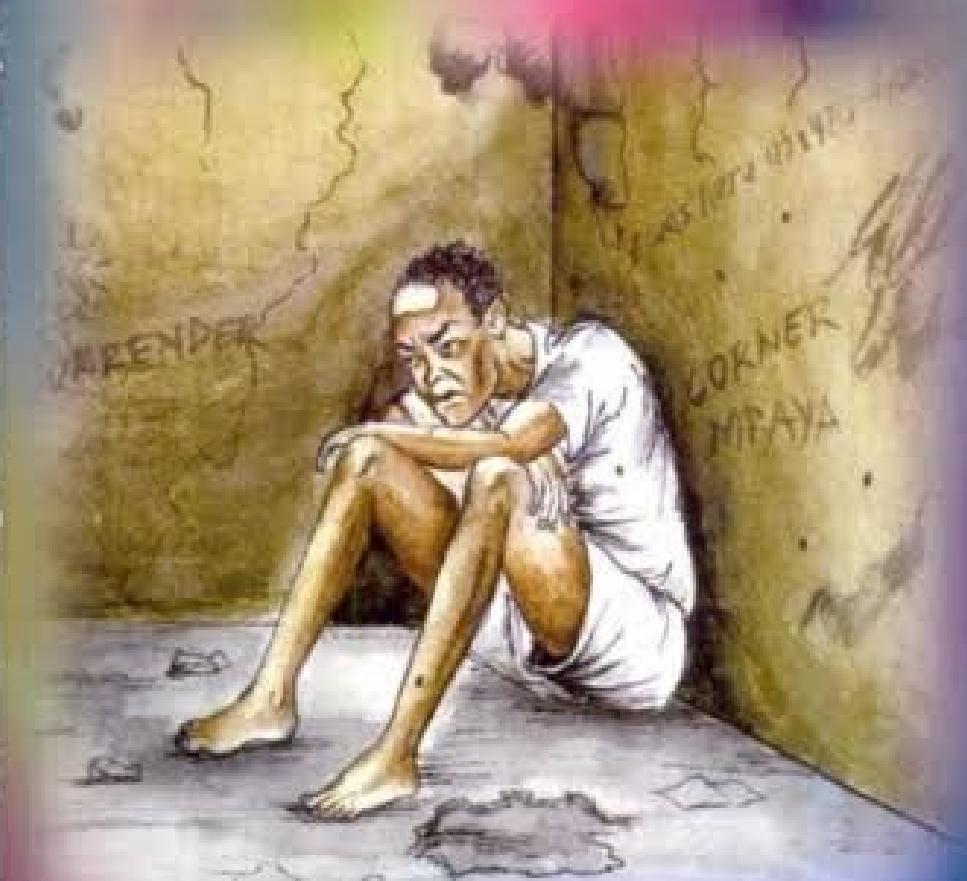


# KIRIAMITI



## MY LIFE IN PRISON

*WHATSAPP 0710327080 FOR  
MORE NOVELS*

## Chapter 1

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The prison van which transported me from the Kamiti Maximum Prison Remand Cells stopped outside the Law Courts at exactly 9.00 am. The two police cars that escorted the van were parked alongside it, one on each side. The back door of the van (whose barbed wire window was used more for letting in oxygen than for seeing anything) was opened. A chief inspector of police spoke to the corporal in charge of the van, and the corporal stepped out. He was holding the key to the two hand-cuffs which fastened me to two warders, one on my left and the other on my right. The warder on my right rose up, forcing me up with him, bending because you had to in this van. We stepped out, dragging with us the second warder who had been dozing.

In remand prison we were very poorly fed, but I could see from the warder's face that his life wasn't a picnic either. I felt I would rather be employed as a grave digger than look for a job as a warder. I've never met a warder who is proud of his work in all the years I have been with them. Every time I hear them talk of retiring soon. But when the time comes, each one starts praying for an additional two or three years of service, for one reason or the other. I suppose their job is as addictive as crime is to some criminals.

The very ugly muzzle of a machine gun, wielded by a senior police officer, welcomed me outside the van. From what I saw of this officer, I realised that I was hated, not only by the few who knew my crimes, but by many more who did not have a clue why I was here.

As I stepped onto the veranda of the Law Courts and up the stairs, I got the feeling that the beginning of the end of all my happy days was at hand. I lowered my head to avoid the flashlight of a newsman's camera. I later realised that that move only added a sensational touch to the picture the public would see of me the following morning.

This was the day I had come for sentencing. The judge had heard all the evidence. The silence that filled the courtroom when I was ordered to stand up for my plea was unnerving. Everyone in the packed courtroom was eager to hear me talk, to hear what I had to say for myself and how I would get myself out of the grave predicament I was in. I hadn't prepared myself for mitigation. I had regarded my case as hopelessly concluded, for they knew all about <sup>lost book</sup> my life in crime; so when I stood up, it was first to survey the courtroom and say a last farewell with my eyes to those who cared for me. This last day, the day of judgement, meant everything to my family. It was on this day that I would either be discharged to join them once again or be parted from them for many, many years. It was for the judge to let them know my fate.

For the first time since my arrest, I saw my father seated in the courtroom. Beside him was my mother, Anne Wanjiru, and Milly, the girl who would have been my wife. She and Mom had attended every session. Every member of my family had come to take me home because, as far as they were concerned, I was the most innocent person in the world. But Milly and my sister Connie knew me better. They knew some of the exploits of the man known in the criminal world as Jack Zollo. So they were less optimistic about the outcome. I strained my eyes harder to see if there was a close friend around and, to my surprise, I saw about six of my old comrades in crime. Such friends normally disappear when trouble arrives and so I was happy to know that I still had friends in my life.

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As the judge, the prosecutor, the court clerk and the crowd waited to hear me talk, I was not with them. I wasn't in the courtroom either. I found myself going back to my past and the scene of my last crime. I thought about the remand prison I had just left. I saw myself again seated outside the jail with hundreds of other remanded prisoners. I had started off badly, for while my fellow

remand inmates were in their own clothes, I was in that horrible uniform worn only by prisoners charged with a capital offence.

A patch of red cloth sewn on my chest indicated that I had a case involving strokes of the cane and that I had to be closely watched. \*

My mind went back to the mock court which my fellow inmates in remand made up as we sunbathed behind bars. Mock courts are intended to teach amateur criminals the courtroom procedures and the kind of tactics to use in one's defence. Some of these jailbirds, having been in various courts – some more than thirty times in their lives – would adopt the roles of judge, prosecutor, defence lawyer, and witness. One then saw how the whole thing worked, and a criminal would be advised to tell his true story so that those more experienced in courtroom defence could give him valuable tips on how to defend himself. It was surprising how these experienced jailbirds could catch a person telling a lie. They seemed to be experts in law.

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After this kind of drama, the "judge" would pass a mock sentence to give the inexperienced ones a taste of what to expect. Now, as I stood in the dock waiting for the real judge to decide my fate, I tried to remember some of the tips I had been given in remand:

"Do not fake an alibi you cannot prove..."

"Do not call a witness you cannot rely on..."

"Do not give a sworn statement because, when you do, you will be open to a cross-examination. While being cross-examined you might very easily contradict yourself..."

"In mitigation, do not beg for leniency for that will imply that you are guilty. Stick to your plea..."

"Never, in the field of crime, plead guilty even if they promise you total acquittal..."

Well, I started wishing I had listened to those jai.<sup>an</sup> who knew it all. But then, all I needed was advice on mitigating<sup>an</sup>, the correct and safe way to get my sentence reduced by this cruel judge. What I badly needed was leniency; but how was I to go about getting leniency without showing that I was guilty?

I broke into a cold sweat as I felt the trap closing in tightly. I saw the dirty water we were served for stew; the *ugali* which slipped between fingers as you conveyed it to the mouth; the stinking cells we were locked in; the rags we were given for blankets; the whole misery of prison life! I remembered those murderers who never slept at night and who would wake you up in the small hours, just when you had managed to catch some sleep, to tell you – with a wild look on their faces – that they had figured out a way in which they might fool the judge.

The malicious warders would come early in the morning, when you were just about to have your sweetest dreams, and wake you up to reality. They would order you to take off all your clothes and squat nude outside as they carried on their meticulous daily search. Could they not do this with your clothes on?

I heard the desperate voices of the prisoners singing Christian hymns to revive hope and kill boredom. I was lost in all that misery when I heard the judge say, “If you have nothing to say...”

Put yourself in my place, though you have never been a robber, and tell me what you would have said. I said nothing. I knew I was guilty. Funny enough, I found myself smiling as I sat down. It was all over.

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On that January day 1971, I was sent to prison for twenty years with hard labour and 48 strokes of the cane.

At 12.30 pm, I was again ushered into the prison van, this time as a convicted prisoner. My relatives wept as the two police cars escorted us back to prison. The van stopped for about fifteen seconds as the prison gate was swung open. I felt all freedom slipping off me as the van crept slowly through the gate. Even

from the dark interior of the van I could feel, with certainty, that the atmosphere had completely changed and that the van and all its occupants had entered a new, strange and frightening world. Just then I heard a man ask, "What do we have this time, *Bwana* driver?"

"Just another bandit, sir. He has been given twenty years. Robbers are really getting it these days. This one, sir, is younger than the rest and I guess, by the time he completes twenty years, he'll be an old man — wise enough to know what is to be taken and what's to be left alone."

"Twenty years? Phew... Twenty years is twenty years even to a ten year old kid. That means he'll see the outside of prison again when? January 1991! Phew I'm glad he's not my son. I'd disown him. Poor boy!"

The van started moving once again. After twenty yards or so, it stopped again and the door was opened. I stepped down into the arms of merciless jailers. I looked around my new home. I was only a few yards from the Duty Office. Behind me, about fourteen yards away was the gate we had just passed. To the left of the gate were the visitors' cubicles where prisoners, saw and spoke to their friends and relatives, through a wire mesh that could not even let in a mouse. Two yards from there was a door leading to a building where the prisoners went for their church services: Anglicans early in the morning, Catholics thereafter. A few yards to the left of this church was another door which led to the cells where the dangerous prisoners were locked up. Right in front of me now was the Reception Office where I was about to be registered as a prisoner and issued with prison uniform. My clothes would be put in a shabby bag where they would remain for the next twenty years. The law was that reliable.

Crossing the road that led to the interior of the prison, you came to the hospital's documentation office, a waiting room, and the sickbay. But all this I was to discover later. Right now, I was not in a position to know anything. My thoughts were concentrated on one thing: I wanted to die. I was not going to stay behind these grim walls for twenty years, no matter what

happened! I was waiting for the handcuffs to be taken off my wrists so that I could fight it out, determined that when I went down, I would go with at least two of them. Knowing that my bare hands were not sufficient for this, I had searched with my eyes for some sort of weapon. The best I could see was a pair of pliers on the table which the sergeant used to seal the prisoners' property bags. I had to reach that weapon at all costs, for it was my only hope of giving a good last account of myself.

"Before I'm done for, I'll teach this lot a lesson they'll never forget! As for the ones I'm about to hit, it's just too bad. I'll give them my reasons when we meet in hell." Those were my thoughts then.

As the handcuffs were taken off, my right hand went up to my mouth to stifle a terrible cough I had felt coming. Even before it was over, the nearest warder was in my hands. I got hold of his neck from behind and squeezed it so hard that I felt some heat on my palms as I tried to twist his neck and break it. Another warder got ready to attack me from behind. He was much bigger than me, and his blow would have sent me to dreamland for hours, especially now that he held the chain of my handcuffs, ready to smash me. Instinctively, I ducked, turning my victim's head towards him. The heavy blow crashed into the mouth of his fellow warder, knocking out a few teeth and making a deep cut on his nose. I released him and let him drop to the floor.

As his friend knelt down, trembling with a million apologies, I dove to the table where the pliers lay. The sergeant, sensing my movement, threw a blow which only glanced on my shoulder. I pretended to fall down and, gave the table a push, knocking it down so that the pliers fell only a few feet away from me. I was about to pick them up when a giant leg with a heavily soled boot tried to crush my hand. I was fast enough to avoid it but, right then, more warders rushed out from the Reception Room, blowing whistles, really loud.

From my kneeling position, I realised just then what kind of trouble I was in. I was certain I was about to get killed. I was happy about that, my only regret being that I had not

accomplished my mission — getting the two I had sworn to go to heaven or hell with.

Like a wounded lion, I got up and lunged for the sergeant. From the way he braced himself, I knew that even if he was not a professional boxer, he was still a force to reckon with. But I was going all out for the kill. I wrestled with him, trying to get a good hold on his neck in order to strangle him and take him with me to a lonely place. But I only managed to give him several ugly scratches on the neck.

As he weakened with pain I was about to give his neck a final twist when a heavy blow exploded at the back of my head. Just before passing out, I heard something else — a siren sounding from somewhere far away.

Four days later, I was told it was a prison alarm.



I heard distant voices and opened my eyes very slowly. Seeing nothing, I closed them again. The voices sounded even nearer and I opened my eyes again. I felt weary and almost dead. But I noticed that I was in a cell of about seven by eleven feet. I realised I hadn't a shred of clothing on. I was completely naked. My head felt like a time bomb, about to explode. Every limb in my body refused to obey my orders. Only my eyes moved, and so I rolled them from side to side.

I noticed that the tiny cell I was in had been drenched with water up to a level of three inches and that whoever had poured it inside the cell had a reason for it, for he had stuck a blanket underneath the door from outside to prevent the water from flowing out.

At one corner, I noticed a round plastic bowl, the kind that was used in this world as a toilet, a kind of crude chamber pot. I instructed my hand to go to my head and find out what was going on there. I felt some water flowing down my cheek and tried to lift my hand to investigate. My hand did not move. The

tongue let me know, by the salty taste of the liquid, that I was weeping.

The voice I heard became clearer. Two people were talking just outside the cell. I wanted to rise up and look through the small hole in the door, but I couldn't move. My whole body seemed to have been beaten into soft pulp.

Just then, I heard footsteps coming towards the cell. After sometime, I heard a boot stomp on the floor in salute and a warder say, "All is well, *Afande*."

"How is the new fellow? Has he come to yet?"

"No, sir. But the doctor was here about twenty minutes ago and said that the prisoner would recover. They really worked on him, sir. They continued to beat him even after he had lost consciousness. ~~Lucky~~ for him he's young, sir, otherwise he'd suffer the rest of his life."

"Is it that bad? Well, all I can say is that he asked for it. Someone ought to advise this boy and make him realise that he's now in jail. If he doesn't change his attitude, it will just be too bad..."

Through the hole in the door, I saw his face, as he peered inside. He struck the door hard with his stick to see if I would move. I lay quite still. For the first time he seemed to notice the water seeping from under the door. He could see I was naked and swimming in water. There was a faint note of concern as he asked, "Must you keep him naked — with water all over? Unconscious? Who gave this order?"

"I suppose the Duty Officer, sir. I found him that way, sir."

There was a long pause. "Well, when he comes back to his senses — if he does — give him some food. Give him some clothing, too. I think he is too young to have any idea what he got himself into."

Another pause. "How long do you think he has been unconscious?" the officer asked.

"Since 2.30 pm yesterday, sir."

"For so long?"

"Yes, sir. About thirty hours, sir."

"Well, that should teach him, shouldn't it? If that doesn't teach him, nothing will. See to it, Corporal, when he comes to."

"Yes, Afande."

Left alone again, I felt some of my muscles loosen. I told my hand to go out there and find out what was going on with my head. This time it obeyed. I touched my head and felt a bandage. At the same instant my head began to throb furiously, making me wince with pain. I closed my eyes and tried to ignore the pain.

Now my tummy began to voice its own complaints. It let me know that it had to have food. I swore to myself that I would not touch any food. Food was for those who wanted to live; I wanted to die.

After a long while I gathered the strength to get up. Slowly, I began stretching my muscles. Every part of me was aching. In my life of crime, I had been caught before by the police and beaten thoroughly. But I had never before experienced anything like this. Well, why hadn't they killed me? Why do half a job? Painfully, I walked to the door and looked out through the hole. I saw that warders were putting food outside the cells. Later, the corporal in charge, escorted by warders, opened each cell and pushed in food. As they were about to open the door of my cell, I began moving away, dragging my reluctant legs along.

"Hey, young boy. How are you feeling?"

I froze where I was. I didn't turn or answer.

"Young boy, listen to me. Listen to me as you would listen to your father. Your approach is all wrong and will not do you a bit of good. Do you understand? I know you are worried about your long sentence. But anything could happen if you learn to cooperate and drop your stubborn pride. You could find yourself free sooner than you think. Be sensible now."

Again I started weeping, not because his sympathy touched me, but because he was out of my reach. Had one of them come near me, I would have been killed, for I would have hung onto his neck and never let go. They seemed to sense it because none of them came near me as they pushed in the food and stayed

*sk*  
away. A few more teardrops streamed down my face when none of them came any nearer. But the one with the food was near enough. Before he could put the food down, I struck out and the food splashed all over him. He slipped out quickly and locked the door. From the lonely corner where I went to sit down, I could hear them talk about me in amazement.

A few minutes later, the officer came again to my door. I was now wild. I stood in the centre of the cell to see what he would do. Alright, come nearer, I thought. But he only peered in at me. My hair was shaggy and dripping with water. I must have looked terrible.

"For how long has this boy been under punishment?"

"Since yesterday, *Afande*."

"That is too much punishment. Can't you see that, Corporal? All that time you haven't given him clothes? Has he been nude since yesterday?"

"Those were the orders, sir. My opinion was that he should get clothed, have a shower, get shaved..."

"Forget your opinion. Whose orders are you talking about? My orders or whose orders? I don't want this. Give him clothes, water to take a bath; then have him shaved neatly. Then give him good food." He knew I was listening and, of course, he wanted to trick me. Of course, they were fooling me. Good food in prison? They just wanted to see my reaction.

Turning to me, he said, "Young man, how are you feeling? Still worried about your sentence? Don't be so miserable. It's nothing, nothing at all. Patience is the only secret. Are you hungry? I want you to eat before anything else. What would you like to eat, eh?"

He was trying to trick me. I was very sure that this was not a hotel where they gave you a menu and asked you what meal you wanted. So I kept quiet.

He cursed me loudly and went away, saying I would soon fall in line. "He thinks I'm his mother, huh?"

Once again I started weeping because no one would come near me and give me a chance to die like a man. They just left me

there, naked. To think that this was only the beginning and many years of misery still awaited me!

No one bothered about me, except for a Mkamba warder with a long cat-like moustache, who kept peering in. Then he would go away whistling to himself.

In the mid-afternoon, at about 3.30 pm they brought in the evening meal. I stood at the door, watching through the hole. The cook I had hit with the food was accompanied by another huge fellow. He gestured to this huge fellow as if to say, "That dangerous boy is in this cell."

The cooks, I remembered, were fellow prisoners, and so I must hold no grudges against them. The huge fellow came in with the food and, to my surprise, said, "Zollo, how are you?"

I looked up in surprise.

"Now listen carefully. I have been sent to you by GG. You know GG, don't you?"

"Yes. Where is he?"

"Shh, listen. GG heard you were here and he has been trying to contact you, but up to now, he has not had a chance. This block, as you must know by now, is the punishment block and it is only for those prisoners who have to be punished. So it is difficult for him to see you. But he will try to come. How he gets here will be his own headache. He told me to tell you to keep very cool..."

Suddenly he fell silent. The Mkamba warder with the moustache had come around. I was very upset to be interrupted before talking to this inmate. He had brought me good news of the only person I had been thinking about in this prison – GG – the man who had been accused with me. He had been sentenced a little earlier, along with some other bank robbers we had met in remand. As I had some extra charges to answer in different courts, my sentence had been delayed, and thus we had been separated. I was happy to know he was here, so close to me. I needed him to tell me how we would go about this challenge, this long sentence.

All I could see was darkness ahead of me. I was not even twenty years old, so how could the judge do this to me? Twenty years, ere?

I didn't touch any food that day or on the two days that followed. The plastic toilet was now stinking because, despite the empty belly, I had relieved myself a couple of times. The water on the floor was mixed with urine. This was the kind of battle I had feared all my life. I had feared this for I loved my freedom. I loved the easy life. I could hardly stand up now and stretch my muscles! My mouth was dry, stinking! I waited for GG, wondering whether I would be able to talk to him.

He had failed to come on Thursday, as he had promised, but I was quite sure he would keep on trying, no matter how much hardship it would cause him. He was that kind of friend. But where was he? What took him so long?

The hunger, the cold and the worry finally overcame me. I remember collapsing when an officer came to talk to me. From the way he talked to the others, I knew he was a very senior officer. He ordered my cell to be opened and that was the last I knew. I was lying on the floor in a heap.

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When I opened my eyes, I heard what seemed to be like music coming from afar. Maybe my mind was deceiving me. I was looking up, staring at the light bulb above me. I realised I was somewhere up high, lying on a bed with clean white sheets. Something told me to touch my head — I had been shaved clean. My wound had been covered with elastoplast. It was night. I looked round, trying to figure out where I was.

There were nine more beds in the room, all occupied. Two of the guys were not asleep and were staring at me. When one of them smiled at me, I closed my eyes and slipped back to dreamland. One of them knocked at the door calling the doctor...

When I opened my eyes again, the music – real or imagined – was gone. The room seemed to have changed. The two boys were still there, in the furthest corner, but the other beds were empty.

A doctor came in and touched my forehead. I wasn't feeling all that bad, but I was very hungry. The doctor pressed his stethoscope on my chest and asked me some questions which I did not bother to answer. He peeled back my eyelids and looked into my eyes. After making notes, he instructed me to lie still and not try to get up. I heard him tell the other two patients not to disturb me in any way because, he believed, I was finding it impossible to talk.

After he had gone I looked at the two fellows again. They looked very interested in me. One of them came closer and stretched out his arm as if to touch something on my head. I prevented him from doing that. But he was smiling gently, gazing at me.

I saw sadness in his eyes although he was trying to hide it beneath the smile. But I hardly took notice of all that, as I was in my own world and did not want to be disturbed. Why on earth was he staring at me?

"Zollo... Jack. Can I talk to you? Can you hear me?"

I looked at him again, surprised to hear my name. Yes, there was something familiar about this fellow. Where had I seen him? It didn't seem to matter. I closed my eyes, trying to go back to the peaceful world to sleep. He touched my head gently.

"Jacki, listen... It's me. Have you forgotten me? Your friend GG..."

I know it sounds odd to say that I did not recognise my friend GG, but after spending days without food, after being so badly beaten and left to rot on a cold wet floor, I had caught some disease, probably pneumonia, which had affected my brain and the way I saw things. But now I could see! Yes, this was GG.

I was gripped by a sudden rush of warmth which filled my heart with happiness. I tried to sit up but he stopped me. He noticed that I was trying to speak and put a finger on his mouth.

"No, don't talk. I know you cannot talk, Jack."

A dark look crossed his face, for he was angry at what had happened to me. He muttered some very angry words, shaking his head. If this had been done to me in another place at another

time, someone would have paid. But this was prison and we were paying our dues.

