybe I can help you with the restaurant?"

"Mari, do you think we're being naïve?"

"Naïve?"

"Thinking they're not looking for us, because every day I see a man in a suit, or a man in a leather jacket or a light skinned woman and I think it's them."

"Tell me about it? I flinch every time I see a Noah but don't worry too much, they also have lives of their own to live."
"

"But you don't know Lily, she's vengeful and spiteful. We have to be very careful. The restaurant we are opening, we have to run it behind the scenes. We can't be the face of it and a few months after the baby is here we have to fly out."

"Okay, whatever you say." Marion was completely lost in love and in the baby boy growing in her stomach.

"Don't we have checkup today?"

"We do, but I can go by myself."

"No, no you can't exclude me every time. I will take you today."

"Come on honey is that necessary? I can still drive you know?"

"No, no, let me be your chauffeur today."

Oyunga parked the car and helped Marion out. She now understood why they called pregnant women heavy. She was in an avocado green maternity dress and sandals and

she walked slowly stopping every two minutes to suck in air.

"Do you want some help?"

"No, I'm fine I just need a minute."

Oyunga took one of her arm and put it around his neck so that she leaned on him and he helped her inside the hospital.

"Just two more months, how are you feeling?" The doctor said while putting on his gloves.

"Besides insomnia and feeling a bit heavy I'm okay."

"Insomnia is quite common at this stage," He said while he did the ultrasound. Oh look at that, your baby boy is very healthy, looks like he's going to be a strong young man. Oyunga was holding Marion's hand and they both grinned, their cheeks pink with excitement.

"You continue eating iron, protein and fibre rich foods like we talked about and everything should be fine."

Thank you doc, I will personally see to that.

They came out, Oyunga supporting Marion like he had done while they were going in. They got close to their car

and Oyunga stopped and Marion removed her arm from him as he felt his pockets in a frenetic of movements.

“What's wrong honey?”

“I think I have forgotten my phone on the hospital bed. Take the keys. I'll get you inside the car.” Oyunga handed her the keys and made towards the hospital.

He had not even gone five steps when he heard a loud blast. “Boom!” He turned and put his hands on his head, tiny bits of his Toyota flew in the air. The air which was now rich with thick black smoke and bright orange flames.

CHAPTER 30

OYUNGA WAS breathing hard. His memory kept replaying the events like a broken record. He handed Marion the car keys then he turned around and saw the car fly into a flame of tiny pieces. In other instances he saw himself saving Marion and his unborn child from the explosion. Other times Marion was the one saving him from the explosion. And yet in others their son was the one saving them.

He hiccupped and raced around the house like a madman. He knew it was the Shemeji cartel. They wanted to kill them both that was their plan. He cursed himself for not getting in the car so they could all die together. He run to the bedroom and came back with a rope and tied a noose on the ceiling fan but when he tried to climb atop, the fan came tumbling down.

He untied the rope from the fan and got something sturdier. A metal ring on the side of the wall but before he

could wring his neck inside the noose his phone buzzed. He looked at the screen. He had a new message:

Pity what happened to your baby momma. It's time to come back home to your lovely wife now, hon.

Oyunga looked at the text. The explosive the cartel used must have had a timer which his fiancée triggered when Marion entered the car. She must be in town. His entire being curdled with hatred for her. He wondered how she had gotten his new number. He looked at the noose on the wall and paced across the room one more time. Everything suddenly clear. He sat on his desk with a pen and paper while balancing tears, this would grow into his ritual, writing letters to his deceased wife.

Dear Mari,

I still remember the first time we met. I remember your easy smile and your light soul. Your white dress, your short hair and your loving manner. I'm sure you're in heaven beautifying the place. We did not meet in the best circumstances but it started something beautiful. I remember how I longed for you. I longed for you the same way The Titanic longed for land and like the Titanic, I'm

now here in a wreckage sinking in a sea of my own making with land nowhere in site.

And our son, I know he would have been a great person. I have no doubt that your love and care would have brought up a fine young man. I'm sure he would have had your easy smile and your leadership verve. Maybe he would have been a footballer, a scientist, an artist or like his mother he would have ventured into advertising. He wouldn't have been like me, vain, attracted to shiny things, and quick fixes. He would have been more like you: smart, resilient, and unwavering.

I'm here without both of you. The pain slices me into pieces every second. I guess it's the price I have to pay for my choices but I feel as if it's too big a price to pay. I don't know how to be strong and the only thing that is keeping me going is the thought of you. You were the very pillars that propped me up and made nothing seem like something. Like your arts and crafts you calmed my soul and quieted my mind.

I know what I'm about to do is not something you would advocate. You, who wants me to give my mother a chance. The mother who abandoned me when I was a small tot,

you, who stayed beside a drug dealer and gave him a son. I know you wouldn't want me to risk my life taking down the people who took you away from me but I must. I have to do this thing for our unborn son, for you, for us.

With Love

Oyunga!

If You Enjoyed This...

The most awesome thing a reader can do is recommend a writer's work to a friend. If you have friends you think will enjoy my work please tell them. I don't (yet) have the budget to buy space on prime time TV or full page ads on the Daily Nation but luckily I have something even the Daily Nation would kill for: A loyal cadre of readers.

Your reviews and relentless ruckus have helped new readers discover us and I'm calling on you again. If you enjoy my writing take one minute to spread the word in the form of a short review on your social sites or as a comment on www.kisauti.com/ebook I will be thankful and new readers will be too.

Salut!

KK

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About the Author

Kariuki Kimuyu is a writer based in Nairobi who also moonlights as a media consultant. He graduated from Strathmore with a bachelor degree in management science (because he had to major in something). He has tried his hand in advertising, working in media for over three years but soon quit, bored by the routine aspect of it. He hopes that his writing gains enough notoriety that his parents are able to explain to their friends what their son does for a living. He also hopes that his parents will stop asking him, 'when he will bring someone home.'

Read him on www.kisauti.com and catch up with him on his social.



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