His companion was standing nearby, but GG did not bother to introduce him to me, seeing the condition I was in. He got hold of his arm and they both sat on the opposite bed. GG asked me whether I was hungry and I nodded weakly. As he was about to take out some milk from a bedside locker, the doctor, came back, a cook behind him with a bucket of milk. They gave me a pint and watched me drink. I was then instructed to rest. I floated back to dreamland.

I woke up feeling much better. It was late evening and the lights were on. GG, who had got himself admitted to the hospital, was awake. He came over quickly and fed me some more milk and food. After this, I could see things more clearly and was even able to talk weakly. GG listened quietly with a frown as I told him what I wanted.

This was my first time behind bars, but he had been in this place more times than he would like his closest friends to know. He too had been given twenty years and 48 strokes, but was taking it much more calmly. From what I had seen of this hellish place, I couldn't imagine one year here, let alone twenty.

I had chosen a life of crime as a shortcut to happiness, not eternal hell, and since I had lost the gamble, there was only one thing left — I wanted to die. GG listened patiently as I asked him to advise me on the best way of committing suicide. I made it clear to him that I was willing to try anything that would rid me of this misery.

"If you have no better suggestion," I told him, "I will try an overdose."

"No, Zollo, listen to me. You are a man, and as a man, you can not despair. Where there's life, there is hope."

"I'm trying to tell you of another way. Will you listen? There's something you can do, if you so desperately want to get out of this place, but it needs perseverance. It will take guts, all the courage you have. But when it is done," GG smiled faintly, "you will be free once more."

"You mean it?"

"Yes. Look, maybe you have noticed that I'm not sick. Do I look sick? The idea I'm going to give you is the one I wanted to try when I arranged to be admitted here. But you stand a better chance of succeeding because, right from the beginning, you have done everything right, as far as the plan goes. For over a week now you haven't talked to the authorities. You haven't even signed any papers of admission. You started fighting as soon as they took off your handcuffs, and that is excellent. Now, this is the thing - carry on. Go on acting mad. Pretend to be mad, talk mad, be as mad as you can possibly be, and carry on being mad until they take you to Mathare Mental Hospital. Once you are admitted, I know you are a professional in escaping and there are a million chances to escape from that place. There are only doctors and nurses and a few guards. If you fail the first time, it doesn't matter. They will only take you back there, get you under a drug for a week and leave you again. The place is paradise compared to this place. I'm sure the next time I will hear from you, you will be sending my brother here to visit me. Do that, Zollo. Forget suicide — act mad and be free. But, my dear friend, you will have to sweat it out. You will undergo so many tests of insanity that sometimes you will wish you had never started. You think they will let you go to Mathare easily? You will really have to prove you are mad. Want to give it a try?"

"Yes."

"I knew you would. And if anybody can make it, it's you, for you have already made a deep impression on the authorities. But one thing: when you start this project don't starve yourself. You will need the strength. It is better to eat heaps of food like a mad man, even wage wars trying to get more food from the cooks. You will have to play dirty. Very dirty."

"How long do you think it will take before they approve my admission?"

"It depends on the degree of madness you display. Shouting through the night or even smearing yourself with shit won't worry them. They will let you do it till you're tired. What they hate is a

mad man who causes losses, so break things. Empty the chamber pot into the prisoners' porridge, then drink it."

I couldn't help laughing weakly. Was GG already mad?

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But it seemed like a good plan. As I was feeling already mad after all I had gone through, it seemed quite natural to pretend that I had gone off my rocker. For the first time, I saw a glimmer of hope. Yes, soon I would be free. All I had to do was pretend I was mad.

GG said, "I'll give you any help you need in your mission. But for God's sake, don't let more than two very trusted friends know what you are up to. These jailbirds are worse than the warders, as you will soon come to know. You can't trust most of them. But I'll be there. Good luck Zollo, and remember, from now on, you are mad."

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I started my act in earnest the following night when the whole prison was quiet, I was still in the hospital. At twelve midnight, when they were all asleep, I prepared myself to undertake the most shameful mission of my life – proving myself mad. And what a mission!

Unlike robbery, where we went in groups, encouraging each other, I was on my own in this. I decided to start by whistling. I whistled loudly, as if I was calling to a man who was miles away. The effect surprised me. I hadn't known how jumpy and insecure all these tough jailbirds were. They all jumped up, wondering what calamity was upon them now.

I burst out laughing because it was so funny. Maybe I was already crazy, finding laughter where there was none. They all looked at me strangely. The following day, GG reported to the doctor that I had behaved rather oddly. He told the doctor that I had complained that people were looking for me with a machine gun,

trying to kill me. The doctor came to see me at around 10.30 am and, as he was coming towards me, GG stopped him pretending to be afraid of me. I got his message and acted on it, grabbing the stethoscope from the doctor's neck and throwing it aside. I was about to step on it when GG pushed me and saved it from destruction. I took a plastic container with milk in it and struck GG on the head. The milk spilt all over him. "Why did you want to kill me last night?" I demanded, "Is it not you who was trying to kill me last night?" GG, pretending to be mortally afraid, withdrew to safety. I turned to the doctor and he retreated. The warders, who escorted him, rescued him and stood at a distance, watching me in consternation. This episode ended with me being handcuffed to my bed.

I stayed in the hospital another week, still handcuffed. Then the nurse reported that I was fit to move, especially because I was wanted for fingerprinting. The receptionist came for me, together with some warders. I went politely without any argument, but took advantage of the situation to publicise my madness. I whistled and shouted, then laughed out loud. I saw a white piece of paper being blown by the wind and started figuring out how to make use of it. By the time the paper had reached us, I had figured it out. I started running back towards the sickbay, crying out for help. I said it was a car being driven by a certain man called John Mwangi who wanted to kill me. The paper was very cooperative — it started following me! I ran in the opposite direction, stopping now and then to see if it was still after me and screaming for help. Everyone started laughing. I darted towards the wards and hid under a bed. A certain officer who seemed to like me came and reassured me that the terrifying thing I had seen was only a piece of paper.

At last we reached the reception officer. My record card was taken out and kept ready, together with the ink for finger printing. Knowing that I might snatch the ink board, the clerk held it firmly as my hand came down. I was supposed to use only my left thumb but I smeared my whole hand with ink. That didn't bother them, as long as they got a good thumbprint. One of

them at first held my thumb but, seeing I was cooperative, let go. With perfect timing, I snatched the record card and jumped back a few steps. I tore it into pieces, pushing some bits into my mouth and chewing them while they gaped, looking shocked. They opened a new record card and I tore it up as well. Someone decided that enough was enough and got me out of the office.

Back in the ward, I found that the inmates were out for sunshine. I remembered what GG had told me about losses. I searched the patients' lockers for any spare milk and drank as much as I could. Then I spilt the rest on the floor. Of course they felt the loss and decided this would be my last day at the hospital. I was taken back to solitary confinement.

\* \* \* \* \*

Again I was all alone in a cell. Now I knew there was no turning back. I felt I knew what to expect and was ready for it.

I had avoided fighting warders as well as I could. The few times I had fought them, during my insanity act, was when they had tried to prevent me from grabbing extra helpings of food. There came a time when I was so rough that some measures had to be taken to contain me. I would go to where the meals were being served and grab as much food as I could, take it to my cell and throw it on the floor at one corner, just the way a mad man would do. After eating as much as I could, I would mix the rest with soil and smear it all over my body — anything to escape twenty years.

Soon, I was smelling like a skunk and was the ugliest item they had in prison. After they realised that I would never take a bath willingly, the sergeant commanded a group of inmates to hold me down and wash me by force. This went on for sometime and there was always a big struggle. Then one day I knocked out a tooth from one of the inmates. This prompted the authorities to rule that I should be left alone, as far as washing was concerned. But the officer also ordered that I should be kept handcuffed since I had proved I could be very violent.

The warders not only made sure that the orders were followed but went a stage further and kept me nude to punish me for tearing up my uniform. In doing so, I was following GG's advice to destroy everything of value that came in to my sight.

Handcuffed throughout the night and without even a blanket with which to cover myself, I started realising just how hard the battle would be. What must I do to convince them that I was mad? I had done just about everything but there was still no talk of my being taken to a mental hospital. I seemed to have succeeded only in making my life unbearably wretched. Here was I now, stinking and shivering with cold, with my hands handcuffed. How long would this go on?

With great bitterness I stared at those handcuffs that made me feel so helpless. "Destroy everything of value," I had heard GG say.

I got rid of the first pair of handcuffs quite easily. I tied a piece of cloth round my wrist to avoid being hurt by the metal and banged the handcuffs against the wall with such force that they broke open. With one wrist free, I was able to release the other one quite easily. Obviously it was quite unwise to let them have their handcuffs back intact, just to use them on me again. To destroy them, I fixed one end under the door and then pulled upwards. I broke them into several pieces and then threw them onto the corridor outside.

It was late at night and all was quiet. The sound woke up the warders and brought them to my cell, knowing I was the only one in the Punishment Block who was likely to do cause such a ruckus. I didn't bother to answer when they talked to me and they went away with the broken handcuffs.

To celebrate this victory I sang the whole night, which helped me forget the cold and also spread the idea that I was really mad. I was beginning to believe it myself. I was afraid that if this continued, I would cross a certain line beyond which I would no longer be pretending, and this was a bit frightening. Perhaps, by the time they let me go to Mathare I would really be mad, and what was the use? While fighting to prove I was insane I realised I had to fight equally hard to keep my sanity.

I broke another pair of handcuffs in exactly the same way banging the lock against the door till it sprang open and then using the bottom edge of the door to break it.

Contemptuously, I tossed the second handcuffs outside, thinking to myself that these people would soon know who they were dealing with.

But the law would not be outdone so easily; they brought a different type. They looked pleased with themselves as they put these new handcuffs on me. "*Kamefungwa na ile automatik*" (He has been handcuffed with the automatic ones), one of them said.

Automatic or not, these new handcuffs were even more delicate than the first ones but the illiterate warders and the sergeant didn't seem to know that. Besides, they had forgotten that they were dealing not only with a madman but a true professional.

To get rid of these ones, I needed a thin nail. In such a case I needed to talk to a friend I could fully trust. I managed to contact an old friend called Young but he told me that a nail was not necessary. He happened to know of a place in prison where he could steal a key for the handcuffs. He promised to bring the key in the evening. When the prisoners closed work for the day, at 3.30 pm, I waited patiently for Young to bring me the key. Then the rumour reached me that a prisoner had been caught with all types of handcuff keys and was in the Duty Office surrounded by all the senior officers, being thoroughly grilled. Young was charged right then and brought to the punishment block to spend seven days on half-ration of *ugali* without stew.

That plan having backfired, I went back to plan A. Another close friend called Kennedy supplied me with the kind of nail needed and in the evening I started working on the handcuffs. It took only a short while to free myself. I broke the handcuffs into two parts and threw them out. My night was more comfortable after that as I had found it very difficult to sleep with my hands tied. But I knew this would not be the end of the matter and wondered what they would do now that I had shown them that I could break all types of handcuffs, including "automatic" ones.

What followed surprised me and convinced me that there was nothing new under the sun. The authorities had dealt with all kinds of mad men and had an answer for everything. I was horrified when I saw the new handcuffs they had brought into the cell to fasten on me, and teach me a lesson.

I had never seen anything like this new fastener. I realised that it was reserved for the most violent characters. "*Dawa ya moto ni moto*," the sergeant said as they tied the thing on me. I concluded that the people who invent things are themselves mad, especially whoever invented this kind of handcuffs.

This strange apparatus was mainly made of leather. The wide leather band went round my waist and was then fastened at the back, just above the buttocks. On either side of the hips were the handcuffs, to immobilise my arms. With my arms locked to my sides, there was little I could do. As the leather band was a bit loose round my waist I could move it from side to side a bit, but that was all. When going to sleep I could only lie on my belly and not on my side or my back. I remembered what GG had told me. "You will wish that you had never started it." I was almost regretting it now, for I felt totally cornered. As I was still naked, I felt I had no dignity left and that the law was slowly winning. I couldn't sleep a wink. I felt like a chicken, tied up for slaughter and was filled with despair.

It seemed to me that the authorities had been toying with me, just experimenting to see how much punishment I could take. I had no doubt that somebody was enjoying this. I had thought I was smart to grab two or three rations. Plenty of food helped to keep me warm in the night. Now I could not snatch a thing from a twelve-year-old kid because of this devilish leather fastener that held me so rigidly.

I had gone to drink some water in the bathroom when I stepped on something slippery. Unable to balance myself with my immobilised arms, I fell and hit my head against the concrete floor. I lay there stunned and unable to move. A warder saw me and picked me up. I was bleeding and this helped me to put on an act. I faked unconsciousness.

The warder took me back to my cell and called the sergeant. As I lay there, pretending I was in another world, the warder explained how it had happened. "You know, soap is slippery, sir," he said, thus giving me a brilliant idea. *If I had soap and water I could get rid of this thing!* Soap is slippery...

"Well, forget all about that and take this boy to the Sick-Bay," said the sergeant.

"Should I remove the fastener?"

"Remove what? Don't be a fool. You need to stay here a little longer to know these people and their tricks. Do you think this boy is unconscious? If you were asked, you would even say he is mad. But there's no such thing. He is faking everything." To me he shouted, "Young boy! Wake up and go to the hospital. *Wacha kujifanya! Wafikiri tumeona wangapi wa aina yako?*" (Stop pretending! How many of your kind do you think we have seen?)

"It's hard to prove you're mad," I thought sadly. "Very hard. GG was right."

The sergeant came up and stood over me. He pushed me with his boot as I lay there, naked and trussed up. "Are you really unconscious, young boy? You really want to tell us you are mad? I don't believe it. I have seen so many."

He gazed down at me thoughtfully for a long time. "Alright," he snapped at the corporal, "have this thing removed and carry him to the Sickbay. Let the doctor examine him."

The leather fastener was removed and I was taken to the prison hospital. Questions were asked why the person was being carried nude, but when the duty officer heard it was me he clicked his tongue as if to say that was to be expected.

After the doctor had seen me, I was taken back to my cell. I had succeeded in fooling them that I was really hurt and they did not tie me up again.

Yet the battle had to continue, despite the risk. Go on being mad, GG's voice said... As mad as you can possibly be... Mathare is paradise, compared with this place. Go on, Zollo. Don't give up!

When they opened my door bringing in the evening meal, I dashed out to where the food was being served. I secured myself

some extra ration, using the dish as a weapon to beat back the cooks. Back in my cell, I threw the *ugali* at my usual dirty corner.

When I had eaten enough and was about to start singing, the door opened and I saw four warders and the sergeant. The sergeant had the leather fastener in his hands and he gave it to a short thick-set warder who had a reputation for handling the most violent criminals.

"Go ahead," the sergeant said.

The other warders approached me apprehensively, knowing I had a reputation for knocking out teeth and making people bleed. But this time I was quiet. I wanted the thing on, for I was sure now that there was a way of removing it.

"So, Mr Sergeant, you brought the whole gang with you?" I said tauntingly, "Very well, I think I'm getting used to sleeping in this thing." I offered my hands. The warders paused, suspecting a trick. "Shall I turn my back? Alright!" I turned my back. With lightning speed they grabbed me, fastened the thing around my waist and clipped on the handcuffs. "Yes, I'm getting used to this thing," I said. "But I guess the moment I break it and throw you the pieces you will know who I am."

Nobody spoke, for they were all beginning to believe I must be mad. They stared at the heap of *ugali* at the corner, as if wondering how I could eat such filth – and, with my hands immobilized. Then they left.

The sergeant then spoke from the other side of the door. "You know, young boy, if you behaved that way all the time, you and I would be great friends. It would save you a lot of headache."

I began to laugh. Was I so dangerous that he had to wait until the door was locked before he could talk to me?

"To show you that I am happy with you today," said the sergeant, "I will bring you a blanket." That showed me he was very tired of the fights I used to put up and wanted to make peace. A few minutes later, he opened the door and threw me a dirty old blanket, fit only for a dog or a mad man. "Here is your blanket, young boy. Sleep well."

Again he locked the door, but didn't go far. He stood outside peering in as if at a strange and fascinating animal. I said to him "You know, Mr Sergeant I'm getting rid of this thing of yours tonight, so you had better go and dream up a better type."

"You are mad," he said, "you know that? I believe, young boy, you are mad. *Kitu kinatengenezwa na Mwingereza unasema utakivumikono mitupu?* (You say you can break something which has been made by a European with your bare hands?) He was one of those illiterate warders. We had nicknamed him *Kariambak* because he was always chewing snuff. I told him, "*Unafikiri kitu cha Mwingereza ni cha Mungu?* (Do you think what was made by a whiteman was made by God?) *Unafikiri sisi zote tunatafuna ugon kama wewe?* (Do you think we all chew snuff like you?).

"If you want this thing," I said, "make sure you come tomorrow morning and collect the bits. But mark my words, Mr Sergeant, I won't throw it in the corridor this time. I will throw it on the guard-walk just to give you a little work."

The guard-walk was at the back of the building and from my cell, I could throw anything there. But for them to retrieve it they would have to go for a special key from a higher authority which would require a very good explanation.

"Young boy, I don't think you will ever learn."

"The guard-walk," I repeated. "Check the guard-walk in the morning." I felt a lot of anger and fire. How could they tie up a man this way?

"Just break that one," the sergeant said. "If you break that one we shall know you are really circumcised." He went away disgusted and disappointed with me. He could see I was still very stubborn and we could never be friends.

A few minutes later, when the coast was clear, I called out for the block cleaner (who, as a prisoner, was always locked in late) and sent him to Kennedy's cell, which was upstairs. I told him that I wanted a piece of soap. He brought it to me. The minutes ticked by and I waited until the entire block had been locked and the final check had been made with the master key.

Then I sprang into action, only to discover that I had forgotten one very important thing — water. What good was soap without water? I had forgotten all about this essential item, while thinking of how surprised the sergeant would be the following morning when he saw me free. But now I had failed and given him an opportunity to laugh at me and remind me how clever the white man was to have made such wonderful fasteners for difficult people like me. I couldn't let him win. But how?

In such circumstances, you are left with only one alternative which, when you think of it, proves you a perfect lunatic. The only liquid there was in the cell was my own urine in the bucket and it didn't take me long to decide that it would have to do. There was enough and I could feel some more in my bladder. Having relieved myself, I dipped the soap into the bucket and made some lather. It was very difficult with my arms tied by my sides and it took a long while to smear my hips and the lower parts; everywhere the leather band would have to slide. When there was enough lather I gathered all my strength and worked the thing downwards, moving it from side to side. Luckily I had slim buttocks and I got the thing down to my feet with surprising ease.

My hands were still attached to the handcuffs but by this time I was an expert in breaking such things. Thirty minutes later, I could hardly believe it. I was standing in my cell free. I shouted "Hurrah" three times. The other prisoners wondered what that meant, for they were used to me singing.

Friction wears out things, I had been made to understand. With great patience, I started rubbing the leather band against the rough part of the wall, singing as I did so. After two good hours of frenzied rubbing, the whole thing collapsed. The leather covered a thin strap of metal and I quickly broke this. Just as I had promised the sergeant, I threw the two bits onto the guard-walk.

## Chapter 2

I was taken to the medical officer a few days later. In contrast to my earlier behaviour, I went to him very humbly and did not scream or become aggressive in any way. I showed him that I feared his presence more than anything else and begged him to withdraw an accusation framed against me by the prison authorities, that I was mad.

"Do you mean to tell me that you do not want me to take you to Mathare Hospital?" he asked me in cross-examination. I could see the trap. I answered, "Why should you do a thing like that? I'm not mad. Please don't."

By denying that I was mad, I knew I was putting more weight to my case — even more than singing throughout the night. The medical officer had the final word in this battle and, as I was taken back to the block, I wondered if I had done it right.

Back in my block, I went straight to my cell and closed the door behind me. I took the only blanket in the cell and wrapped it around myself. I had been supplied with another worn-out *kunguru* (prisoner's uniform) and I looked very shabby because I hadn't washed for weeks and had smeared myself with *ugali*. I felt tense and miserable as I sat at a corner figuring things out.

"I have been sentenced to twenty years and forty-eight strokes," I thought to myself. "Since I came to prison I have known no peace; terror has been my constant companion. How long have I been in prison now? two years? No. One year? No. Well, it must be at least six months... Oh, no!"

Bitterly, I realised I had been in prison for less than one month! I started moaning as I thought of the twenty long years ahead of me. I realised I had taken all the punishment I could take. There was no way I could continue with this kind of suffering. I was thinking on those lines when I dozed off to sleep.

When I woke up there was a plastic bowl of *ugali* and beans. There was, to my surprise, also a plastic cup of water. The sergeant in charge had either got tired of my arguments or had started

liking me or both. I didn't touch either the tempting food or the water. I didn't talk to anybody that night and didn't even sing. I was now tired, very tired of everything. I didn't care whether I went to Mathare Hospital or not; I didn't want to continue with the acting. I remembered GG's words: "You will wish you had never started..." But I just didn't care any more. I had no more strength to go on.

Once again I started thinking of suicide, the only option left open to me. All the trouble I had gone through, all the punishment, all the mad acting, all the loneliness had happened in only three weeks. If it had been two years, as I had at first thought, there would have been some hope, for it would have left me with seventeen years to go. But my 20 years were hardly touched. Nobody, not even Superman, could survive twenty or even ten years of this kind of life and I knew I was now defeated. Why waste all this time pretending and eventually fail? Before I could give myself an answer, I fell asleep again.

\* \* \* \* \*

That night I dreamt that I had hanged myself and when some people came and cut the rope I started running away. When I looked back, I saw more than twenty police dogs running after me. I was about to climb a tree when the lead dog dug its fangs deep into my flesh. I woke up in fright.

I could hear a bell ringing in the distance. Soon after, a trumpet sounded. This happened every day at 5.30 am. That morning was particularly cold and I squeezed myself into a corner wrapped up in the blanket. I saw the food where it had been kept the previous day. I realised I hadn't eaten for almost two days. With the kind of thoughts that were in my head, I had no appetite now, no time for food. All I could think of now was the easiest method of suicide. I didn't care if I went alone this time — unlike the first day of prison when I wanted to go down with at least two guards. By the time the day warders appeared in the block, I had come to a decision which made me feel relieved and

happy — I would kill myself. I knew where I would get the rope, although I would have to deceive the man who would bring it to me. I would tell Kennedy that it was just another gadget I needed for a new act and no doubt he would fall for it. None of the people who knew me from the old gangster days could ever imagine that I could commit suicide. Kennedy would not suspect a thing.

My cell was opened at around 8.30 am and porridge was brought in. In a fit of anger (this was not acting mad) I took the plastic container with the *ugali* and threw it out into the verandah. I kicked the bowl in which they were putting the porridge for breakfast. They went away hastily.

Surprisingly, I wasn't feeling hungry and now that I had come to a firm decision about killing myself, there was no point in eating. What I needed now was a pen and piece of paper so that I could write GG a farewell letter.

At 9.30 am, Young brought me a pen and a piece of paper. He had finished his penal diet sentence but was not back to his duties. At 10.30 am, Kennedy brought me the rope, warning me very sternly not to crack under pressure and give him away when they found the rope. This annoyed me considerably, since it proved that he still didn't trust my courage after all I had gone through. At 10.45 am, I wrote the following letter to GG and handed it to a trusted cleaner, who acted as a go-between. I was sure of my security because this illiterate cleaner could not read a word I had written:

*My dearest friend,*

*I have done the best I could but to no avail. I think I ought to have followed my first plan right from the beginning. Just as you had warned me, I now wish I had not started this whole game, but I dare say that to try and fail is, at least, to learn. Whatever I have learnt is, I'm afraid, quite useless, for I will never get the chance to put it to any use. My dear friend, you know I am not a coward, and you know Jack Zollo never gives up before he is quite defeated. Now I have reached the end and I am ending my life.*

Please, GG, remember me to Milly, if she comes as she promised. If she doesn't come, don't bother sending her the sad news. She will know in due course. If there be any life where I'm going, rest assured I shall pray for you daily. I hope you will make it and survive the twenty years. I do not mean to discourage you, but I don't think it is possible to survive under the present conditions. I do not see anything beyond suicide.

Yours,  
Jack Zollo.

P.S.: By the time you get this note, I will be no more, so don't bother.

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I folded the piece of paper very tightly and kept it ready. I then tested the rope and nodded with satisfaction. It could hold my weight all right. I turned the chamber pot upside down and I was standing on it when I heard the sound of heavy boots hitting the floor in salute. The security officer or some other senior officer was making a round of inspection. I hid the rope in the chamber pot, went to the door and looked out. It was the officer in charge, and he was heading straight for my cell. I heard him ask the sergeant, "What do you think of this boy in Number 36? I think you know about this case a little better than I do."

The sergeant's answer surprised me, for it was the opposite of what I expected.

"From my years of experience, sir, I can say without any doubt at all that the boy is mad. He is completely ~~mentally~~ sick. I have observed him very closely, sir, ever since he came here, and I am sure he is not pretending in any way. He is too young to pretend that way. I think he has been heart-broken by the long sentence imposed on him and it has ruined his mind."

Surprised was the right word for it. Kariambaki talking well of anyone! It surprised all the inmates in the block. I am still sure he did it, not because he really believed I was crazy but because he was tired of me. The officer came to the door and we looked

at each other. Now that Kariambaki had helped me I knew what to do, for I am never short of ideas. I went to where the plastic cup of water was and I picked it up.

"Be careful, sir. This boy will splash water in your face!" said Kariambaki, but the officer didn't flinch. He wanted to see what I would do.

"Open the door, sergeant."

When the door was opened, I walked up to him like a zombie or a hypnotised fool, holding the cup out to him with both hands.

"Have some water, sir," I said, "it is the only thing I can offer you here. They never give me anything else. They don't give me food. For two days I have not eaten but they don't care about me." I had never talked so meekly. And it was taking effect.

"Young boy," he said, "put that water down. I want you to be taken to the hospital immediately. Do you want that?"

"Hospital? But I'm not sick! And I was in the hospital yesterday."

"Not here. I mean the other hospital, Mathare. Don't you feel that kind of sickness?" he asked quietly, watching my face.

"But, Sir, it's very late!" I said.

"Very late? What do you mean, late?" It was only eleven in the morning. He looked surprised.

"I want to die," I said, "I might even die tonight." Just then I realised I might be overplaying it. I had probably made a slip. I kept quiet, while he stared at me. Then, turning to the sergeant, he said, "Bring this boy to the reception office. He must go right away. I am of your opinion, sergeant. He's quite confused. If anyone needs help, it is this young boy."

So on that day, February 11, 1971, on the same day I had written a suicide note, I was handcuffed and ushered into the same van that had brought me to prison. Through God's power, help had come just in time.

\* \* \* \* \*

The van stopped outside the reception office of Mathare Mental Hospital some time in the afternoon. There were four prison warders and a prison sergeant guarding me. I was handcuffed like a mad bull and two warders sat me between them. I had not talked all the way from the prison to the hospital. I just felt like weeping. But bitterness was choking my throat at the mere thought of all that I had gone through, the punishment and the hatred I had had to endure. When the door of the van was opened, the atmosphere changed dramatically. I could see the officers some yards away, the first time I was seeing anything outside the grey prison walls. I forgot my misery, feeling that things were slowly working out my way. Only this morning I had wanted to end my life, but now there was hope.

A tall brown, smartly dressed man came forward. From what I learnt later, he was called Henry and he was the second in command of this nut-house. He had been here for thirty years and prison warders didn't worry him. When we all stepped down, he fixed his professional eye on me for a long moment, then ordered that I be uncuffed.

"This is a prisoner," the sergeant objected, "he must remain handcuffed." But this, he should have known, was quite a different kingdom, with its own boss. Henry barked out that if they did not take off the handcuffs they would have to take me back to prison. At the thought of being taken back to prison I got really angry and I decided to give Henry a helping hand. I charged at the sergeant and hit him so hard with my handcuffed hands that he fell like an axed pole. As I did so I, cried, "How dare you defy my father's orders? Didn't I tell you once that my father would come for me? Do you think I will not tell him all you have been doing to me back home? I wish I had a pistol — I would shoot those helmets off your heads!"

As the sergeant rose up, Henry said, "That's it. I told you to take the handcuffs off. This is not prison, this is a hospital. Take them off or go back with him."

The handcuffs were taken off, after which I was instructed to follow him into the office. The sergeant looked confused. He called out, "But, sir! This boy is serving 20 years imprisonment. He might dash off and escape. Do you think that it's wise...?"

"That's the idea," Henry said, "Let him escape. Let us see him do it. I find it only fair to remind you, once again that this is not prison."

Realising that Henry was a no-nonsense person, the sergeant did not argue any more. All he could do was order two of the warders to go to the back of the building and lay siege, just in case I tried to run. A third one stood at the door and the fourth warder came with the sergeant into the office. Henry sat down, took out a form and began interrogating me.

"What's your name, young man?"

Instead of answering, I looked round at the two warders with me. I folded my fists to strike. Henry, a man of long experience, quickly intervened. "Move away from this boy! Can't you see he hates the very sight of you? You must have mistreated him very badly to make him hate you so much. Move back, get out of here. He is now my patient, not your prisoner. Go, go. Leave him to me!"

When I saw them hesitating, I again decided to help Henry. Before they could get time to fool around, I took the chair beside me and, lifting it with both hands, smashed it on the back of one of the warders – so hard that he went out bending. From what I saw of Henry, he enjoyed every bit of it — provided, of course, I did not suddenly turn on him. I watched the sergeant go to the back of the building where he had stationed his two warders. He beckoned them and after two minutes, they all got into the van and left. I couldn't believe it! My dream of the last two horrifying weeks had finally come true! Hurrah, I had made it! I was in Mathare Hospital, not in that hateful prison. Here I would see no more helmets. I had seen the last of those warders who enjoyed inflicting pain. What remained now was for me to keep my record clean in this hospital so that I would be recommended to stay. But I must not forget my chief aim — to escape to total freedom.

\* \* \* \* \*

But let's not forget one thing — to keep a record clean in this place is quite different from what you might think. To keep it clean in order to be recommended to stay, you have to play dirty, talk dirty, sing dirty songs, play dirty games, do the craziest things. I had to remember to stay mad!

Behave normally and you are proved sane — and the next minute you are back where you came from. So all I needed was to be cautious and I was very good at that. Henry, when he saw that I was mentally back again after watching those warders go, repeated his question to me.

"Tell me your name. What is your name?"

"Zollo. Jack Zollo from the Kenya Navy."

"Ever had a car accident?" he asked me in English, after realising that I was educated.

"Never heard of one. I don't hear much, the way I am treated back there."

"Has someone ever hit you on the head or have you had any type of injury on any part of your head?" Henry asked.

"From what I know, you are not likely to see any of them around here. The way you have treated them has made them afraid. Back there they are used to inflicting pain on others. They are not used to being given orders. I never like seeing the... If it was not for the..."

"Forget them!" said Henry, "Tell me: have you had any member of your family admitted to this hospital?"

"Yes. My father ordered an hour ago that I be brought here. He likes it here more than anywhere else."

Henry started smiling. I couldn't forget the fact that I was under the most critical examination I had ever gone through. But he seemed impressed by my foolishness, if not my madness. My foolishness seemed to amuse him. He stood up and asked me to follow him. Like a hound, I trotted right behind him, wondering what awaited me in this place of lunatics.

It was at moments like this that I thought about crime and whether I had not been misled by my youth. I had never foreseen anything like what I was going through. If someone had told me, during the good old days, that I would one day be happy to be admitted to a mental hospital I would have called him mad — or arranged for him to get a new set of teeth.

I was taken to a certain compound surrounded by a barbed wire fence and a stone wall of about nine to ten feet high. There was a distance of about seven feet between the two barriers and this was where a sentry box was situated. As I passed the sentry, I saw something about him that I didn't like. Later, I learnt that he was a retired prison warder.

Within this yard were Wards Three and Four, in which criminal lunatics, especially those of my category were housed. I was taken to a room all by myself and locked up. I selected a corner and sat down to review things. When evening came, food was brought and I noticed it was somewhat different from prison food, although it was still *ugali* and beans. The difference was that the food was properly cooked, the beans were even fried. There was also tea, and everything was in clean plastic utensils. I was about to devour this wonderful food when a warning signal flashed through my mind. I decided to eat only a bit of the food and half the tea. Regretting the loss, for I was really starving, I decided to paint the wall with the rest of the food, mixing it with the tea. I had to keep doing such mad things until it was time to escape.

I took the bowl and placed it at a corner. I then stepped back and began playing a game — trying to throw the plastic cup into the bowl, noting how many times I scored. I had a feeling that I was being watched and I laughed loudly to myself whenever I succeeded in putting the cup into the bowl. I didn't let them know that I knew that they were around.

Suddenly, the door opened. A lunatic stood there, staring at me. I wondered what he wanted and prepared for the worst. Again I threw the cup and immediately the lunatic went to it. As he stood upright, I ran up to him and gave him the kind of head-

but not even a lunatic can forget. He fell down flat. I sat down with pain ringing in my head. Those who had been watching came in and dragged him out. Once again, without word to me, the door was closed and I continued with my game.

\* \* \* \*

In the hospital compound, there was a person who knew me, although I did not know he was there at the time. He had seen me and recognised me the moment I stepped out of the prison van. His name was Kamau and he was a very well-known gangster.

Like me, he had been admitted for lunacy. Later Kamau introduced me to Mwangi, the man I had hit. I mention this name because I met Mwangi later in prison where he caused a massacre and set off a reign of terror that lasted several years...

The door was opened at around 7.00 am and I went out for breakfast. I looked around the place to see if there was any loophole that would enable me to leave this place as soon as possible before I became completely mad.

At around 8.30 am, Kamau came and I was very surprised to see him.

There was one thing I was beginning to realise — that it was a small world for criminals, a very small world. There were so many boys I had known on the other side who I now met in prison. I began to realise that when you don't see a criminal for some time, just know he is in prison. This is where they go for their holiday. But I was quite surprised to find this one in Mathare. He had been arrested about eight months earlier and his case was still pending. While in remand, he had begun acting funny, like a mad hare, and they had brought him to the nut-house. He was being watched and was waiting for the final word from the head of the asylum.

He gave me a few tips about the hospital. If my type of madness required that I knock a few people down from time to time, that was all right, for there were people here who were so

mad they would never know what hit them. But I must never ever dream of hitting anyone on the hospital staff.

"That would be like committing suicide," Kamau told me. "You might hit the wrong kind of person and then they could easily beat you to death. Then they would note that you died of a sudden illness, and no one would ever know the truth. Be careful who you fight with when the devil starts to rage in your head. One more thing, I know why you are here. I'm here for the same reason. The only difference between us is that you know your sentence, while I'm still awaiting trial. All the same, we are in the same boat. So let me give you some advice. Don't, for heaven's sake, try to escape at this early stage. They are watching every move you make and you still have a long way to go before you can convince them you are really mad. So don't be in a hurry. Dispel their suspicions and then you will stand a better chance."

I believed part of his story but doubted his sincerity. I still had my wits about me and could not swallow whatever some lying criminal dreamt up in the night and brought to me in the morning as the gospel. I had stayed with these boys long enough to know how cunningly they could bring complications into something they feared themselves. Take this boy Kamau. He had been here for several months, not daring to escape, and his only fear was that Jack Zollo would soon do what he feared to attempt. It would be a big let down if I succeeded and left him cooling his heels in this mad place. In such cases, a jealous criminal is more dangerous than even the warders. Taking him into your confidence can be really unwise. In a place like this, which was completely new to me, I badly needed a friend and assistant, but judging from his talk and something in his eye, being quick to trust him would be detrimental to my plans.



\* \* \* \* \*

After three days, those who were watching me must have come to the conclusion that they had another case on their hands that was worth watching for a little longer. I wasn't taken back to

prison; I was taken to a ward accommodating forty to fifty lunatics. Here, they were issued with fairly good blankets and mattresses made of foam rubber. In this ward there were three people who were not mad — Kamau, Mwangi and I. We also had one thing in common — the desire to escape in order to evade long sentences (Mwangi had 23 years).

Mwangi had been in the asylum for about a year and had become one of the most trusted patients in this kingdom of the mad — which made me afraid of confiding in him.

By studying the genuine cases of madness, I was able to improve my own performance but, at times, I could not help laughing at what I saw around me. There were times we would be brought film shows, and the funny thing was that only a few of us would actually watch the movie; the true lunatics were only interested in finding out where this light and the pictures were coming from, so you would see them staring in the direction to the screen, trying to figure things out. Others would go to the screen and start attacking the images. When a fight broke out on the screen, they joined in. There was fun when we went to play football. They would be divided into two groups all right, but then almost everyone would have his own private goal, and then shoot the ball wherever he believed it to be. A sane man watching such lunacy could not help laughing.

Still, I had to be careful not to laugh too much. I started feeling concerned that nothing, so far, had been put on my record to show that my discipline was going down, and I knew that to stay there I had to keep on dirtying my record. So, on one particular occasions, after some games, a certain lunatic started attacking the whole field. I gave him a hand from the other end. Together we dispersed the whole group and they ran like frightened sheep to their respective wards. That left the two of us and we studied each other. I knew this lunatic well, for I had observed him staring at me. He was a tall, strong, handsome fellow who was completely mute. He had an obsession for washing his mouth and would do it on the strangest occasion. For instance when rain fell and there were puddles around, he would walk up to where the water was,

scoop some with his hand and clean his mouth. But he never talked.

When he started walking towards me, I was apprehensive. I had decided that one day I would hit him so hard that he would stop staring at me like that. Probably this was the moment.

I braced myself for battle, but when he got near me he stretched out his right hand. I responded but gave him my left, just in case. His face looked friendly and there was something in his eye that I found strange and interesting. He indicated that we sit down, which we did. The man looked around to assure himself that we were all alone in the open field and then, much to my surprise, he opened his mouth and spoke to me.

"I have been in this bloody place for quite some time now," said the 'dumb' man. "I have looked around carefully but haven't found a single person in whom I could confide. You are the first." He looked at me again, as if expecting me to say something to confirm that he was right. I remained silent. He went on, "I have been watching you from a distance since you came and, looking at you, I knew we could one day make a deal. My brother, I'm not mad and, yes, I can speak."

I was still quiet, listening. I wasn't going to make a mistake of committing myself too soon. But he went on, "My name is Rashid Ibadah and I am from Uganda where I was once a lieutenant colonel in the Ugandan army."

Judging from his mastery of the English language, he was a learned fellow, more educated than I was. This encouraged me.

"My story is very complicated and might sound exaggerated to you," Rashid went on. "But please, just listen and try to believe me. From the look of you, you are the same as me – just pretending to be mad – maybe for the same reasons. But then, brother, before we have talked we cannot know. What I want you to realise is that I wouldn't talk to you if I didn't need help pretty badly. You will wonder why I give you my story but I have all the confidence in myself and in my judgement. You can prove it yourself. I am able to detect that you are not mad, something you know very well. Now, tell me before I continue, can I trust you?"

I stared at this figure beside me, massively built, handsome, brown with thick hair. He was between thirty and thirty-five, if I was any judge, and quite a personality despite the clothes he had on then, the blue hospital uniform. Having been in many places during my life in crime, I knew I was not being played for a sucker and if I was ever to get a genuine friend in this hospital, it was this man, Rashid. I decided to take the risk of trusting him.

"I do not know what you have in mind," I said, "but I can tell you that you can rely on me, that is to the extent of the story that you have told me. It will not reach other ears. As for my own sanity or insanity, that will all depend on the story you have in mind. That is all I can tell you at present."

His reaction to my words showed that he was sane, alright. He was very pleased with my roundabout answer, whose meaning only a sane person could understand. At first it proved difficult between us, because neither of us seemed quite prepared to go the full distance in trust, considering the immense risk this involved.

One wrong move and I would be back in prison. But slowly the trust came, and with it a great sense of relief.

"There you are," Rashid was saying, "I expected that kind of answer. I tell you, you are not mad. Now, this is the thing. I'll be as frank as possible, since I have decided to talk to you and need your help. Between you and me, you are the second person who knows my secret — that I am not a Kenyan. The other person is also here, but I won't tell you who he is, there's no need. I am afraid he is not reliable and I have decided to cut him out and forget about him.

"Here is my story, brother. I was found in possession of two firearms, several rounds of ammunition and several game trophies without permit. I had just checked out of Nyali Beach Hotel in Mombasa. I was in a taxi going to another hotel in which I had hired a room and deposited some of my goods. Most of my belongings, in fact, were in this new hotel. I was transporting these goods to the new hotel when the police stopped me. They

said they were suspicious that I had some bad intentions and would like to search me. They caught me quite unawares. I had no papers, nothing brother. It was bad, very bad."

Rashid went on, "I could not refuse to be checked. They found the firearms and the other goodies in my possession and said they had to take me to the police station. It was quite a sad affair for me because I had been in Kenya for only three days. I didn't even have a country. I had lost my prominent position in Uganda because of the Idi Amin coup. Then I remembered one good thing. I had not spoken a single word because of the shock. So I decided to play dumb from then on. Later they decided that I was mad and recommended that I be brought to this asylum. Do you understand now?"

"In a way, yes."

"And you do see what could happen if I don't do something soon. I can't play dumb forever and I'm really aching to get out of here. What bothers me is what I left in that hotel with the manager. He expects me to pop in any minute to claim my things, which I hope he has not interfered with yet. But then the more I stay, the more he will get ideas. I don't know his name and there's no one I could send." Rashid paused and shook his head, looking very very unhappy.

"I had told half my story to this other fellow hoping that, since he knows this country, we could make arrangements to escape together. My problem is, I hardly know where we are or which way Mombasa is and I would be quite lost if I tried to escape alone. I do not know why, but since I told my story to this fellow, he has avoided me completely. For the first time in my life I misjudged somebody, but only because I was desperate. Sometimes I feel like getting rid of him for good, for I don't know how his mind is working. But that wouldn't solve my problem."

"How can I help, Rashid?" I asked. "I have been here for less than a month. I haven't had time to look the place over. But I also want to escape before they wise up to me and prove me a

phoney. But I can't act before I am satisfied with the plan I am going to make."

"Look my friend, I have figured it all out. I have looked at all the possibilities and even managed to acquire a few gadgets I will need. I have a way of going over the wire. And I have a way of going over the wall. I wasn't a soldier for nothing. Why I need you is that, once I am over that wall, I will not know which way to go. I do not know where I can get clothes or the fare to take me to Mombasa. With a person like you who knows the area, such problems would be overcome. We would make it. What do you say?"

"Let's say we manage to escape and I show you the way to Mombasa, what do we do next? I understand you have run away from Uganda and cannot go back."

"Did I tell you what was in those suitcases I left in that hotel in Mombasa?"

"No."

"The most bitter thing is that I left goods valued at Ksh. 4.5 million. Precious stones. I was intending to sell them here and if possible settle here because this is the only country I felt I could live in, after Uganda. Well, this place is now hot, so I have a second choice — Zambia. I have been there twice, during my days in the army, as an escort of the President. So there's no worry there. I'll be all right once I get my goods."

"You'll be all right, but what about me? Suppose I don't want to go to Mombasa? What do I get out of it after taking you to Mombasa, right to your hotel and you've got everything back?"

"We are crossing a bridge too far but, if that is done, I promise to give you one third of the total value of the stones. That will be 1.5 million shillings, roughly."

I held my breath. 1.5 million shillings was a lot of money. Was this just the talk of a lunatic? Why get excited about some precious stones that I had not even seen? A bridge too far... I played it cool.

"As I understand, the goods are in the form of precious stones," I said. "Do you have any liquid cash? To go to Zambia, you

neea ...quid cash and I don't think there'll be any time to sell the goods with the law on our backs."

Rashid's next words were like music. "I had about 20,000 Uganda shillings and not less than 10,000 Kenya shillings in my suitcases. So that's no problem. The problem is how to get there."

"And you say I'll get a third of all that?"

"I give you my word. Or do you still think I am mad?"

"If I approve of your escape plan, after you tell it to me, then consider the rest done. I am a professional where such things are concerned."

"Okay, that's a deal. Now let's go to the others, lest we start looking suspicious. Whenever you act suspiciously in this place you become marked and they watch you closely, so let's be careful. Let's go back singing. And let's beat up any one we see on the way to the ward, except the nurse."

We went back to the ward, with one doing all the singing. I was happy and the future seemed bright. If all went well, I would soon be free. And if this lunatic was telling me the truth I would soon be rich; rich beyond my wildest dreams.

\* \* \* \* \*

I sat down with Rashid again the following day at a private place. He had not changed, as I had feared. You never know with lunatics. He explained to me his plan and as I listened, I realised he was not a simple man. He had it all worked out, like a good soldier.

In Ward Four, where we both slept, there was a toilet. The wall was made of timber and could be broken through from inside the toilet. There would be noise all right and we also knew that a great number of the lunatics never slept at night. The good thing was that they were too crazy to figure out what we were doing. They might even think we were repairing the place and increasing their security.

The people I feared most were the two characters I knew. We had discussed them and decided that we would do our best not

to arouse their curiosity. In his own way, about which I did not care to ask, Rashid had acquired some handy tools for our mission. One of them was for breaking through the ceiling. We would go into the toilet when our two friends were sleeping. I would stand by the door, preventing anyone from entering while Rashid worked on the ceiling. The ceiling was the only problem. Once on the ceiling, you could drop outside very easily, as there was enough space between it and the roof. The rest Rashid had worked out...

As I say, he was a good soldier.

We would escape at the end of the month. "During that time," Rashid explained, "all the guards are drunk on duty and they start dozing the moment they reach their posts. It will also be a good time to visit a friend or a relative of yours as people have money then. We shall need money for the journey to Mombasa."

I agreed with that and we chose a day at the end of that month. I looked forward to freedom and I felt very lucky to have run into Rashid. I thought of the way he had been staring at me when I believed he was a lunatic and how I had planned to hit him and cure him of the habit. I could have hit my best friend.

Whenever I was alone and the ward was deserted I would go and look the place over. The more I looked at that ceiling, the more convinced I became that it could be done. But just before the big day came I decided to have something bad on my record, just in case we failed and got arrested. They would look into my record and see I was just mad.

We would not be the first escapees; it was a well-known game here, although few of the patients ever got far. Their madness was their undoing and they soon got caught, as they lost themselves in mental confusion. Nothing much happened to them. They were just brought back and I hoped the same would apply to us if we met with bad luck.

In the compound, just outside our ward, where the patients sat and enjoyed the sun, I started screaming. I called the names of all the nurses I knew in the hospital and then called all my friends, telling them about the warders who were trying to kill me. I

shouted any crazy thing that came to my mind. By now I was a professional in playing mad, having learnt from my fellow inmates. Such things in the asylum are just routine and nobody takes much notice. So, to be noticed, I had to do it when a nurse was passing by. Unfortunately the whole thing backfired on me, because this particular nurse, instead of comforting me and then leaving me alone, decided to give me an injection that made me sleep the rest of the day.

Rashid had tried to stop me, as soon as he had seen what I was up to. He had whispered some words I remembered later. "What's the idea now? You'll be given an injection that will make you sleep, maybe for days. Skip the pretence!" But he was too late. He ducked when he saw the nurse coming. The injection was soon in my vein, which made him very perplexed and annoyed.

When I woke up, he was beside me. He had kept some food for me as I had not eaten and we were already locked in. He had everything ready, for we were to escape that night. He had checked the guards and confirmed that the man in our area was terribly drunk. I had by now learnt to take Rashid's word. I ate without much appetite as the needle had made me weak. "So all is well," Rashid said. "Very quiet. I hope you are feeling fine."

I nodded. It was very late at night. Most of the others, including the dangerous two, were asleep. About seven of them were snoring in the usual unpleasant way. My last night here, I thought. Never again would I be so mad as to come to this place. One lunatic was rolling some tobacco, another was kneeling at a corner praying, the first time I had seen someone praying here. Meanwhile, another one was crying for help, moaning deeply and fearfully. I wondered what he saw and what he felt. I felt very sorry for these guys, many of whom were doomed to spend the rest of their lives here. Too bad they couldn't come with us, for they needed their needles and pills. As for Rashid and I, we were sane men, about to leap into action to save ourselves.

With things that way in the ward, with a few moans to hide our noises, it wasn't difficult to break out. Soon we were through the ceiling and we dropped down like two bats out of hell.

## Chapter 3

After our escape, we hurried to Mathare Valley but before we entered the village I stopped him to get myself reassured. "The deal, I take it, is that I guide you to Mombasa where, after you get back your property you will pay me Ksh. 1.5 in the form of gems, is that right?"

"That's the deal. What's the matter with you? Are you doubting me, my friend? After all the talk...!"

"Okay, that's over. Now listen, Rashid. I am not going to trouble any relative or friend of mine because there's no reason for them to know that I'm loose. All we need are clothes and cash, so we are going to rob anybody we come across. We will relieve him of anything he will be having, then rob the next person until we are both suitably clothed. Do not panic for God's sake. Act as if you are back in the Uganda Army. Know that if we slip we will be taken back. We won't be charged, not with our Mathare record, but we don't want to go back there. Or do you?"

"If I did, would I have bothered to escape?" Rashid asked irritably. "As for panicking, my friend, I'm sure I'm not that type. Show me what to do and I'll do it."

So we entered the valley and went deep into the slum's interior. We were using the darkest paths for our own safety. Though I hadn't told Rashid, I was as new as he was to this smelly slum and there was not a single place or face I could say I knew. All I knew was what I had heard from people. I was the one in the lead. We passed between some shanties where there was a lot of noise and I knew, without being told, that it was a *chang'aa* bar. Just then, I stepped on a body in the darkness! It was too dark to see whether it was a man or a woman and I was afraid to touch him or her, in case it was a corpse. I had moved a step backwards and Rashid sensed there was something funny. When he grasped the situation, he said, "Come on, frisk him. Can't you guess without being told that he has come out of the bar and he's just drunk? He can't be dead. Let me do it."

I stepped aside and let him do it. The groan that came from the body on the ground made him jump back nervously. It was so loud that all the noise in the shanties stopped and everything became suddenly still. Then I heard Rashid ask in a voice that could be heard in those shanties, "Panicking, eh? And I thought I was the one who was panicking. Give me a hand!"

At least I was glad he said it in English. In lowly, dangerous places like these, people who knew English were considered safe. If he had spoken in *Kiswahili* I would have dashed off! All around, the voices went up again and we went on with our work undisturbed. *Kikuyu*, *Dholuo* and *Kikamba* were being spoken all around us by drunken men and women who had no idea what was going on a few paces away. The man groaned again, but this time more quietly. Rashid was pulling off his trousers. I started wondering whether he was really a lieutenant colonel or just a violent madman.

I helped him undress the man and he put on the clothes, trousers, shirt, jacket and shoes. He gave me a sweater that was too large for me, but I put it on, for this was not a time to be choosy. We left the Mathare uniform there, except for the trousers I still wore. From the papers in the man's clothes, we knew he was a *Luo*. The clothes fitted Rashid beautifully and the personality I had detected in him came out a little more. Rashid was now ahead of me, leading me as blindly as I had led him. I stepped on an object and bent to pick it up. We stopped to examine it in the faint light and saw that it was a dagger in its leather sheath. With it in my hands, I felt much safer.

We went on through the dark valley until we came to Kenatco. We were better off now as Rashid was well dressed and the long sweater covered my hospital shorts. The man we had undressed had left, after drinking, about 180 shillings in his pocket and we could have bought some good trousers for me were it daylight.

I noticed one bit of weakness in my friend Rashid. He put too much faith in the fact that, if we were caught, we would only be taken back to our lunatic home and could always escape again.

So he could take any risk, he thought. He didn't seem to realise that there were other dangers. Had we been caught robbing that drunk of his clothes we might have been beaten to death by angry Mathare villagers. Had he ever heard of mob justice?

Morning came as we walked. A man Rashid was about to attack without my knowledge - for he was now behind me - called my name and I turned in surprise. I had met him in the Remand Prison and we had liked each other. What had happened to him afterwards I did not know but here he was, apparently acquitted. I was very happy to see him, for he looked like a good chap. Luckily Rashid had not jumped on him, for he would have hurt a friend.

I turned to introduce Rashid, giving him a pseudonym. My friend summed up the situation, what I needed and where I had come from. He asked us to follow him.

This is one good point about criminals: whenever one meets another who has just escaped or been released, he helps him straightaway, without asking too many questions; tomorrow he might be the one in need. We followed this one to Eastleigh Section 2 where he shared a room with another of his type. We found this other boy in bed with a prostitute, which reminded me of what I had been missing while inside with criminals and lunatics. Would I ever go back there? Heaven forbid. Soon, if I was not dealing with a lunatic I would have Ksh. 1.5 million in my hand and would go where the long arm of the law would never find me.

My friend Jeremiah selected a pair of shoes, socks, a shirt, a pair of trousers and a tweed jacket for me and I felt much better, for they fitted me perfectly. We stayed with him all day. As we left his room in the evening we were as smart as professionals ought to be. We had money, too, for Jeremiah had made some donation. We boarded a Coast Line bus and, as it was about to start, Jeremiah said goodbye, wishing us luck. Soon we were out of Nairobi and I breathed a sigh of relief, as if the whole bad dream was finally over. By morning we would be in Mombasa.

We travelled for over thirty minutes without talking to one

another. We had secured a seat near the rear, just the two of us. Rashid had bought two packets of 555 State Express cigarettes and a couple of matchboxes. Now he gave me one packet and one matchbox. I realised he was a man who had been used to expensive tastes before bad luck caught up with him. He also gave me eighty shillings from what remained, just in case things went wrong somewhere and we had to split up in a hurry. As we headed towards our new life, we began glancing at one another and breaking into laughter for no reason at all. I couldn't suppress my giggles and neither could Rashid.

"Why are you laughing, brother?" Rashid asked me, trying to keep a straight face. "What's so funny?"

"This lunacy business has entered our veins, I guess. I'll never be the same again, perhaps, and neither will you. We look at each other's eyes and we laugh. We must be crazy."

"Maybe," said Rashid, "but I'd rather be mad among sane people than back there among a pack of loonies." I couldn't help laughing some more, as if he had just said the funniest thing. Rashid laughed, too, slapping his thighs.

"But tell me frankly, Rashid, for I'm getting worried. Do you feel that you are the same Rashid of a few months ago? And how could you have pretended to be dumb all that time? I was there for less than two months and I feel quite different."

"Please... For the sake of success, let's not discuss lunacy," Rashid said. "It's true I found it hard to stay dumb all that time. Sometimes I felt like shouting and screaming aloud. I feel like screaming now but so what? A lot of sane people scream out loud."

"But they don't scream without a reason. Or laugh like we are laughing."

"Will you please cut it out? Will you skip all that?"

"I've skipped it, Rashid. But I'll tell you one thing... If you are sane, even Salim Abdullah back there is sane."

"Yeah? Say that again. Did I hear you compare me with Salim Abdullah?"

"Not exactly... I only suggested that maybe he too is sane and is just fooling around. Think of it."

Rashid shut me up. Salim Abdullah had been in that damn place for so long that he had forgotten the difference between a man and a woman. In his life, I guess, he had laid more men than women. If you did not know how to handle him, you could land into his trap. He had the face of an ape, the roar of a lion and the strength of a buffalo: but he was also the most cowardly creature you could ever come across. Looking at him or listening to him as he threatened you, you could feel like kneeling and begging him to spare you: but those of us who understood him knew that he was quite easy to deal with. To get him off your back, you only needed to give him a blow in the face or bend down as if to pick up a weapon. When you straightened up, he would be gone.

Our bus stopped to refuel when we reached Mtito Andei. I stepped down to stretch my legs and have a glass of cold milk. However as I entered the hotel, I got the surprise of the year. Whenever you hear me repeat every now and then that this lunacy business had left a gap in me, it is because of some of the things I did. When I entered the hotel I thought I was seeing things. I stopped right where I was. Right before my eyes was the chief of the Mathare Hospital! My breath became laboured and my legs shook. Everyone in the hotel had their eyes fixed on me, for I couldn't move. Then as people got more and more confused, I started recovering my wits. This Indian doctor had never seen me because I had never been given an appointment to see him. As this thought came into my mind, I began to relax and I felt the muscles of my legs come back to life. I started moving backwards, step after step and once at the door dashed off towards the bus. I could hear laughter coming from the hotel. I was very relieved when the bus started moving.

Back on the road I laughed twice without telling Rashid why. One thing was obvious — I was not quite sane! How could I have behaved like that back in the hotel — like someone hypnotised person or someone who had seen a ghost? After giving

Rashid the whole story he convinced me that the fat Indian I had seen was not the same one in Mathare: but, funny enough, he himself became very uneasy, more than I had ever known him to be. He regained his breath only after we had safely got to Mombasa. There he admitted just how frightened I had made him feel by mentioning the boss of Mathare.

We reached the Oceanic Hotel at around 6.00 am. We had no luggage and I hoped we did not look all that odd. At the reception, we learnt that the manager was not around but would report in any time between then and 7.30. Rashid could recognise the receptionist but the receptionist showed no sign of having ever seen him, so we decided to wait for the manager.

We ordered some breakfast. As we were eating, the manager entered the hotel. There were now several customers in the dining-hall. The manager looked around briefly but did not seem to recognise anyone. Rashid, still looking uneasy, but this time for a different reason, decided to intercept him as he was going across the room. The clothes he was wearing now looked shabby, not as smart as they had looked in the night and in different surroundings. I felt very concerned. Would the manager deny or accept? Was this talk of millions sheer lunacy? I tried to listen. "So how have you been doing all this time?" the manager was saying, smiling politely.

"Oh, fine. I told you I'd come back any time," Rashid said. "This world is in nobody's hand, and if you promise yourself that you will go all round it, you will die before coming back where you started." The manager was still smiling, looking amused.

"I've been to many places since you saw me last. But, you know, I'm still not through and I intend to have a day's rest and start moving again. Well, I've come for my luggage. I won't carry everything, though. Just enough to take me a little while. So let's see what you have for me and make the necessary arrangement."

There you were. He was crazy all right. As he was talking I was looking carefully at the manager's face. Three or four times he had tried to interrupt but Rashid kept on talking, although it was

quite obvious that the manager did not follow and was wondering what this funny fellow was talking about.

"Do I understand that you want a room for tonight before you start your journey or did I get you wrong?" the manager asked when he finally got a chance.

"Well, not exactly that," said Rashid. "You do not seem to recognise me. I hired a room here a couple of months ago and I left some luggage with you. It wouldn't surprise me if you have forgotten because I took longer than I had said I would."

"You mean you have a room here? Some luggage too?"

"I had a room here, yes - and some luggage, which I left with you. Try to remember."

The manager, trying to get the picture, looked far away. Then he turned to stare at Rashid and his face lit up.

"Oh, yes. I had almost forgotten. Sorry, Sir." I saw relief flooding into Rashid's whole body. As for me, I felt excitement mounting, as I realised that Rashid might not be insane, after all, and that those gems might be real, not a dream. The manager went on, "Yes, I almost forgot. This was quite some time ago. Lo! I had really forgotten you! Well, it's good to see you again. Your luggage should be in the safe. Just excuse me, I'll have it brought up to you."

For the first time since I had given him the story about the Indian, Rashid managed a dull smile. He gestured to me and I went up to join them. He introduced me as a business partner. We were shown into a private room where we were left alone to check our luggage. This was my moment to believe that Rashid had told me no lies. The ex-lieutenant colonel poured the precious stones on the bedspread and my heart skipped a beat. In my time I had never seen precious stones and could not tell good ones from bad ones. But that kind of knowledge was not needed to judge these ones on the bed. Amateur or not, I could tell that these were real gems, very beautiful and of great value. All I could do was stare with my mouth wide open. Rashid looked at me to see what I was making of all this and, reading only surprise, started counting them. As if to make absolutely sure, he took a

pen and divided them into three piles. I knew why: I was entitled to one third of the lot and he wanted to keep to his part of the bargain. Since they were identical, as far as I could judge, I knew he was not playing me for a sucker. This man intended to give me real gems, for what I had done for him.

A third of the precious stones were put aside. Rashid got up and went to his suitcase again. After a little search, he fished out a container which, to me, looked like another type of rare jewel. It was rectangular and golden in colour, about five inches in length and an inch in width. When he opened it I saw that it had a soft reddish velvet cloth all around the inside. Its lid could only be opened through a secret combination of numbers. He had to show me the formula twice before I could open it on my own. This man, or this lieutenant colonel, had known better days for sure. By now I was all eyes and mouth. After I had opened the small golden case twice and he was satisfied that I knew how to do it, he pointed at the heap of diamonds he had shared out to me.

"Put them in the case, they are yours. One third, as I promised you. These stones I've given you are worth at least Ksh 1.5 million. If you get the right customer, I wouldn't be surprised if he gave you Ksh. 2 million. Be patient. Do not rush things for I would hate to know you have messed it all up and been cheated."

He got up again and went to another suitcase. Meanwhile I was touching the diamonds, marvelling at their beauty and thinking of all the things I could do with Ksh 1.5 million. After all I had gone through, I was now a rich man. I put the diamonds into the beautiful case, still unable to believe my luck.

Rashid came back with two large buff envelopes. He sat on the bed again and poured out the contents of one of the envelopes on the bedspread. I was waiting to see what would pop out this time and was not surprised when red Kenya currency notes bearing the portrait of our President fell out in big bundles. 'Money,' I thought. "These accursed, decorated pieces of paper Money, which sent me to prison for twenty years, with forty eight strokes of the cane...!"

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Again I was in the courtroom listening to the charge. "Peter Henry Kariuki Mugugu, Peter Musili, Stanley Githenji and Jack Zollo. You are all charged that on the, 18th of November this year, jointly with others not before the court, armed with two guns and *simis* at about 9.30 am you robbed Barclays Bank, Naivasha, of 580,000 shillings in cash. It is also stated that, in so doing, you used violence, contrary to section 297 of the Penal Code. The second charge states that, on the same day, you used a car which is believed to have been stolen. The third charge is for accused No. 4 alone, Jack Zollo. It states that on the 14th of December, you were arrested and found in possession of a firearm without a proper permit. A further count states that, while you were being arrested, you used violence to resist arrest..."

That was how the bad dream of prison had began, through greed for money. A son of two respected personalities had to be restrained with the best types of handcuffs the country could afford because of money... which made me pretend that I was mad, making me eat all kinds of filth, wallow in my own excrement, walk nude in front of people... end up in Mathare Hospital, of all places. Money. And here it was again, making my mouth water. Whose idea was it to invent money and how much did the fool have of his own?

"Well, here was my chance to retire. "What's the matter with you?" Rashid asked. "You are staring at me as if you are planning to eat me alive! Please stop acting crazy. This is a different world we are in where we have to start a new record."

"Am I staring at you? I didn't realise."

"I am not a magician, if that's what you are thinking. This is good money, and just as I promised you, you will get one third."

He counted the hundred-shilling notes and divided the sum by three. He gave me one part and kept two parts. He did the same with the Ugandan currency, which was in the second envelope. I tried to protest, saying I had enough — that I had no use for Ugandan money but Rashid threw the notes at me, saying that a deal was a deal. The thought that this man was insane occurred to me, for he was acting most peculiarly.

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With Ksh 1.5 million worth of diamonds, Ksh 3,330 and over 6,000 Uganda shillings, I stood every chance of becoming a millionaire, if I trod carefully. Every worldly door could very easily open up for me as I approached. No need for more crime. At least my contract was over and I was paid for the services I had rendered. A new life must begin. From what I could see of Rashid, he now wanted to be as far away from Kenya as any vehicle or plane or ship could possibly take him.

"Okay, brother," he said to me in a business-like voice, "I think we are now finished. Don't you think we have seen enough of each other? Now I'm leaving. Move with caution, brother. Don't let anybody take you for a ride about those diamonds; they are worth every dime I've told you." He was closing his suitcases, preparing to leave in a hurry. Now that all his troubles were over, there was no reason for him to waste any time here.

"How do you intend to leave this country?"

"Look," he said, "not so long ago I was an army lieutenant colonel. I don't think they gave me that rank for nothing. Worry about yourself." Rashid took his suitcases, said a last goodbye and then vanished. The room felt very deserted all of a sudden. Considering how we had met — as insane people in a lunatic asylum, we had coped very well, disregarding a few minor differences.

I was standing in the centre of the room where Rashid had left me. I stared vacantly in the air, not knowing what step to take next. Now I wondered how to proceed. I looked at the closed door and realised that I had lost a wonderful friend and comforter. I wanted to follow him but knew it was too late. He must have taken a taxi and left.

Once again I remembered the twenty years and forty-eight strokes still awaiting me in prison. If I made one false step and got arrested, the same sentence and same number of strokes

would he waiting, no doubt about that. There was one mistake I was certain I had just made: I had allowed Rashid to go. I knew it was risky to stay in Kenya and was ready to leave. Rashid could have helped me.

But maybe I was not meant to leave before I had finalised one or two things. First I needed to see my parents and let them know that I was no longer in prison and that I was intending to leave the country for a very long time. I could write to them, of course, but could the post office deliver such things as love? Secondly, I could not trust the post office to deliver Ksh 1.5 million worth of diamonds, which I could not risk taking out of the country without first rehearsing the journey. The third point was the GG affair. Because of our partnership in crime and our mutual suffering, GG and I had become very close and I could not ignore his request that I deliver a message to his brother. This would have been an unforgivable sin to me. I felt that, whatever the circumstances, I needed to go home first — and that was my worst mistake, as things turned out. I was really insane.

I boarded a Peugeot 404 taxi for Nairobi at 11 am. I had visited a shop in Mombasa and bought myself a pair of dark glasses and a *tarabushi* shirt with which to disguise myself, if only little. The cops in Nairobi had not forgotten me, and now I was on the Wanted list after escaping from Mathare. I thought about the Indian I had seen at Mtito Andei. After he heard that some patients had escaped, he would most probably remember that strange face at the Mtito Andei hotel and conclude that we were in Mombasa. But I could not be sure of this because Rashid had planted some seeds of doubt in me. It could have been him or not, I wasn't sure. Either way I had to take great care.

As a wanted man, it was utterly insane to take a journey during the day but I took the risk because, as I keep saying, my head was not quite my own. It had been turned by all the suffering I had gone through and it was hard to think calmly and make the correct decisions. But, anyhow, the taxi dropped me outside the Kiirini Bar in Nairobi at 2.30 pm I didn't want to stay in this

town where I was known by every cop and every informer there was, so I went to Tea-Room and boarded another taxi for Murang'a town. My head was telling me to accomplish those few things and then go to Zambia where I could join my friend Rashid. In this plan I overlooked a lot of things which would have been quite obvious to anyone with a sane mind.

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At Gakurwe shopping centre, I went to a hotel GG had directed me to. Here I was to ask for a man called Francis and tell him to go and visit GG in prison immediately. He wasn't there, so I went to the nearest shop and bought a pen, a sheet of paper and an envelope. Using the sane part of my brain, I wrote him a note, giving him all the details GG had instructed me to pass on. Then, using the insane part, I took out three hundred shillings, right in front of the person who was to deliver the letter. I didn't see his mouth water, but all I can tell you is that the letter still hasn't reached GG's brother, which goes to show you that the majority of thieves are not even in prison. So one of the missions that had made me take all that risk was never accomplished. It was in vain.

On to the next mission — to see my parents. I stood outside Kairi shopping centre from where I could see Thuita shopping centre where my mother went for shopping. I could even see the portion of land we owned. I could see the only stone building in the area and it belonged, believe it or not, to my parents. It was only three-quarters of a mile away. There was a valley with a river called Ndurumo which divided my location, No. 14, from Location 15 in which I now was. I should have headed back to Nairobi then and saved myself a lot of misery, for they had laid an ambush for me, knowing it was here I would end my journey at Wagituri farm — where I belonged. Where else would a mad man go but home?

I crossed the Ndurumo river some minutes before dark. Somewhere on the hill, I hid the diamonds and I have no idea who was the lucky man who found them, for they have totally vanished. I was feeling very uneasy but the insane part of me told me to push on. Ninety yards to go. Then I saw the first helmet.

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We recognised each other simultaneously and I turned round and ran. He threw the only weapon he had in his hand but missed. Then he blew on his whistle and the others came out of hiding, two from the direction I had chosen to follow. I changed course, running with all my strength and will from twenty years and forty eight strokes. I was gaining ground all right but was still in any pursuers' sight.

As I jumped across the river, the inspector shouted to me to stop, but I had no such intentions. A bullet, then another were fired. I knew the terrain well and I knew all there was to know about a moving target. I added speed, ducking from the bullets, and got into a rocky and bushy area. Here, I was sure to dodge them as it was a tricky place. Then the worst happened. I stepped on a loose rock and fell down a cliff.

It was growing dark but I could see I was surrounded by a group of not less than twenty people, civilians and police officers, all after me. I could not move and one look at my bare feet made the inspector order that I be carried to the Land Rover.

In the Land Rover, I saw familiar faces of people from the hospital. I could not help thanking God that I was going to be taken back to the hospital, not prison. At 8.00 pm, the Land Rover drove into Mathare Hospital. My freedom had lasted twenty-four hours during which I had gained and lost a whole fortune, the diamonds hidden in the shrubs so many miles away from me.

## Chapter 4

I was back in the cage, in the kingdom of lunatics. Whoever was not a lunatic here was either a nurse or a guard. If he was neither of the two, he had to be taken back where he belonged and this had to be my fate, for now I was regarded as sane. I had proved myself sane the night before when I had demanded angrily why I had not signed for the money that had been found on me. Again it was my greed that put me into trouble.

The following morning, after my arrival, I was given an appointment to see the Indian boss of the institution. I had two alternatives — to try and bluff my way back into madness or to admit I was beaten and answer questions directly. I looked at the Indian and he looked back at me. Yes, we had met at Mtito Andei, hundreds of miles away, for the world was a small place, after all. The arm of the law was long.

We smiled at each other in recognition. That, plus the events of the night before brought the verdict of sane. I was whisked off and, after collecting my belongings, was taken back to prison.

So I was back to the reception office, where I had fought with the guards on the first day I was locked in. All the effort I had put into escaping had come to nothing. If only I hadn't felt an overwhelming desire to see my parents — and if GG hadn't sent me. If only I hadn't become partially mad, after acting thus for so long, I wouldn't have taken the risk of going home.

From the open door of the Sickbay, I saw some patients looking at me and waving. Remembering that I had left GG there, I tried to have a clearer view inside but lost interest when I realised that GG was no longer there. Later I was told he had been transferred to another prison. I wanted him to know that it was partly commitment to his cause that had landed me back here. Now I felt like running genuinely mad at the thought that my twenty years in prison had hardly started; the strokes were still intact. I had accomplished nothing and was back to this strange horrifying world called prison.

"Have you returned to the sane world, young boy?" the duty officer asked.

"What exactly do you mean, sir?" I asked. Perhaps he meant to ask whether I was not normal, after leaving the prison in an abnormal state. Or maybe by "the normal world" he meant the prison itself, which to me wasn't a normal world at all.

"I mean, are you back to normal?"

"To normal... I'm all right, sir."

"I see. So we won't be getting any more trouble from you, eh?"

"I don't think so, sir. But you never know with sickness."

He looked satisfied. I was then received as a new prisoner, on this date, in this prison. Feeling very low and disheartened, I was taken back to block G, to solitary confinement. This was where I had done my mad acting, but all that was over now. I had only lost some precious time, I thought bitterly.

My life was different now because I had given up acting mad and decided become cooperative and obedient. I was never locked in until late evening. Occasionally, the sergeant would tease me about the past, but as time passed by he stopped, seeing that I was serious and did not want to be disturbed. I stayed on here as a block cleaner for a while and was then taken to the officer-in-charge to be assigned duty in the prison industries.

Many things had changed within the short time I was out. GG was gone. The officer-in-charge had been transferred and replaced by a new one.

"A very understanding one," said one inmate.

"He doesn't like to see prisoners mishandled. I understand he sacked a warden and two corporals in his previous prison for roughing up a prisoner," added another inmate.

"He is very rich and drives a Mercedes 280 SE. He is not interested in stealing from the prisoners' rations fund like that other one. In his last prison, some people who knew him say he used to give three times as much food as we get here. Wait and see how fat you will get."

As a new person in the mainstream of prison life, I believed all they said. I looked forward to growing fat in prison. But when I

came to know better, I learnt an important lesson - prisoners like to live in a world of fantasy. Just to escape from wretchedness they would indulge in a lot of wishful thinking, telling each other the most beautiful, colourful lies, and nobody seemed to mind when they found out the dark truth. Beautiful lies are very welcome.

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Soon I found out that the new officer-in-charge had just been promoted and was commanding a prison for the first time in his life. He had no Mercedes Benz and not even a motor-cycle. Within a month, the rations became even smaller than before.

I was taken to see him. I was feeling well and ready to impress him in order to bury my very bad record deep, so as not to lose my remission. A few things were bothering me; things that could make my life here very hard. One was that I had made an escape. Fortunately, it was not from prison, but they could still hold that against me and put me on the escapees' list. When you were on this list, you had to wear some stripes - either red or blue - on each side of your shorts and on the front and back of your shirt.

Red stripes marked the prisoners on the A list, usually those who had escaped from jail. Blue stripes marked those who had escaped from police custody - but there was little difference between them because neither were allowed to move about in prison. There was a book in which their names were written and they had to answer roll-call three times a day. They were housed in their own block with special guards, and were locked in soon after evening (three o'clock) meals.

My other worry was that I had a Mathare Hospital record, which meant I could be put in that group for better surveillance. Although I wouldn't wear the stripes, my freedom and privileges would be very much curtailed.

The two warders who took me before the officer-in-charge were bothering me quite a lot, straightening my arms whenever I forgot to do so, pushing my head up and so on. Standing next to the

fficer-in-charge was the chief warden who had made this special appointment.

"Your name, young man?"

"Jack Zollo."

I was promptly pushed back and hit on the head. Not knowing what I had done, I looked at the warders angrily. They told me to say "Afande" or "Sir" whenever I was answering.

"I can see you have been behaving very badly," said the officer-in-charge. "Fighting, insulting everyone and so forth. Why do you behave this way, young boy?"

"I was mentally sick, Afande."

"Are you all right now?"

"Yes, I'm fine now, so there won't be anything of the sort again, Afande."

"It's up to you to decide. If you want us to treat you like a human being, we will do that. On the other hand, if you want to be treated like a wild beast, we can do that too. You understand?"

"Yes, Afande."

"Choose your own way. Now what type of trade would you like to learn?"

"Sign-writing, Afande."

He looked at me very sternly. "If it wasn't for your age, young boy, I would give you something else you wouldn't like at all. I do not want to be hard, so I'll take you to the place you have requested. Sign-writing. It is up to you to keep up the discipline. If you don't, I'll have you segregated until I am satisfied that you are ready for discipline. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Afande"

"All right. You can go."

The warders did not take me back to solitary confinement. They took me to another block housing Stage 2 prisoners, those who had done less than three months. The following day, I was taken to the polishing section where I would learn sign-writing. There were other courses here, like silk-screen printing, art-painting, general-painting, glass-cutting, framing and so forth.

But this was another kingdom commanded by a different person all together. Before you were allowed to specialise in the field you had chosen, you had to first learn how to smooth the furniture with sandpaper. With so much dust breathed in every day I wondered how one would last twenty years. After sandpapering you were shown how to apply wax on the cheap grade of furniture using a sickening solution of turpentine. By the time you got through the course you had requested, you could easily have served half your sentence.

Luckily, for me, I had enough education and when the officer in-charge of this section realised this, I was given special treatment. He took me to the Commercial Art section, which was the most honoured place in prison. My instructor was a white man who was serving seven years and who was about to be released. He gave me some advice.

"Do you think they brought you here as a special favour for your own good? No. It is for their own benefit. They know you have education; they know you will learn quickly and be productive. You have a long stretch in which to serve and serve well. It is up to you to know how you will pull along."

Soon I realised he was a very good instructor, and in me he had found a very willing student. This white man was the supervisor of other prisoners in the section. It was his duty to assign tasks and report which materials were needed. As a Stage 4 prisoner he had other privileges.

This stage is achieved by prisoners who had served over eighteen months without an error. They had more privileges than Stage 2 or 3. They could watch TV up to 6.30 pm and purchase such items as tea, sugar, milk, coffee and so on from their earning scheme which, in most cases, was ten cents a day. Increases rose gradually until one reached a peak of 20 cents a day. This was a special stage and was given to those who had done three years without an error. But then it was regarded by the authorities as such a high honour that one could go twenty years without ever attaining this special stage.

My section was also known as the Finishing Section, for it was where all the carpentry and metalwork was brought for painting or polishing. It had more prisoners than other sections and was packed with illiterates.

Because of the privileges I was given in this section, I was, unlike the others, free to take different courses and within three months, I could write sign-posts of any size, paint pictures of animals, and print by the silk-screen method. I was soon promoted to Stage 3 and moved to another block where the privileges were even better because we were allowed an hour's recreation, playing volleyball, before we were locked in. Things improved as days and months went by.

It was around this time that I started smoking, a very dangerous thing in prison because if the authorities found out they had no more respect for you. There was a heavy penalty for smoking. Once you had decided to start smoking, you had to join the black-market run within the prison between the warders and the prisoners. It was a tricky business because not all warders were involved. You could do business with one warder and then be caught by another warder, soon after leaving the scene of the deal. The warder benefited most because, for the price of a cheap packet of Rooster cigarettes, he could get an item valued at fifty shillings. But then a prisoner had nothing to lose because whatever he passed on secretly to the warder did not belong to him but to the prison.

One could, of course, get money from friends outside, but this also had to be handled carefully, through a friendly warder.

The worst method of all to gain membership in the smoking club was, of course, to become a *shoga*. At first I did not know what they meant when they said that so and so was a *shoga*; I assumed it was the name of a tribe like Somali or Giriama. And then I saw people being taken forward, accused of doing it to each other. It shocked me so much I gave up smoking for a while. Imagine sleeping with another prisoner, just for a fag!

But there was yet another way – no less incredible – of getting a smoke in prison. So you badly needed a cigarette? Give up

some of your ration! One full ration of lunch or dinner earned you one precious cigarette. Three pints of breakfast porridge also bought you one cigarette – which meant you had to go without breakfast for three consecutive days to get a lousy cigarette. No wonder then, that cigarettes were regarded as gold, and no matter how rich a person was with cigarettes, he would never smoke a full one at one go. To smoke a full cigarette would have been very extravagant, and so one cigarette was always cut into two pieces, each called a *ki-piece*.

"What nonsense!", I thought, as I saw people forsaking food and going hungry for the sake of cigarettes. "Must one smoke?"

But with the boredom of prison life, smoking was a great luxury and avoiding it was next to impossible. It was the single relief one could resort to. Without a cigarette one felt miserable and empty and there was little joy in life. With a cigarette hidden somewhere, you had something to look forward to after the long monotonous hours of the prison regime.

So I got in touch with a warder from my location and we talked. There is a thing you must know — when people found out that you had robbed a bank, they gave you a lot of respect. The warders talked to you hoping you might send them some place where the loot was hidden. They believed you were a rich man and it didn't do any harm to give them that impression. Since I had enough funds within the prison, I made an arrangement with this warder from my location to have some of it withdrawn for me. I sent him with a note to Milly, in which I instructed her to come to the prison and collect some money. Meanwhile, I applied for this money from the authorities, although it couldn't be paid to me personally. After Milly collected it, she would give the first instalment to the warder and he would take one third and give me two-thirds.

After a week I was allowed to withdraw one thousand shillings. Milly came and got the money. She passed five hundred to the warder and he passed it on to me, after taking his cut as agreed.

Now I was among the prison tycoons. I started smoking without much trouble. The same warder became my regular supplier. Now

with the gold on me, life became quite tolerable. I could afford any amount of food I needed, even milk, because those who had milk recommended as part of their diet by the doctor were quite willing to trade their pints for cigarettes. You could even get a kilo of meat. Things like milk and meat, so essential for health, could be traded off for just a few cigarettes. Behind prison walls is where you find folly without boundaries. Imagine one giving away one kilogram of sugar for sixteen cigarettes that won't do his lungs any good!

Night followed day and day followed night and I got more or less used to prison life. Now that I was richer than many other prisoners, some of whom had longer stretches than me, I took courage and was no longer thinking of suicide. One day at a time and God willing, I would see the end of twenty years. And then temptation came. I made another bid to escape.

A friend of mine called Muiruri was imprisoned for four and a half years for stealing a motor vehicle. A few days after his arrest he was brought to the same section as I was in. All I can say is that he was the toughest criminal I had ever known. He had only four and a half years, but now he wanted us to escape. It was all right with me since I never turned such an idea down. So we sat down to plan how.

He had a hundred and one ideas – most of them mad – but finally, I approved of one. It would involve three people only.

It was in the polishing section of the prison that finished items from the industries were packed into the vehicles for transportation. This was done by the prisoners. As a standing rule, there had to be a guard to ensure that everything was all right, and to give the green light for the vehicle to move off. But in practice, it was very rare to see a guard — and when one came, he stood at a distance. There were two types of transport vehicles — an open one, and a hooded one. For purposes of escape, the open one was better than the hooded one. The latter was locked from outside which made it impossible to jump out at the right moment. We decided to escape in the open vehicle, hiding inside some wardrobes. We would have to make a small

space between two wardrobes facing each other, but the space could be concealed with a kind of foam rubber they used to prevent goods like these from knocking against each other.

There was another precaution we had to take. We had to have a prisoner looking out so that he could warn us of danger. For this, we needed a very reliable friend, and between us, we decided to have Kennedy who was now employed in the spray section just outside the packing area.

Kennedy approved of the idea. Three days after completing our plans, things took the shape we had hoped for. I now had some power over the prisoners in this section and could select the prisoners who were to do the loading on this particular day. I took a group of docile, simple people who could do what they were told without becoming suspicious about what we were doing.

But things started off with very bad luck. For the first time in weeks, they brought a guard to inspect the loading. This necessitated a slight change of plan. Instead of having Kennedy up on the truck packing with us, we had him keep the guard busy talking, promising him everything under the sun, just to divert his attention. Kennedy walked up to the guard after we had sorted out our hiding places. We had decided we would try to jump out after travelling for about twenty minutes.

I got rid of the man who had been packing. Kennedy was busy chatting with the warden on guard. Muiruri and I quickly got into our separate wardrobes and hid ourselves under the foam rubber. Once inside my wardrobe, I started shivering. Everything inside my belly turned watery as I thought of what would happen if I was caught again. I listened intently for the order that would make the truck move. All I could hear was my own heartbeat. The slightest touch on the vehicle by a passer-by frightened me. I felt the need to urinate but it turned out to be diarrhoea. I had never, in my life, experienced such fear. To do what we were doing needed hardened hearts, and few would have attempted it. The sound of our own planned signal also made me jump a foot inside the wardrobe.

Waiting for the vehicle to start moving seemed like eternity. I heard the driver's door open and at that moment remembered a very important thing I had forgotten. As the prisoner-in-charge of the packing, my officer would want to know from me the number of wardrobes we had packed. There were some crutches also at the far back of the vehicle and no one except me knew how many there were. The group I had selected consisted of illiterates who were too dumb to know a crutch from a walking stick. And no one from the whole section knew where I was. I sweated harder when I heard my name being called.

"*Na huyu kijana, ameenda wapi saa hii hii?* (Now where is this boy gone just this minute?) *Wee, Maasai, unasema hayuko kule chooni?* (Hey, Maasai. You say he's not in the toilet?)"

"*Apana, Afande, mimi sikuona yeze buko* (No, Afande, I didn't see him there)."

"This boy is sometimes a nuisance," the officer muttered angrily. "I don't know whether it is because of this long sentence, or what. I just don't know. Anyway, Morris, climb on the vehicle and count those crutches at the back, and give me the figure."

My clothes were now wet with sweat and soft shit. I was at the same time shivering as if with a terrible cold. In fact, if somebody had been listening, the vibration of the wardrobe would have given me away. Morris finished the counting and stepped down from the vehicle. The green light was given and we were off and away. We were at last moving towards freedom, and if I got away this time, I would fly off like a bat to Zambia. No one would ever catch me again, I promised myself.

But when we reached the gate, something happened which made me wet my shorts again. Quietly I said goodbye to the world with its happiness, riches, peace of mind and freedom. The vehicle was wanted back!

"You are ordered to take this vehicle back to the Industries," said the gate-keeper. "They have just phoned me to tell you to go back straightaway."

"What is it they want? Did they say?" the driver asked.

I strained my ears so hard they almost ached, for I wanted to hear the reply to this vital question. My whole future life depended on it. It wasn't necessary to strain my ears all that hard because I could hear very clearly, getting more and more frightened.

"I think there is something terribly wrong. Was there a guard when these things were loaded? Anyway, go and find out. You will soon know."

And so the vehicle was reversed, and we headed back to the Industries as ordered. It stopped just outside the polishing section and the driver got out. I wondered what they would do with us when they opened the wardrobes and found us in there. I prepared myself for anything. From where I was, I could hear every movement outside. I thought I heard footsteps of about fifty warders surrounding the vehicle, waiting for it to be unloaded. I also thought I heard two warders climb into the back of the truck. Did I hear one moving just near where we were? Now I had just a few seconds before my death. Realising how filthy I was, covered in my own urine and shit, I took a handkerchief out of my pocket, passed it down my shorts and made an attempt to clean myself. I couldn't stand the shameful thought of leaving a shitty mess on my corpse. As I dropped the handkerchief, the wardrobe I was in was pushed and turned. I felt the door being pulled and, knowing there was no other way out, I pushed from the inside to make their work easier. To my overwhelming relief, Kennedy's face stared at me!

"Step out immediately he whispered urgently. "There is no one around except two prisoners and they are busy." I jumped like a bird out of a trap. So the fifty warders I had heard had all been in my imagination. All the damage I had caused myself was out of fear, a bitter way to prove oneself the greatest coward on earth. The short stay in prison must have changed me tremendously. Since when had I become so jumpy?

But thank God, we had selected a true professional for the job of guarding us; a person who couldn't rest until he was satisfied that we were safely out of prison; a person who would have spent sleepless nights until we had sent word to him that we

were free and safe. Kennedy had kept his ears alert. Soon after we had left, he had heard someone say that the vehicle which was supposed to carry some goods to the State House was not coming and, therefore, the vehicle carrying the wardrobes to the Ministry of Works should be stopped at the gate, and turned back so that it could go to the State House instead. So he had waited for the vehicle to come back and saved our skins.

Well, this was not our day. The five of us started unloading the lorry. Muiruri and I had managed to slip out of the wardrobes, but not without being noticed by two or three fellow prisoners. Within minutes, about half the prisoners in that building housing the Metal Section, five Carpentry Workshops, a Machine Shop and the Upholstery Department knew all about it, that some prisoners had tried to escape. It was not surprising because that was how prisoners were. Once a secret was out, it spread like wild fire.

I was helping to unload the last wardrobe when I heard an outburst of laughter behind us. I turned back to see what was happening, hoping to join in the fun. Someone was pointing at the lines of dry urine that were running down the legs of my friend Muiruri. He too had urinated on himself, but had no handkerchief to clean up the mess. Having done the same, I couldn't laugh at him and I walked away to isolate myself. At least I wasn't the only coward in the prison.

\* \* \* \* \*

As we went back to the block that evening, I felt very uneasy and miserable. I knew something had gone wrong somewhere, but I could not quite place it. All I knew was that when such a great number of prisoners knew about something like that, the end of it was yet to come. Just like in the world outside, there were informers in prison. Usually, they had very little to report — just mere gossip and speculation. But this was a big story for any informer. The authorities would at once see the loop hole in that loading zone, remember my record, my absence during the

loading and come to the obvious conclusion. Any fool could have put two and two together and come up with Jack Zollo.

My fears were realised the following morning, but the information passed on by the informers was inaccurate. It was said that a plan was being hatched by the prisoners to escape in the manner we had tried, and that I was behind it. There was a long list of prisoners who were planning to escape by hiding themselves in the wardrobes. At about 9.30 am, I was called by the officer in charge of the Industries. He was with other senior officers. I was interrogated closely and by the time I left, I knew I had not been very convincing. My years of imprisonment again felt very heavy on me and I dreaded the future.

As we closed for the day, I was called to the office of the Senior Technical Instructor who was also the Deputy Officer-in-Charge, Industries. He informed me that I should not report for duty in the polishing section until further notice. I was to stay in the block until he sent for me.

I asked him whether the officer in the section where I worked was aware of this, and I was told not to worry. I had thought he would protect me because he now relied on my keeping section records. But I had forgotten that he also took orders from the same man who was now giving me mine.

That night I did a lot of worrying. I knew I wouldn't be taken back to the polishing section, and even worse, no other section would be happy to take me. An escapee reflects very badly on his warders. I was a marked man now, a reject, and I wondered what my fate would be. I knew they would not keep me in the block as a cleaner for all of any twenty years. This left me with the greatest fear that I might be kept in solitary confinement throughout.

A few days later a clerk from the Reception Office came for me. I knew why. I learnt from a reliable source that there was a plan to transfer forty prisoners to the Naivasha Maximum Security Prison. These were prisoners serving 15 years or more, and I was certain that I was among them. Because of this advance knowledge, I was fully prepared. I had sent a message to all my

relatives still interested in my welfare that I would very soon be taken to Naivasha, and they should visit me there from then on.

Having known the wealth and the power that was in cigarettes, I had decided that I would smuggle at least a hundred-shillings to the new prison. I had therefore folded a hundred shilling note tightly and hidden it in the waistline of my shorts, now prepared to go whatever hour of night or day that I was called.

I did not want to go to the Naivasha Prison. I knew that, in the past, some prisoners had their transfers cancelled after they had bribed the reception clerks so that they could have their records hidden. But this was impossible for me for I was now a marked man. Besides, all the prisoners serving more than fourteen years were being transferred and so, even if I used two or three pounds to bribe someone, I would still be discovered eventually.

So I gave up the idea. I tried to imagine what the new prison would be like...

From what I had heard, once you were there, you lost communication with the free world. Worse than that, it was said that no one went out of his cell after coming from duty, and that food was supplied by a rail system which went round the blocks from the kitchen, stopping outside every cell, to give the prisoner a few seconds to pick up his rations. They said there was no possibility of a prisoner picking up two rations. Only one came into view through a hatch.

As for the security of the prison, there were warders going round on a thick high wall riding horses and followed by fierce dogs. Each warder carried a machine gun. There were large towers where each warder reported after doing a round.

I did not know what to believe. In the prison there was very little difference between fact and fantasy. They had even worse things to say about the place, which I would not care to narrate, for it was all nonsense. Having no choice, I hardened my heart and prepared myself to face what was ahead.

I was lucky to have prepared because after I was called to the Reception Office, I never returned to my cell block. Even if I had wanted to, they would not have given me the time. I was

surprised to see that all the other prisoners who were leaving were given a few moments to prepare and that their property had been checked and signed for. They had considered my past record and thought that I might become violent. So they had decided to finish with the other prisoners first, and then proceed with my case.

They had, of course, misjudged me. I was more than willing to cooperate. I always knew when I was beaten. Quietly, I checked my clothes, item after item, as they were being read off by the Reception Officer. I put them in my bag after satisfying myself that they were all there. I had two sets of personal clothing which you might recall because, I had been admitted to Kamiti twice. I made a thumb print impression on the form because this was the standard way of signing for anything in prison, whether you were a university graduate or illiterate. No one could trust a criminal's signature and, in any case, no one wanted the educated to feel more important than the illiterate.

We were handcuffed in twos, and then ushered into a *Black Maria*. What a queer name to give such a van, I thought to myself as I climbed up into its grim dark interior.

The way these people escort you, one might think that you were a king or the most precious thing they possess. When the *Black Maria*, carrying more than its capacity, passed through the gate, I noticed a Land Rover shoot out in front of us. It had an open roof. While standing, we could see it was full of GSU officers armed with machine guns. Another armoured Land Rover followed ~~the~~ the first. The driver of our van seemed to have been given instructions to drive at top speed, and we were thrown against the steel walls with every turn. By the time we reached Naivasha, our faces were swollen. We had tried to slow him down by yelling but he was an old hand who enjoyed his work.

\* \* \* \* \*

We arrived at Naivasha town, left the main road and headed for the prison, driving on a dusty, bumpy road which did us great harm.

harm. No one could open his eyes because of the flying dust. All the prisoners were coughing. Otherwise, we were silent as we drew near our new home which, according to the stories we had heard, had a large sign post with one Dholuo word written on it: *Oriti* – Good bye!

The van stopped outside the gate to give the gatekeeper time to decide whether to open or not, for he took his time. When we finally entered, everyone was quiet. The news we had heard of this prison made us all afraid and we prayed that we would get out.

Our clothes, hair and eyelashes were very dusty and we looked like gravediggers. We were outside the Reception Office where the *Black Maria* had climbed a small hill in reverse gear. We entered the hall where, before any other ceremony, we were sent straight to the shower room which was just big enough to hold five or six people. We were pushed into the room like cows into a dip. The water was very cold. We could have been taking a bath on top of Mount Kenya or the Himalayas.

To put you in the picture, this was not done out of hospitality either, but as some sort of disciplinary measure — something to jolt us into alertness. It was quick and fast with everyone being driven out quickly with his body hardly touched by the water. I was still clinging to my hundred shilling note. It was my only friend at a time of great difficulty.

After the shower, each one of us was given a new pair of *lunguru* (prison uniform) and were ordered to squat in lines of five. A voice came from a loudspeaker:

"Attention, please!" An invisible person called out. "Senior Sergeant Shitani, please send ten warders to the Reception Office!"

We started shivering. Two minutes later, we were being mocked, frisked, abused and pushed around, questions being fired rapidly.

"What's your name? How much money did you steal? Where did you hide it? Do you think you can force us to lie down here as you did to those people in the bank? Have you seen a person like me anywhere? Do you think, even if you met me outside,

you could do anything to me?" They went on and on, breakin us in.

I kept very quiet and decided not to give cheeky answers like I was used to doing. Although most of us were tough bank robbers we could see we had met our match. There was a lot of violence in the air. Our escort from Kamiti Prison, by way of introduction told them mockingly that I was the type that could not be "scratched", a graduate of Mathare Mental Hospital. This was their method of blacklisting a person they either disliked or feared. The new warders seemed to take good note of that and I knew I would have it by and by.

We passed the Duty Office where we were again pushed about. We received more abuse as we were marshalled towards the cell blocks. Here I almost got heart failure. The search that was in this area was what was known in the profession as the "tooth brush search". It was a sheer miracle that my hundred shilling escaped detention. I was sweating, knowing I was the only person who had a battle in front of him for smuggling something into this prison. Luckily, I passed between two warders, one in front and one behind. The one in front thought that I was going to the one behind, while that one thought I had already been searched. So I escaped.

We were now divided into two groups. Those serving less than eighteen years were put in one group and kept in Block B. The rest were taken to Block A, where hundreds of inmates were eagerly waiting to see if they could spot a friend.

Prisoners had gathered at the windows and the iron gates of their blocks, staring at us and waving. As we passed the first block, moving in pairs, I heard someone call to me:

"Jack Zollo!"

From the distance, I had no way of knowing who it was. I could not recall that voice. All I could see were hands waving to me; but I did not bother to wave back.

On to the second block, the third and lastly the fourth where I was to stay. To my surprise, I was recognised in each block. And again, I heard someone call me, "Jack Zollo!"

All this meant that I was very well known in criminal circles and that many of my friends who had disappeared were locked in here. I had a feeling that here, at last, I would pay all my dues.

\* \* \* \* \*

Outside the fourth block, I saw GG. I couldn't believe my eyes. I was so happy to see him.

"GG! You're here, too?"

"Yes, of course I'm here, Zollo. Didn't you know? Come on, let me take your things."

He took the mat and the three blankets I had been issued with, and then led me to my cell. I was still breathless from the treatment we had received: but with GG by my side, I no longer felt out of place. I could now afford to feel like an old Naivasha prison inmate. My cell turned out to be Number 88, which I was to share with two others I had come with from Kamiti. I didn't know them very well.

After arranging my blankets, GG asked me to come out to the resting yard. A group of more than thirty prisoners were following us. I shook hands with so many tough boys that I got tired. What surprised me was that all these people knew Jack Zollo, yet I could not remember most of them. I got a little bit bored listening to all of them trying to make me remember the past. I was reminded of fights and other bad things because when a criminal wants to jog your memory, he quotes some notorious incident he believes you can remember. They seemed to know me pretty well, judging from the kind of incidents they were recalling.

I wanted a few minutes with GG and I told them so. But even then, they could not hold back their curiosity for long and they kept coming back. I could not quite blame them, for inmates

here were starving for news. In the short time I had before we Stage Three prisoners were locked in, I gave GG the whole story as it had happened, after I had left Kamiti for Mathare Mental Hospital. He listened very patiently until I had finished, and then burst into laughter.

"Tough luck Zollo, but it's good to see you, anyway. I thought by now you'd be in Congo!"

"What kind of a place is this, GG? Is it as bad as they say it is?" I asked anxiously.

"You'll find out soon enough. But it's peaceful. Don't worry too much."

Just then, we were called for lock-up. I went straight to my cell, spread my mat and lay down to think. I felt I had come to some kind of end. GG had told me nothing much about what the future held, but I could see he was not happy. I thought of all the rumours I had heard about this place, but I learned long ago not to trust prison gossip. The horse-riding warders were nowhere to be seen. The rail system for distributing meals was the figment of someone's imagination. Maybe this place was not so bad after all.

Unlike the Kamiti Prison, where you only saw clouds above the yard and the occasional bird that flew past, this prison, being in a low valley surrounded by high hills, offered a wider and more interesting view. One could look up at the high hills from the resting yard and enjoy the sight of animals grazing on the hillside. I thought whoever had designed this place must have had a soft spot in him and had borne in mind that criminals condemned to spend so many years of their lives in this kind of place deserved a little relief.

You could see many different kinds of antelope, monkeys and dogs, cows and goats grazing. You could even see other prisoners from the Annex Prison as they went out to work on the Prison Farm. I talked about all this with my two cellmates, but I didn't like them much. I didn't quite like the look of them. When they were sleeping, I stood up to survey the cell we were in for I wanted to find a safe place to hide my hundred-shilling note. I

was guarding it with my life because I knew I would rank high in this new prison with this kind of cash and my old reputation.

I examined every inch of our cell that night. I saw a small crack at the bottom of the door and knelt down to examine it carefully. It looked fine. I realised it had been used for the same purpose by whoever had occupied this cell before me. This made me hesitate; what if this person was still around? Then I realised that he couldn't be around since these two guys were also new in the cell, like me. I folded the note tightly and tucked it deep in to the crack. No one would ever suspect there was wealth there.

The following morning the cells were unlocked. I decided to study what the old boys of this prison were doing as this was the best way to learn the survival techniques used here. After the usual counting by the Duty Officer, life proceeded pretty much as it had at Kamiti — cleaning out the chamber pots, going for breakfast, and then off to the Industries.

GG came in the morning, even before I had done anything. He wanted to give me some advice since I could be called to go and see the officer-in-charge any time from then. He wanted me to join the metal section to learn welding. He soon realised that I was not interested and dropped the subject. But he gave me an idea about the kinds of things to expect.

At 12.00 noon, we met once again in the Block for lunch. It was then that a fight broke out between an African and the only European prisoner in the block. The European was serving five years for killing a police officer and a police dog in a hit-and-run accident. He had been arrested in Tanzania where he had fled to. The African was a Kikuyu serving 14 years for robbery, a queer sort of chap.

The fight had been caused, in fact, by his peculiar liking for grasshoppers, beetles and other insects. Sometimes he would leave his meal, go to the part of the resting ground where there was a patch of grass and start hunting for the insects. He would tear an insect up in pieces and mix it with his stew — a habit the white prisoner found revolting. Then he would sit down and eat — spoiling the white man's appetite.

This white man and an Indian businessman, who was serving nine years for theft, were enjoying what were known as Scale C and D meals which, for reasons best known to the authorities, were not given to any of the Africans. The white and brown skins, from what I had seen, were still feared and honoured even in jail. How else could you explain that these two used to enjoy such delicacies as chapatis, bread and butter and pints of tea? Certainly, they felt superior to the rest of the prisoners and looked down with loathing on this poor guy who was eating grasshoppers.

In this particular incident he happened to notice a beetle, his favourite insect, pushing out of the soil from a hole near the European's foot. That was what started the war.

"I'll blow you to hell, nigger, if you come any closer," the white guy said. "Take those filthy hands of yours away from me."

"I want that bull pushing soil between your legs. I'm not eating my lunch without it."

"I said you're not going to get it, damn it. Now could you move your ass out of here before I lose my temper!"

"I want that bull."

"I said you're not going to get it."

"If I don't get that bull, I won't eat my lunch, and that is one thing I have sworn never to miss. So move your foot so that I can get my bull."

This was enough for Johnny, the white man. He took his bowl and all the food in it and hurled it straight at Wainaina's face. Before he could recover from the shock, the white man gave Wainaina a blow in the belly and another on the chin which knocked him flat. He fell on his own lunch.

The other prisoners were watching sullenly. They knew this European and how he despised Africans. Later, I heard that at his trial, he had denied killing anybody, saying that he had only killed two dogs.

Wainaina may have been a lunatic alright, but he certainly knew how to hit back. He slowly picked himself up, wiping the stew from his face. Being a hard core criminal, he knew a few tricks

that the white man did not. Suddenly he lept up in the air and gave the white man a flying head-butt.

He staggered and fell. He lay on the ground, bleeding and counting the stars. Many of the prisoners applauded, but the Indian didn't like that. He hated to see his buddy down, and he went for Wainaina in a clumsy sort of way, trying to strangle him. But the Indian was weak and Wainaina easily pushed him aside. Now all hell broke loose. All the prisoners were now smelling blood, aching to have a go at the white man and the Indian clown. The two would have been finished by this yardful of bitter, hardened criminals who had watched them eating good food every day while they ate ugali. But the two had some friends — parasites who hung around them waiting to get the leftovers of the kind of food an ordinary criminal only saw in his dreams. So a war broke out between the prisoners, some of whom had other scores to settle. It got so hot that people could have died had someone not broken the alarm on the wall to call the warders.

They came and order was quickly restored.

In a matter of minutes, we were all locked up, waiting for the outcome. But in my hurry to get back into my cell before being hit by a warder, I had lost one toenail. As I nursed my toe, I wondered what kind of place they had brought me to. I had now seen how furious and violent the warders here could be. They knew they were dealing with the worst kind of criminals and they showed no mercy when this kind of thing happened.

The verdict was collective punishment. For the next two weeks, we were locked in as soon as we had taken our meals, which we took while squatting in lines of five. We would no longer read newspapers or listen to the radio. This last pronouncement was made three days later, after some old timers angrily said that if everyone was going to be punished for the misconduct of a few, then everybody would participate in future fights. This made the officer-in-charge very angry and he threatened further punishment.

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On Saturday, after meals, I met most of my other friends. We were watching a football match between the warders and the prisoners. I was very surprised to see that nearly all the criminals were men I used to know on the other side (along with a few others who used to pose as Criminal Investigation Department officers). They had been rounded up too and were in this prison. It was saddening to realise that the profession we had chosen had ruined the lives of so many people. Many young boys who had terrorised most of Nairobi's urban areas, calling themselves the "42 Brothers" were now here serving 14 years and over for violent crimes such as snatching watches, breaking into cars and raping women.

Maybe many people here were getting exactly what they deserved. But this one boy had done nothing. He told me his story.

He had been on his way home after looking up his girlfriend and not finding her at home. Near the bus stop he saw her, walking with another man. As he passed them, he snatched her headscarf so that she would have to look him up later and explain her behaviour. That was the worst mistake of his life. Apparently the girl was in love with the other boy, a bank clerk. The boy who had snatched her headscarf was just a young school-leaver struggling through life, doing odd jobs. To show the bank clerk she had nothing to do with that shabby boy, she went to the police to report a crime of robbery with violence.

When the other boy got back to his home in Kiambu town, he waited patiently for his girl to come any minute. But he was surprised thirty minutes later when he answered a knock and saw, instead of the girl, three police officers armed with pistols.

The bank clerk was an eye witness two weeks later in a Kiambu court when this young unfortunate fellow was charged with stealing a headscarf valued at Ksh 20 and Ksh 40 in cash allegedly tied inside the cloth. He had used violence, contrary to Section

296-A of the Penal Code. Despite the fact that the boy had never in his life associated with criminals, he was found guilty and sentenced to 14 years imprisonment with hard labour and 12 strokes of the cane. He was also to be put under police supervision for five years after his release. The exhibits were the headscarf and his own hard-earned Ksh 20.

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The match ended peacefully, the warders losing the game by one goal to two. It was the first and last game I ever saw between warders and prisoners in this prison because any peace that had existed here was soon shattered.

Five days later I was assigned duty in the polishing section. The authorities argued that it was a good idea that I specialise in one trade instead of being a jack of all trades and a master of none. For a person serving a long sentence, this prison was better than the others, I told myself. So far I had noticed a relaxed atmosphere whenever there was no crisis. And you could never feel rejected among other prisoners who were also serving very long sentences. I had gone around the blocks, checking the sentences meted out to the other prisoners. They were written on cards that had the prisoner's photo, name, date of imprisonment and the earliest possible date of release (EPD). The card was fixed on the door just above the rectangular hole used by the guards for peeping in. These cards were arranged in the order in which the prisoners slept.

If you slept in the centre, your card would be between the other two. Some EPD's read 1995, 1999, 2001, 2010 and even 2121. That was when those prisoners would be released. Yet they seemed to be in high spirits, talking now and then of "what I will do when I emerge". They gave one courage.

If they could bear it, so could I.

## Chapter 5

I was assigned to D Workshop and I had only worked there for three days when something happened, something that changed the lives of many prisoners and left many parents without sons. It brought endless horror to this prison which I once believed was the ideal place for a person serving a long stretch. It was to create real hatred between the hunter and the hunted, the warder and the prisoner.

The thing that brought about the daylight massacre was caused by some guy I had met in Mathare Mental Hospital. Unlike me, he had been proved insane, but for some reason, he was now with us. From that day on, the prison became a place of horror, and every inmate believed in only one language — the language of death. The prison commander was a man we had nicknamed Kagi, and until the day he was transferred and another commander brought in his place, he made our lives a living hell.

On that day, April 24, 1972, I woke up earlier than usual, feeling very uneasy for some reason. Usually, whenever I felt like this, it was a sign that some blessing was about to come my way as the result of some investment I had made in one place or other; but this particular time, I became more uneasy because I had not invested anything anywhere and it was quite unthinkable to expect any blessings from space. What would it be this time, I wondered?

The wake up signal sounded at 5 am in the morning as usual. I've never known seconds, minutes and hours drag so slowly, even when I have been in pain, and I couldn't figure out what was bothering me. The one and a half hours before the bell rang and the cells were opened seemed like eternity to me. I didn't talk to anyone when I stepped out of the cell.

After the usual head count, I cleaned my chamber pot and then went for my breakfast. Usually, at around this time, I went to see GG, whose cell was below mine, on the first floor. Sometimes it was he who came to see me, depending on who completed his morning's work first. Then we would go out to breakfast together.

In the strange mood I was in, I did not look for him this morning. Neither did he bother to come and see me. Maybe he, too, was sensing something evil in the air.

At the serving area where we were given a pint of *uji* each, a friendly chief warder was waiting to offer me an extra pint. As I walked away with two pints, I asked myself whether this was the blessing which had made me feel so uneasy. No, I figured it couldn't be, since I couldn't even finish the two pints. The *uji* seemed to stick in my throat. I realised there must be something else, and that something was major. But what, I wondered?

I spotted GG in the yard and walked up to him. He had come for breakfast earlier than me and had already finished his share. I offered him some of my porridge but he would not take it. So I called the nearest prisoner and gave him the remaining *uji*. The guy was very surprised at my generosity but he could not know what was going on in my disturbed mind.

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The loudspeakers announced that we should all go to our respective places of work. As usual, we took off, walking two by two to the labour distribution yard where all prisoners converged and squatted according to their sections. We were counted and dismissed to go to our respective places of work.

The Naivasha Prison Industries were far larger than those at Kamiti. Each workshop stood on its own ground, surrounded by a stone wall, with a gate made of iron bars. It made movement quite impossible without escorts.

The A Workshop consisted of the Machine Shop and Carpentry Sections one and two. B Workshop held Carpentry Sections three and four. The Metal and the Mechanics sections were in the C Workshop. The D Workshop held the Polishing and Upholstery sections. Then there was the E Workshop. It housed Tailoring Sections one and two, the Button Hole Section and Printing. Finally, there was the F Workshop. It had two more Carpentry Sections, five and six, and the Cutting Section, connected to

Tailoring. At the labour distribution yard, two prisoners disagreed between themselves and started fighting. They were immediately escorted to the Duty Office where the Duty Officer authorised that they be taken to the punishment block, a lucky break for them.

When I got to the Polishing Section in the D Workshop, I was called by the artisan who had opened the section. There was a large dining table that had been brought there for polishing. Like most of the prison products, it was an excellent piece of craftsmanship that would probably end up in some government building but its legs had somehow come loose at the joints. It needed to be taken back to the B Workshop so that the problem could be fixed and, being a newcomer in this section, I was assigned the job so that I could get used to this kind of hard work.

I was ordered to get hold of one side, while another prisoner known as Short Ali, and who had been an old friend of mine in Nairobi, was ordered to take the other end. Our escort was told, "Take this table to B Workshop, section Four. The artisan there will know what to do with it."

Short Ali and I had to carry this heavy table to the carpentry section furthest from the Polishing Section. It was like punishment because even four people would have felt the weight. I remembered my uneasiness early that morning and thought to myself, "What an odd manner to get blessings!"

As we entered Carpentry Section three where GG worked, I wondered why my heart was beating so hard. It couldn't be just the exertion. I was still feeling very uneasy.

People here had just started opening their tool-boxes to get ready for the day's work. Our arms aching from the strain, we walked through to Section Four, where we put the table down, panting hard. A Luo warder talked to us, asking why the table had been returned to Carpentry after having been polished. Short Ali explained and the warder went back to Section Three, where he had been posted as an escort.

A tap on my shoulder made me turn round. It was GG He wanted to show me around because he knew it was my first time to visit this side. No one had started work and some of the lazy prisoners hadn't even opened their tool-boxes.

The warder who had escorted us was now in the Section Four office, talking with another warder and this gave Short Ali and me a chance to go with GG to his bench in Section three to look around and have a 'quick word'.

We were now facing the entrance from bench No. 14. We saw a Commissioned Officer II (CO II), a prison officer with two pips, enter and go straight to bench No. 3. The CO II talked to one of the prisoners working at that bench, hitting the prisoner on the chest with his swagger stick. The prisoner nodded submissively and the officer left him alone. There was deadly silence as he came and stood just in front of us, at bench No. 15. Only the width of the bench now separated us.

Mwangi Mwaura was making a sideboard. He was supposed to have finished it. The officer went up to him and I heard the conversation between them clearly.

"Why didn't you finish this thing on Saturday?" the officer demanded. "I said I wanted this sideboard finished on Saturday and taken for polishing."

As he spoke in a very commanding voice, he hit the prisoner on the chest with his swagger stick. He said:

"You people never do what I say and one day you will really know who I am."

My heart was pounding heavily. I could see Mwangi's face darkening with anger. He said, "Don't hit me on the chest again. Tell me what you want but don't dare hit me again."

I sensed great danger. The officer, feeling insulted that a mere prisoner could talk to him so casually, started hitting him again, harder.

Mwangi pushed the stick away from his chest saying, "I'm telling you, sir, not to hit me again with that stick. Tell me what you want. But don't hit me again. It won't help me hear you more clearly than I'm hearing now."

The officer got really mad at this lack of respect and hit Mwangi furiously several times. The prisoner, equally mad, started backing away with calculated steps.

The officer was too annoyed to see the danger but I could see the prisoner reach back slowly with his right hand to feel the bench behind him. There was a carpenter's hammer which he got hold of. The officer was still following him and hitting him on the chest. Any wise person could see the great danger but this officer, puffed up with pride, was too blind to see. Suddenly the prisoner grabbed the hammer and struck out at the officer. Miraculously the hammer left his hand and fell on the floor in a very strange way. As he tried to pick it up and fulfil his mission, he was seized by two warders and his hands were twisted and held behind him. A number of prisoners started making a chorus, "Hey... Hey...!"

Then Kairu, a former mental hospital inmate, arrived on the scene, looking wild. I didn't see him creep up but suddenly, after coming from the furthest bench in the section, from where he had been watching silently, he was right there, on top of the bench holding a hammer. I later understood that he had come jumping from bench to bench, as they were arranged in a straight line. From the top of bench No. 15, this maniac hit the Luo warder, a short thick-set fellow of about five foot three but physically strong. The warder staggered a little, then fell.

When the officer and the other warders holding Mwangi saw this, they let go of him and jumped back, for they saw that they were about to be attacked. People fled from the scene screaming. Warders started blowing their whistles but this only made our man even crazier. He jumped down from the bench and hit the unconscious warder on the head again.

By now, all the prisoners and warders in this section had run out, horrified. Only two prisoners remained. One was trying to persuade Kairu to stop. "Brother, please stop doing this. What will it benefit you? Please leave it! Can't you foresee the trouble you will cause?"

The other prisoner was stranded high up on the roof of the office, twelve feet from the ground, where some finished items were kept. Seeing that he was about the only one left in there with a maniac, he risked a broken leg by jumping down to the floor. Surprisingly, he made it to the door in one piece and joined the others outside.

Kairu turned to the Mkamba friend who was pleading with him and said, "Go out. Stop telling me this and that. Follow your fellow cowards outside and stop bothering me."

The Mkamba friend was brave enough to hold his ground and went on pleading. "*Haina haja ufaranye hivyo. Itaku faidi nini, jo?*" (There is no need for you to do that. What will it benefit you, eh?)

Kairu's eyes blazed in anger and we were afraid he might kill this innocent man, too. Wide-eyed and holding his hammer threateningly, he told the Mkamba, "Stupid! Move out or I shall work on you, too. I am a man and once I have started a job, I have to finish it. So, move! Get out of here!"

Frightened, the Mkamba moved out, away from death. Mwangi Mwaura, who this maniac had come to rescue, was standing outside, looking sorrowful. Having seen what he had started, he suddenly became afraid of what the outcome would be. Kairu, now all alone in Section 3, proved worse than a common lunatic.

He took a very sharp chisel, three-eighths of an inch wide, bent over his victim and struck into the brain using the hammer. Blood started oozing out. The assailant took off his clothes, like a man preparing for an important job. He sat on the victim's chest. As the blood oozed out, he scooped some with his hands and drank it, smearing his body with the rest.

He then stood up and violently started jumping on the victim's chest. Now the whole prison was filled with horror. In every section, even in the blocks and in the hospital, alarm bells were sounding. The whole prison was maddened with terror. Never before had the alarm sounded for so long.

Back in the block and the hospital, people were astounded, for they still didn't know the cause of the commotion.

In the Tailoring Section, over a quarter of a mile from the scene of the crime, inmates were taken out of the workshops and made to squat outside in lines of fives. There was general panic, but nobody knew what to say. From the centre of the squatting crowd, as he never believed in being in the lead or in the rear, an inmate called Thuku remarked, "Whatever it is this time, it is terribly bad."

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The alarm continued as the minutes dragged by. A Luo artisan who had slipped into Section Three to investigate what Kairu was doing came back with the shock. The inmates stared at him expectantly but they noticed right then the hatred for prisoners that was written all over his face. He glanced once at them and then hid his face with his hands, shaking his head and trembling.

Another artisan went up to him and asked, "What is it? Something bad?"

"Oh, get off!" the Luo said to his Kikuyu counterpart, "Go and find out for yourself. Leave me alone!"

The second artisan, surprised at this reaction and the hatred in his fellow's voice, slipped inside to investigate. The Luo artisan said, "*Nyinyi hapana watu!* (You people are not human)".

An old jailbird remarked, "We are the same people who were in Ngong River! Whatever is on the way we shall face." Those were some of the last words he ever spoke.

It is believed that the greatest persecution of prisoners was in this Ngong River Prison, in the colonial days, during the Mau Mau war. It was a very defiant thing to say, of course.

The other artisan who had gone inside came out. Usually he liked joking with the prisoners but the look on his face this time warned them that something was terribly amiss. This added to the fear and the confusion of the workshop inmates, who had seen the new hatred in both their artisans.

In the Metal Section, three hundred yards from the scene, prisoners who had work to do were queuing to get tools from the

tool-boxes when the sergeant supplying the tools stopped suddenly and locked the box. Prisoners were ordered to get out of the section. As was the practice whenever the alarm sounded, they squatted outside in lines of five. Here they could hear the eerie sounds of the whistles and the alarm bells.

It was so frightening that some cowards caught instant diarrhoea and rushed to the toilet. Others tried to urinate but in vain. All was silent there, five minutes later, as they wondered what could have caused the terrible uproar. To many it was the closest thing to death.

An officer came running. He tried to talk to them but no words came out. His mouth was open and he looked dumbfounded; hatred was written all over his face.

An inmate called Peter Kariuki commented, "There must be murder somewhere — or something near it." Just then, another warder arrived weeping and he, too, had no words — nothing to tell the prisoners.

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Meanwhile, in the A Workshop (Machine Shop and Carpentry Sections one and two), prisoners were gathered together by the officer in charge of the workshop for some lecture before commencing the day's work. He abruptly stopped talking and looked vacantly into space. He could tell the whistles were coming from Workshop B. He sent his deputy to go and investigate. He tried to continue his lecture but courage failed him and he stopped again. The alarm bells in his own section were sounding! So was the prison alarm.

"Get out and squat outside!" he ordered.

The warder at the door was nowhere to be seen. He therefore ordered the prisoners to squat inside the section. From where they were, they could see the warders running to and fro, past the iron bar gate, blowing their whistles. John Mugo, the toughest boy I had known in years, was squatting in front of the rest. He heard a corporal remark, "We had said this . . . It should have

happened to him instead. They should have killed the Senior Superintendent of Police himself."

That was enough to tell the bright boy that a murder had been committed. He quickly changed his position from the front to the rear. Similar things happened in the other workshops and all other places where prisoners were — they were ordered to squat and wait for further orders.

We who were near the scene of the murder ran towards the cell blocks after realising that the attack victim was dead.

But when we got to the labour distribution yard, we were stopped by the warden in charge of the shift who ordered us to squat there in twos.

A certain group from Section Three had run to the Machine Shop for safety. The door opened and they, too, had to squat.

Warders who were not on duty had by now come from their houses, knowing there must be something really wrong. Suspecting a prison riot, they had come, still in their civilian clothes, armed with clubs and shields, hand axes and drawn swords. A group of them stopped near us while some went to the scene of the crime. A chief warden nicknamed after his favourite statement *Robo ni mwongo* (The soul is a liar), assessed the situation. Those drawn *simis* and axes were contrary to the Prisons Act and he knew that the prisoners' lives were in danger. Things were getting out of hand! The warders were overcome with emotion. He ordered that we be taken to the block and locked up in the resting yard. We were taken to Block B, and this I considered part of the blessing I had prayed for. From what I had witnessed since the murder, I had not expected to arrive in the block in one piece.

The alarm was still sounding and the only other sound was that of the warders weeping over their dead comrade. The Luo warders were overwhelmed by the loss. One of them cried, "*Jomarichahinya ginege* (Very bad people have killed him)". Their weeping might have been in accordance with their traditional custom during funerals but it was very frightening. The axes and the *simis* were still flashing while we squatted helplessly, awaiting

our fate. Now, even the hardened jailbirds were praying quietly, for death was in the air.

Forty-five minutes later, the alarms were still sounding. Now all the senior officers had gone up to the scene of the crime; every warder knew of the murder, but the assailant had not yet been arrested. He was still sitting on top of his victim enjoying his meal of blood with brains. Shock seemed to have paralysed the whole prison. The commander of the prison arrived and he, at least, had the bright idea of arresting the murderer.

He went up to the door which was made of steel bars. Some warders had earlier locked this iron door and the commander pushed the muzzle of his pistol through the bars.

"Mwangi Kairu! Drop that chisel and stand up!" he ordered tersely.

Kairu, seven yards away from the commander, looked back once, then continued eating. This maddened the commander who repeated his order in an angry, anguished voice. "I order you to drop that chisel! One!... Two!... Three!" Kairu looked behind him and this time saw the pistol in the commander's hand. He dropped the chisel and stood up, swallowing.

"Now, face that side, putting your hands behind you."

Kairu obeyed.

"Okay. Now, move backwards slowly to where I am."

He did so, but after he had passed the body, he stopped and walked back to it. He shook it as if to make sure that the warder was quite dead. Then he put his hands behind him again and walked deliberately to the door. Kagi, the deputy commander then handcuffed him. The door was opened.

The iron door dividing Sections Three and Four had been locked and the warder had run out, leaving some prisoners there. These were now ordered to go out, after taking off all their clothes and sandals and holding them above their heads. In that fashion, they moved from there to the blocks in twos. They were instructed to move to the A block, then to B and so on up to E, all entering their respective blocks as they came to them. All the other workshops followed suit. What was astonishing was the number

of warders in the open yard, on the way to the blocks, who were armed to the teeth and screaming vengeful murder. The commander was barely able to restrain them from massacring the prisoners.

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In the resting yard of block B, we were ordered to sit in fives. We had to stretch our legs and hold our hands above our heads, a really tough punishment. One must not talk or make the slightest movement, let alone drop his hands even for a second.

As a human being, it is impossible to keep any part of your body hanging in the air like that without obeying gravity. The longer the arms stayed up the greater the agony. So people had to drop their hands and when that happened they were given terrible blows on the elbows. After the blows the hands still fell down again, which meant more blows. Our elbows swelled so much we could hardly recognise them. But if we thought this was tough, more was to come.

By 8.30 am, every inmate in the prison was locked up in one place or other. It didn't matter where you were locked up.

Some were even locked up in hospital wards, if they happened to be there. As for the blocks, people were locked up from cell number one onwards, as they arrived, regardless of whether they slept there normally or not. Some cells were occupied by more than three inmates, which was the normal maximum. From where I was, in Block B, I knew things were very serious and that we had to expect severe punishment, innocent as we were. By now I had been hit five times on the elbows and they were swollen. A slight touch from the boy sitting beside me made it sting as if stabbed with a sharp needle. Whoever was sitting next to me was giving me a hard time. I decided to face him and give him a stern warning.

I stopped short when I saw who he was. It was Mwangi, the man who had started all this. I didn't talk to him and I pretended he did not exist, for I was suddenly afraid that I was in the wrong.

group. I remembered that scene, how he had seized a hammer to hit the officer and how his arms were held and pinned behind him. Then Kairu had gone to his rescue. Yes, I was certainly in the wrong group.

If people were to be beaten, then we would be first, and from what I had seen of the warders, we would be lucky to escape with our lives. "Oh, I don't think we'll make it through this day," I told myself.

Just then a group of warders standing outside the door pushed it, trying to break through. Things seemed to be out of hand, for they were making scary noises and crying out, "Are these the ones? So they have decided to feed on our flesh? You wait until we start!"

"*Hata hakuna haja ya kupiga wengine. Tupewe hawa hawa. Mimi, huki ya Mungu nitaua mtu, ngoja wewe.* (No need to be given others. These will do. God's truth, I will kill somebody, just you wait)".

An aircraft passed above the prison with such a loud sound that I thought it was going to land in the compound. I wasn't wrong, for ten minutes later, the Commissioner arrived with his subordinates. Our door was opened. I raised my eyes to look and saw the Provincial Prisons Commander with the officer-in-charge of this prison. They called Mwangi. He kept quiet for some time and then realised he couldn't hide with all the prisoners looking at him. He stood up slowly and walked to the door and what we believed was his end.

The door was locked. I heard the PPC authorise the SSP to take the key from the corporal and go with it. I was grateful for that, for someone was trying to protect us from those warders who were now past reason. For the first time, I felt a little safe. Now that they had the culprits, Kairu and Mwangi, the whole thing would be soon over. But I was wrong.

\* \* \* \* \*

Horror began few minutes later. From our cell, we started hearing screams of horror and whistles blowing. The mixture of

screams, whistles and clubs striking bodies was the ugliest sound I had ever heard. There had been some fateful disagreement between the authorities: some wanted to select for punishment a particular group in prison calling itself *Black Power*. But Kagi, the deputy boss, said we should be given collective punishment. That suggestion must have delighted the blood-thirsty warders. The whole force was taken down to the punishment block. Screams . . . whistles . . . strokes. That was the thing now. People were being let out in groups of five at a time to come out and pass through the hands of hundreds or thousands of vengeful warders, arranged in two lines, five feet apart and at a distance of one and half feet from each other. You had to pass through this path. It was up to you to pray to your God to help you make it and if you didn't, you were for the vultures.

The upper blocks suffered higher casualties as the distance from there to the football pitch was long. The warders had all been supplied with long deadly sticks called *jarahani*. The prisoners came out nude from their cells. They were offered an alternative if you agreed to lie down you would be given twenty-four strokes and then allowed to go to the pitch. But those who agreed to this, received well over a hundred strokes from warders who fell over each other trying to get at the prisoner. They didn't care where they hit — buttocks, noses, even eyes.

Prisoners realised it was more dangerous to take the "twenty-four" strokes but, all the same, they were forced to take anything. From where we were, we were terrified by the horrible screams and the sure knowledge that our turn was coming. It came nearer and nearer.

I would hear a scream, and as the scream came to an abrupt end I would count one dead. I thought hundreds must be dead by now. Then some warders were outside our doors. "Why don't they open for these?" one demanded, "We are punishing the rest for nothing". He withdrew as a certain commander came. Not knowing that any of us could understand English, he said to another in disgust, "Let's kill them. These are not people. They are beasts."

I wanted to know who he was but at that frightening moment I dared not look up.

The general screams came even nearer. I noticed something now. Those who were screaming were crying, "Oh, Mummy ... mummy ..." I didn't hear anyone crying for God. Could it be that no one in this prison knew God? Could it be why they were being punished while God and all the warders knew very well that the guilty ones were safely in the hands of the authorities, leaving the innocent to be killed? Innocent people were being beaten, maimed, castrated, blinded, made deaf ...

As the massacre was continuing in the field, the door was opened again. We were told to look up at the senior officers, including several provincial commanders, down to the rank of senior superintendents.

One of them said, "Listen, you people calling yourself *Black Power*. If you hear your name called, come straight in front and squat."

I was called fifth. I rushed to the front and squatted next to my friend GG. From the cries I had heard, I was certain I was now for the vultures. After calling six people, he ordered us to stand up and walk into the verandah in twos. The whole field stopped all action. The warders faced our way, ready to receive us. The whistles stopped blowing. In the heavy silence we could only hear the boots of the warders as they marched towards us. I held my breath and prepared to die.

They were inches from us, murder in their eyes when the senior prison authorities acted. They surrounded us, preventing the lynch mob of crazed warders from reaching us. They were only able to make them retreat by beating them with their swagger sticks. Between fifteen senior officers who now were like guardian angels, saving us from certain death, we were marched toward the Duty Office.

Now we had a clear view of things and were amazed at what we saw. The whistles we had been hearing were all being blown by the senior officers trying to save the prisoners from being maimed. When a person fell down the officers would try in vain

to warn the warders from beating him any further. It was useless because they only left you when they were satisfied that you were injured. Several senior officers were, in fact, mauled on their arms, trying to save prisoners from death.

There was a password being given by the warders to the prisoners. "Run to the football pitch." Around the Duty Office which was opposite the football pitch, were about fifty warders with firearms, so that if you happened to run the wrong way they would fire at you. The prisoners could see that and didn't dare. The field had by now well over a thousand warders, a thing that surprised me. They were coming in lorries from wherever there happened to be some. This was their day to settle scores.

As we neared the Duty Office, shielded by our protectors, I noticed multitudes of people on the hillside, visible above the prison walls. They were witnessing the massacre and the terror that had come over the prison on that hellish day. They were all making loud noises, but I couldn't tell whether they were for us or against us. The whole thing was horrible, except to the merciless warders and their wives, who were forever on their side. Those wives could have torn a prisoner to pieces. They regarded us as their husbands' mortal enemies. Those could never be on our side.

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The gate to the Duty Office was wide open. Usually they opened the small door for people and the large gate only for vehicles; but for us they opened the big gate. We were ordered to move on. Between the Duty Office and the gate lodge were other armed warders, some with firearms and others with batons and shields. I thought some were weeping as we passed them. Once in the gate lodge, we were shown into a corridor and ordered to sit down on the floor. The officers guarding us went upstairs. We were given other guards to watch over us.

At 2.00 pm I was taken into an office upstairs. The strong warder who took me in there grabbed me by the shirt and shorts

from behind and, half lifting me up, forced me to ascend the stairs fast.

"Thank you. Wait outside." This was the deputy commissioner talking to him. Inside this vast office, I met faces I had never seen before. Some wore hats as if they were hiding their faces.

Some were smart, some shabby. They had come from wherever they lived to deal with this emergency and I could only hope that they would not eat me alive. Some stood at the window looking outside. At another corner, two bull-like characters sat on their chairs, legs spread on the table in front of them. The strangest of the lot, a man with a long moustache, sat on the floor. He got up as I entered. I was pushed forward to the two sitting comfortably at the table.

A smart young character came nearer, holding a book and a pen. Then the questions started. To my surprise my prison record was already on the table. This was strangely comforting. Things would be done formally, according to the law of the land. It was a change from the hot, murderous atmosphere outside, where illiterate warders were having their heyday. I was ready to answer any question, but the first one left me dumbfounded.

"Jack Zollo. Why did you kill him? What was the intention?"

I had been interrogated several times in police stations and by the most ruthless characters in the country but had never been so surprised. I was very new in this place. This was the hardest and most hurting question anyone could have asked me. Realising the confusion I was in, the other continued, "Anyway, we won't bother you with that question. All we want you to realise is that what you are going to say from now on may be used as evidence against you. Do you understand?"

I said I did.

"Now, I want you to tell me of all your movements since you woke up to this moment you are standing in front of me. If any of these gentlemen asks a question, you will first answer it and then continue. For your own good, when you talk let it be the truth only. Now start."

Once even the toughest criminal has tasted prison life, he automatically grows soft, especially when his sentence is as long as mine was. During my heydays outside, I would have given this bull the rudest answer he had ever heard. But I complied and gave my story from when I had woken up to the time I went to Section Three. So far no interruption. I then told of how, after I had put the heavy table down, GG had come for me to show me around, since I was new here. After showing me how the place was arranged, we had gone and rested on his own bench. I told them of what had happened then. I was asked questions here and there and made to repeat the exchange between the officer and Mwangi.

"What do you think Mwangi intended to do when he raised the hammer and it fell out of his hand accidentally?"

"I can't say I know, sir. He could have meant something bad or not."

"My question is, Jack Zollo: What do you think he intended to do?"

My senses were now waking up and I was not all that scared now. When they were alert, I never committed myself.

"I didn't think anything then."

"And now? What do you think now?"

"I think he was annoyed."

"By what?"

"By being hit on the chest repeatedly with a swagger stick. A very odd thing." The last four words were supposed to lead the man on.

"Ah-huh. What was odd about it?"

"That even without being hit the question bears the same weight and meaning and would have looked more respectable, even to the one who had asked?"

A man looking out of the window turned to face me. He lifted the hat covering his eyes, enough to let me recognise him. Of course we had met before. What I remembered of him most was a kick he had given me in the ribs at the Central Police Station while I was being questioned before imprisonment. I remembered

his expression of anger as if it was yesterday. From him came this question, "You were asked what was odd — not your idea about it. Can you answer?"

I had started to enjoy this because of all the plainclothes men in the office. The matter was going to be looked into in a deep organised manner, police style rather than prison style and there is a world of difference between the two styles, I can assure you.

Speak the truth or search for it in prison and you might very easily end up in solitary confinement. The rule in prison, if you want peace is to learn to say yes when you know the answer is no. That way you stand a better chance of emerging untouched. You will even acquire a name, *Maburu*, used by all tribes in prison.

But now I could speak a little from the heart.

"The odd thing is for an officer to hit a prisoner on the chest, knowing the prisoner is willing to comply."

"What would you have done, if it were you?"

"I am assigned to Polishing Section, sir, where I am not likely to be asked those questions he was being asked."

"That's not the question. What would you have done had it been you the officer hit?"

Be careful, I warned myself. Then I remembered something I had been reminding myself since the murder and decided that if I didn't say it now when I had the opportunity, I would be of no help to anyone. So I said politely, "I would have stood it patiently, sir, since it would have been over soon but then I am not as mad as Kairu."

Everyone turned to face me. The two bulls now dropped their legs from the table and looked at me closely. A question hit me from behind.

"What exactly do you mean by that?"

"That I am sane and can control myself. But for a man with a Mathare record, his head can always go haywire."

"I told you from the beginning that anything you say can be taken as evidence against you. Now what you are trying to tell me is that the murderer is a lunatic — or was once a lunatic?"

"Yes, sir. I was with him in Mathare Hospital. I was discharged as sane and he was detained there as insane. In fact I don't know how he was discharged."

They looked at each other. Then the head civilian turned to the prison authority around.

"Does his record state that? If so why was he mixed up with the other prisoners — especially at a place with deadly tools?"

They exchanged some words and, seeing the prison authorities being pressed, I started enjoying myself. Foolish of me. When two bulls are fighting, it is the grass that gets ~~hurt~~ and we were the grass in this case. All the same, I had started something and if they had to continue, I had shed some light on the matter that would help them to see the whole thing from a new angle. When I entered that office, the belief was that the prisoners had committed the deed with the idea of escaping, that it was a pre-arranged thing. This, of course had no foundation at all; it was the sort of thing we called *Kiswahili*. Someone had conjured up lies to get us into a jam.

I was about to be dismissed when an old civilian who had not spoken talked to me.

"You are Jack Zollo, I understand. Can you tell me this: were you with someone else in that section after you entered? Did you talk with anyone else, besides GG?"

I knew why this had been asked. According to my statement, I knew Kairu. Reluctantly I said, "Yes, sir. I waved at Kairu who was four benches away." I knew one of the prisoners who had been here before might have mentioned this. It was true that I had said hello to Kairu before settling down to talk with GG.

"You didn't talk to him?"

"No, sir. Perhaps I would have, before leaving."

"When were you imprisoned, Jack Zollo?"

"In 1971, sir. Last year, that is."

"And you came to this prison when?"

"Only nine days ago, sir."

"I hope it is true that you do not work in that section."

"It is true, sir. I had been there for only five minutes."

"Okay. You can go."

But not before I had thumb-printed my statement. As I left, I heard the same man tell the ACPs, "We don't need that one for the time being. We need those calling themselves *Black Power* and who have been in that section for a long time."

I thought that was a favour done to me but, as it turned out, I was partly unlucky. I was taken to block D by two senior officers, instead of being returned to where GG and the others accused of being *Black Power* were. They had taken me back to the jaws of death! People in this block were now urinating on themselves with the sure knowledge that they were next on the punishment line. I was locked in cell No. 32, the first on the left as you entered. There were three occupants in this cell, one being a Mkamba working in the tailoring section and who, up to now, still had no idea what the noise and the screaming was all about. The second was a sixty-year-old Turkana imprisoned for life and who never talked to anybody. He lived like one who was dead and all the screams, though so loud from here, were no concern of his. When I came in, he did not show even a flicker of curiosity; he had no desire to know what was going on outside. But the third man in the cell was very different from these two.

## Chapter 6

His name was Deya and he was the toughest egg in this prison. All the warders hated him, for he was the most insolent character here.

He was about five foot eleven, heavily built and very strong; he was a boxer simply because there was nothing else he liked better than bashing people.

He wore tight-fitting prison clothes which made his muscles bulge. The gang he was leading was as terrible as he was. Because he never worked but stayed in the block always, he was not given any earnings. So when others purchased such things as sugar, he and his gang became robbers. They would investigate and find out who had cigarettes or money. When they suspected you had some, they merely surrounded you and held you down, then took everything, knowing you would never dare take them to the authorities.

Unknown to the authorities, they terrorised the whole prison and were feared by almost all the prisoners because, unless you went in a large group, you couldn't get anything back. Deya was an old jailbird who felt quite at home in prison because life outside was not for him. He had been in and out of prison thirteen times.

He was so hardened that all punishment and severe beatings were merely routine to him. He did not recognise trouble; even when it perched on his shoulder and when he did, he seemed to like it. He had attacked so many warders that the name Deya was familiar even to those who had never met him.

So here I was with him in Block D. He had heard of me, too, so we talked. He told me that he had only seven days to go before his release and I greatly envied him, knowing my long sentence was hardly touched. I was feeling nervous, for the horror was creeping upon us. Trouble, grievous trouble, was now at our door. Deya was jumping up and down in the cell, shadow-boxing. Sometimes he would hit the door so hard that a warder would come up to the door to investigate.

"What is wrong, Deya? What do you want?" the warder asked.  
"I want you to open for me so I can screw the whole lot of you."

Precious Lord, I thought. This homosexual of a man did not know when to go on his knees and pray. He did not know that the angel of death had arrived. I started loathing whoever had brought me to cell No. 32, throwing me together with this mad man.

Now Block C was done with! It was our turn and they were right outside! The outer door was already open. The corporal with the keys started with cell No. 1 and I was glad, for there were still some minutes to go before my body was broken to pieces. I did not believe that anyone could make it to the football pitch, passing over a thousand blood-thirsty warders spread over three acres of field. A distance of almost a quarter a mile. I told my cell mates the password. 'Run to the football pitch.' Maybe that would help them — otherwise they would be beaten without knowing which direction to run to. I breathed hard to calm my nerves.

The horrible screams were now almost next door. All of hell's fury was just about upon us. Warders, knowing that Deya was in this block started shouting.

"*Toa Deya njel!* (Bring Deya outside!) Deya! Deya!" For the first time since meeting him, my hatred of him became complete. He turned to me with his red eyes and said, "*Wa Mama.* Don't worry, I'll hit back. At least I will go with two. Just wait and see."

Knowing what I knew, I said, "No, Deya, I don't think you'll get a chance. You don't know what is outside. But if you can do what you say, do it, because I doubt if you will live."

"I'll make it, *wa Mama.* Seven days is nothing. They'll maim me but I'll make it. *Siku saba tu* (Only seven days.)"

"I'm telling you, Deya, what I've seen with my eyes. With the way you are talking to these people and the long standing hatred between you and them, you might not last another day. If you do, there won't be any dead."

He didn't say anything. He paused for a while, then started jumping up and down, calling out. Cell No. 31 was opened amid

cries of horror and pain. They received their treatment. And then it was our turn.

As he opened the door, the corporal said quietly, "That's the Deya you are all asking for. Take him."

\* \* \* \* \*

God, the way he was received I remember to this day, many years later. A warder, using all his might gave him a blow on the head. Blood spouted out like water from a spring. He turned to face the warder who had hit him, but as he did so, more than twenty attacked him from behind crying joyously, "Here he is! Here is Deya!"

They all converged where he had fallen, each determined to get a stroke into the hated form. And Deya was trying to hit back, trying, at least to touch one of the warders before he died. I must say he was the one who saved me, for I saw my chance and ran towards the football pitch. I received only a few strokes on the back and the head, for they were concentrating on Deya. As I reached the football pitch breathlessly, I knew he must be dead.

Near the tap which supplied the prisoners with water when they were playing football, some forty men lay on top of each other, some dead, some maybe alive. I didn't know what to believe. Jesus, somebody had poured water on them, all around that area and the blood flowing could have carried a dead locust a good distance.

Over seven hundred prisoners who had managed to cross the field of death and made it to the football pitch were now squeezed into a space where only three hundred could have occupied comfortably, on one end of the pitch. It was at a place filled with broken stones which were to be laid on the road. Sitting on a stone hurt so much because of the weight of those on top of you. When you felt your buttocks with your hand, you found that the stone had entered your flesh. I got one removed two days later.

\* \* \* \* \*

The field was now bitter with hatred. Tribalism had started between the warders and as I have said, when two bulls fight it is the grass that suffers. The Luo warders knew that the warder whose brain had been eaten had been killed by a Kikuyu and they looked out for Kikuyu faces as they meted out punishment, hitting them where it hurt most. As the prisoners were coming out naked, they looked out for those ones who were circumcised — but not the Maasai or the Nandi, who were not all that difficult to make out. As more than two-thirds of the inmates were Kikuyus, it was not easy to miss. As a result of the punishment that day, many of us have half-male organs.

The Kikuyu warders, realising what was happening, said, "Oh . . . So that is what is going on? Practising tribalism, eh? Beat them and pluck their eyes out." And so the grass started suffering.

Many lost their eyes completely, like this one who was just next to me on the football pitch who made all the pain I was feeling disappear when I saw that his left eye had left its socket. That was the day I found out that a man's eye is several times larger than it appears in its socket. His was just hanging down and you can imagine the chill that ran down my spine.

Even here they followed us, giving us a real taste of hell. Hands were to be kept above the heads, even the broken ones. On my right, an inmate was in great pain. His arm was completely broken and the bone was protruding like the edge of a *simi*.<sup>\*</sup>

The warder, stepping on my body to reach him, wants that broken hand over that head. He strikes out with the huge ugly baton and the prisoner desperately, crying out horribly, tries to use his good hand to straighten up the broken one. It doesn't work and he receives a heavier blow. He tries a third time and it still doesn't work, so I stretch out mine and hold his. The warder stares at me for one terrible moment, then decides to go. He is a Kikuyu like us, though from a certain location in Nyeri where they are born tough; from a place they call *'Thous Tetu*.

Then the poor guy starts falling on me. He's fainting. Before the warders realise what is going on, they think I am putting my hands down deliberately and I get several hot ones on my head. I decide to save myself and let the dead bury their dead like Jesus instructed. The man is dragged unceremoniously to the unconscious heap.

In front of me now is a row of mutilated backs, of people who were foolish enough to agree to "twenty-four" strokes. Nudes keep coming in to the football pitch. Most of them fall down unconscious and are dragged away to a heap. Now they make a high pile. Two children six years old standing on the opposite sides of this pile would not be able to see each other. The long minutes drag by. The whistles ring in our heads. Even in the intervals they are not being blown they keep ringing ...

\* \* \* \* \*

It was after 6:30 and it was growing dark now. They were working on the last lot in Block D. It was decided that the remaining blocks would get theirs the following morning. So, still hearing the whistles in my ears, though they had actually stopped, we were marched to the blocks in twos, leaving the unconscious ones to the vultures or the dead burying the dead.

The cells were wide open when we got to the blocks. All the blankets, chamber pots, buckets of water and the plastic cups were out. The cells were completely empty. It didn't matter which cell you entered provided there were three of you. By 7.30 pm all the inmates were locked up.

So the whole of April 24 had been spent committing a massacre that was soon buried and forgotten. Because of one lunatic, innocent people were mutilated and murdered ... By those who were supposed to reform them.

Although I was in pain that night, it was to me an old experience, sleeping hungry and completely nude. But the memory of what had happened bothered my mind all night. Again, I wondered whether I could survive twenty years in such a place.

That night, a large number of warders mocked and taunted us. "Tomorrow is the finishing day," they said. "That one you killed will have to be paid for by half of you." Usually we were guarded by four warders who changed shifts after every four hours but tonight, each floor was swarming with warders, about fifteen per floor. After spending a night full of foreboding, we woke up expecting the worst. With those threats that had been issued throughout the night and from what we had gone through, we knew anything was possible. There was a time we had thought of collective punishment as a joke: how could everyone be made to suffer because of one man? But now we knew, with certainty, that an angry man could do anything.

Despite the threats from the warders, nothing either good or bad happened the next day. The cells remained locked up, thank God. Nobody missed food, for we all prayed for peace. We spent three such days and nights, with the cells locked up and nothing coming, either good or bad.

The cells were opened during the lunch hour of the fourth day. Lunch was dished out, which included some offal the warders had left over after they had had some cows slaughtered, probably the authorities' way of appeasing them. They must have eaten so much that they didn't need the offal, and this was given to us on this fourth day when our compulsory fast was brought to an end.

We were also given thirty minutes to go and relieve ourselves in the toilet. Clothes, blankets and water were issued. This was the sign that peace was returning. From this day on, we received our normal rations. We would be given thirty minutes to take our meals and help ourselves, and then the cells would be locked. It went on for a month. How long had I been in prison? Just over a year.

\* \* \* \* \*

A high ranking official in the prisons visited our block one day and ordered all cells unlocked. He was accompanied by other senior officers and they had a list of names. He called fifty-seven

prisoners, including GG and me. I hadn't seen GG for a full month, despite the fact that we were in the same block. His case was a bit tough since, during the questioning of April 24, six witnesses had tried to implicate him in the murder. In their statement, they had testified that GG had taken the hammer from Kairu and hit the warder twice on the head while he was on the floor. His luck hung on the fact that my statement and that of Short Ali agreed with his: that we had been talking with him when it all happened and when he finally came out, he was given his own cell in which he stayed for that whole month.

Now we were taken out and marched to the Duty Office. There, we found a *Black Maria* waiting, with many senior officers from the headquarters.

The Superintendent of Police, who was the security officer of this prison told us, "All of you are going for a temporary transfer. Your warrants will be left here and your lock-ups will be always added up here. But you will go and remain wherever you are going with our own escorts. Now you will get up in twos as we call your names. You must first produce your photo before you enter the van. I hope you know why you have been called, for you know who you are."

And, in fact, we all knew: it was the group that had been in Carpentry Section 3, when the warder had been killed; the same group that had been locked up and isolated in the resting yard of Block B on that day of terror.

Before we got into the van, each of us was scrutinised. Only when the security officer was satisfied about our identity were we allowed to enter the *Black Maria*. Outside the gates of the prison, there was a surprise. The General Service Unit (GSU) escorts outnumbered us. They were in a lorry and two Land Rovers and were all armed with machine guns. The senior officers wore guns in holsters, as if on parade. Once on the main road, the leading Land Rover headed for Nakuru and the rest followed.

At 2.30 pm we were welcomed into Nakuru prison and here the usual prisoners' speculations began as to why we had been brought here.

"We have been transferred because we belonged to Section Three where Kairu killed the warder," some said, "and the authorities are afraid that if we remain in Naivasha, the warders will kill us."

Others said we were going to be given additional sentences in connection with the killing. But those, like me, who liked to use their heads coolly didn't need to be told that we were wanted as witnesses in the trial of Kairu and Mwangi.

We were shown into one large ward and supplied with worn out blankets with no mats. The area had a few other wards occupied by capital remand cases and people charged with robbery with violence. The warders outnumbered us by three and they stayed around us every minute. We were informed that we would go to court the following morning, confirming my suspicions.

The following morning, under the heaviest escort ever given to criminals, we were taken to court. It was quite a motorcade: two Land Rovers and a lorry for the GSU, plus five light cars for the senior officers who had come to the prison to drive with us. Civilian vehicles were stopped on the way to let us pass. Police cars led the way with their sirens blaring and people lined the route to watch. The court area was jammed with more people, and GSU staff keeping them in control. Thousands of faces startled us as we came out and were led to the courtroom. We were locked up in cells to await the next step. I wondered how a town like Nakuru could have so many people hanging around with nothing to do but poke their noses where they didn't belong.

The prison staff took three days testifying in the dock. Under the same kind of escort we would be taken back to the prison for lunch and then back to the court. It proved a great bore, for only a few prisoners were actually called to the dock all this time. Some of them gave evidence out of line with what was wanted by the prison authorities and this brought a new development. They started picking from us only those they knew would not be a nuisance in the dock. They also realised that fifty-seven prisoners in the dock, one at a time, might be too

much, especially when they were giving almost exactly the same kind of evidence. In the end they selected eight.

So, it was decided, there was no need for the rest of us to go to court. After this decision, while travelling back to Nakuru prison, I found myself in the same vehicle with Kairu and Mwangi, the two accused. The van was divided by a wire screen into two parts and they sat in one part, each handcuffed to two warders. As I was an old friend of Kairu, back in Mathare, he was willing to talk to me, through the wire screen. I deplored his deed, but I was curious to know where he had been hidden when we were being punished for what he had done.

"What are the boys saying back there?" Kairu asked me.

"They want to know what happened to you and where they took you."

"Were they also beaten?" Kairu asked.

"That doesn't answer my question," I said, "Where were you taken?"

"To a police station."

"Which police station?"

"I don't know," Kairu said, "I was wrapped all over with a blanket."

We were not bothered by the four warders with them, though they tried to stop us from talking. We had reached a point of no return — suffered for what we hadn't done and realised that when you committed a very big crime in jail, you were handled delicately like an egg, while others suffered for you. This place, where everything went opposite, bored us and distressed us very much.

Look at it this way: Jesus had suffered for many, but here the many were suffering for this guy, Kairu. If you want to get the best picture of prison, you have to take everything the opposite way. Doors are locked from outside when you go to sleep, instead of from the inside; cigarettes buy money, instead of money buying cigarettes. Enough to drive you crazy!

"Were you beaten?" we wanted to know from this murderer.

"No. Not exactly beaten."

"What do you mean?" we demanded. "We thought you were beaten continuously for one week! We were mutilated and killed because of you."

Kairu retorted, "And I am being charged with murder because of you!"

"Meaning what?" we asked.

"Meaning that I did that to straighten things out for you all. I have done it. Now it is for you now to make use of the opportunity."

"Good God! What things did you straighten out for us? What was not straight?"

"Many things."

"Such as what?"

"Such as being pushed."

"So you think now we are not being pushed? Well, Kairu, just pray to God that you are not taken back there. The boys would eat you alive. Do you know that their food ration has been reduced by half and it is the only thing they care for? Try coming back there. You talk of sacrificing your life for them, while they know they sacrificed their lives for you. Just pray that you are not brought back there."

Then I asked him, "Have you pleaded guilty — or how on earth are you sacrificing yourself?"

Kairu said, "Even if I plead guilty, they will refer me to where I once met you — Mathare Hospital. Do you remember?"

\* \* \* \*

GG was one of the eight prisoners selected to give witness in the dock. The following day, he and the other seven went off again but the rest of us remained in prison. That whole day, we remained locked up in the ward. We weren't allowed to go out in groups but only one at a time, to the toilets. The officer in charge of this prison must have thought we were extremely dangerous and he wouldn't allow us to bask in the sun for even a minute. The day seemed like a month.

When GG came back that evening, he had no news, except that some of the prisoners had gone into the dock and given testimony, and that the courtroom was jammed with people. We talked for a long time and slept at around 10.30 pm.

The following day, the eight went to court again and we remained behind, locked up. Getting very restless and bored, we argued among ourselves that we should not take this kind of treatment. I argued that nothing we could do would be regarded as more serious than what had been done and that we should not be afraid of asking for our rights from the officer in charge of this place. We discussed all the things we wanted rectified and they elected me to speak for them. And so we sent for the officer in charge of the prison.

He came escorted by his deputy and the duty officers. He was a brown man of about five foot ten, of medium build and with quite a personality. He listened patiently and talked with well-constructed sentences made of well-selected words.

"I understand you sent for me, is that it?"

I stood up and answered, "Yes, sir, we did. We would like to present some of our problems to you."

"I am at your service."

So I proceeded. I talked about the long sentences we were serving and how one could not survive if half-starved to death all the time. As I talked he nodded his head and I felt encouraged to continue. So I talked about the single messy toilet we were all using and requested at least one pair of sandals to avoid stepping on all that shit and coming to bed with messy feet. He nodded again. I swallowed some saliva and told him how we were finding the days long because of being locked up all day.

"Since we are not remand prisoners, you could consider sparing us some minutes, sir, to bask in the sun."

"Mhh . . ." he nodded again.

"From what you can see, sir," I said, "we haven't had a shave for a month and these beards are becoming a nuisance. If you don't mind, you could arrange for us to have a shave."

Lastly, I talked about the blankets we had been supplied with during his absence. They were mere rags. And the nights were long and cold.

After I had finished, the others clapped their hands to show the Senior Superintendent Prisons that whatever I had said was on their behalf. We waited expectantly for his reaction.

"Thank you very much," he said. "In fact, all my prisoners here are serving short sentences and if I gave them the type of ration you get back at Naivasha Prison, they would be dying to come back after their release, for they would think prison is heaven. In this case we give them small rations as part of punishment. I agree that this should be different for you, and from now on your food will be prepared differently."

We clapped our hands happily.

"Eh, ehm, as regards sandals, that is the best suggestion of all. It is unhygienic to go to the toilet barefoot. I will arrange that you get two or three pairs straightaway . . ." We clapped our hands again.

"About the sun . . . You have plenty of escorts and I don't see why you shouldn't bask, so that one goes without opposition. Now to your last request. I regret to say that in my store I do not have even one spare blanket. As you are not here for long, you will patiently make do with what we have until you go back to your own place. What I would like to ask you now is to keep up discipline as you have done in the few days you have been here until the time comes for you to go back. And, oh, sorry: the beards. I will send barbers straightaway to get rid of them for you. I think that is all. All right?"

"*Ndiyo, Afande!*" we said in chorus, clapping our hands. While we were clapping, he left and we marvelled at his understanding. Four minutes later, we were out basking in the sun.

\* \* \* \* \*

Prison and prisoners. To tell you the truth, I don't know which is worse. In my opinion they are equally bad.

Now here we were, having just won a sweet battle, a victory helpful to all of us. But here was a queer fellow called Muinde who was not satisfied. He is a Special Stage prisoner and although our privileges (or under-privileges) were equal here in Nakuru his dish was far better than ours. He was imprisoned back in 1961 when I was still in school and so had been inside for eleven years. In that time, he completely forgot the difference between a man and a woman.

All the time we were talking with the officer-in-charge, he was staring at this handsome eighteen-year-old boy. This innocent boy didn't notice him at all and was completely ignorant of the fact that there was somebody here who wanted to do it to him from the rear.

Being fairly new in prison, he had been duped into thinking that this fellow Muinde was very nice because, at times, he pushed his Special Stage dish towards him, saying that, after all the years he had been inside, he was unable to eat all that much.

The trouble was that this boy stuck to GG, who he regarded as his elder brother or his father. GG protected and advised him, and this boy was always close to his heels whenever GG was not in court. GG knew how some prisoners treated handsome boys. Afraid that, in his absence, he might be mauled by the likes of Muinde, he left him under my care. I do not like prisoners in general. I did not show him my dislike and so he liked hanging around me, knowing he was as safe with me as he was with GG.

Now this Muinde creep had a plan. He wanted to spoil things for us. He was not happy about what we had achieved for the simple reason that if we all got good food he would have nothing with which to entice this boy.

He was also mad with GG. because he could see how the boy stuck to him for protection. He was not worried about me because he was wise enough to see that I minded my own business in prison and never interfered with what anybody did.

So when we were basking in the sun, and were all deep in conversation, he sneaked away and went to a warder. As a Special Stage prisoner, he was given a lot of respect and the warder nodded and went away. Ten minutes later, Muinde was called. He was escorted a few yards from us because he could not go further than the protected zone we had been allocated to stay in. I was very suspicious and uneasy, so I also got up and went as near as I could to hear what he was playing at. He was talking to the Duty Officer. He was accusing GG, telling the Duty-Officer here to call the Provincial Commander because the matter was very serious. He was busy doing his *Kiswahili*, very fishy talk in which there was no truth whatsoever.

He was saying that this Kairu and Mwangi case would remain unsolved because of one man called GG who was lecturing the prisoners every night, telling them not to give the wrong statement in court. He said that GG was giving them a statement filled with lies because he wanted the case against the prison authorities to be strong.

"He has confused all of them," claimed he, "and what you will hear in court will surprise you all."

"At the same time," so Muinde said, "GG has been organising a food strike. If it wasn't for the promise given by the officer-in-charge, people would have gone on strike today."

I was shocked and didn't know what to say or do. I did not know whether to move away or go up there and oppose him strongly. I knew that this sodomite wanted GG segregated so that he could get a chance of winning the handsome Kikuyu boy. I began campaigning for GG among the prisoners but, all the same, he was taken away from us and given his own cell.

That night, the queer came and fixed his bed where GG's had been. He lay beside the young boy who now looked at me with frightened, pleading eyes. Since I already had some influence in this prison, I decided to do something this queer would not forget in a hurry. I beat him up professionally until he lost consciousness. Everyone was watching with admiration. The next morning we all said that we did not want him with us and he was taken away and given a cell next to GG.

That's what makes prisons — queers and the opposites. And if you think that Muinde was the only queer we had in prison, you have something to learn.

We didn't have long to stay in this place. The evidence required was given by the selected prisoners. GG never entered the dock; his name had been crossed off the list of witnesses.

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On May 15, we were taken back to Naivasha Prison. The case was over and, for a long while, none of us knew the outcome simply because the people who gave us news did not like discussing that particular issue; but now I believe that the two prisoners were discharged after psychiatrists pronounced them insane.

A few days after the case was over, the then Commissioner of Prisons visited Naivasha Prison. Now the commander of this prison had been transferred. Kagi, his deputy, was in charge.

The Commissioner was seen at the Duty Office coming towards Block E. Usually, when such a big fish came visiting, the prisoners were always eager to see him. In most cases, they rushed forward to meet him. But in this particular case, I was surprised to see that, instead of the prisoners going towards him, they went away to hide at the back of the block, as if out of fear and distrust. Others went and locked themselves in their cells, not because they were afraid of being punished but because they now hated him. They did not want to see him or know what he was here for.

Those who were caught unawares surrounded him out of curiosity. As I'm also a curious character, I detached myself from those who were hiding and drew close to see what was up. I was never satisfied with second-hand information. And I had been in prison long enough to have learnt never to trust whatever rumours were passed around by the prisoners. I knew them all too well.

I told myself that if he consented to answering questions I would ask him the one question that was bothering me and which I would have liked him to relieve my mind of. I was burning to

know why an innocent person had to be punished because of only one maniac when there was no doubt, whatsoever, as to who had done the crime. But, as it turned out, all he was here for, that day, was to show off his power and award promotions to a few of the officers who we knew had contributed to much of our suffering and had been especially active during the massacre.

Three hated corporals were promoted to sergeants; four sergeants were promoted to senior sergeants, and one senior sergeant to Commissioned Officer II. All of us wondered why this had come so soon after the massacre, but it was not our business to ask. I, for one, realised this would be the wrong time to ask any cheeky questions.

The Commissioner was saying, "Mr SSP, you're telling me the prisoners of this block are all good. I do not agree with you, for why did they all not come when they heard I was around? Anyway, that doesn't matter. Whatever I will say here, the ones who are here will tell the rest."

His next words astonished and frightened me. "When I came here, I thought I would find over a hundred prisoners dead. All I can say is that I'm disappointed to see that the warders here do not know their work."

He had a walking stick and he was swaggering as he spoke, obviously enjoying himself.

"Mr SSP, I want to assure you and your subordinates that, in my capacity as the Commander of Prisons, I give you the authority to beat these prisoners any way you like. Do you hear that? I want these boys softened, softened until they are like young children. Do anything to them that will soften them so that they either bend or break."

On hearing that, we started dispersing, knowing that we were like motherless children in this prison with no one guarding our lives. He, too, walked away in a fit of temper. From then on, horror haunted this prison. Most of those who had survived the massacre caught hell during the ten years of terror that followed.

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Two days after the Commander's departure, the new SP visited Block A feeling rather proud of his new rank. He seemed to have an itch to brag. He called all the prisoners and delivered a message, a message which was simply stated but later powerfully implemented. He was a short, thick-set character who had some speech impediment.

"Ah, uhm, you see, as you can all see, that is how things are. I am now the Commander of this prison. Ah, I know most of you are very much hurt by this fact; but whether you like it or not, that is how things are. I'm now the Commander. One thing I can assure you is that a genie that knows you does not suck you to death at once, but slowly. When you are about to die, it feeds you a little life again. Know this, I'm going to be with you here for a long while and I will never soften my principles, even if you smear me with perfumes."

With these words, he turned abruptly and went away, leaving the prisoners startled. No one exactly understood what he really meant when he referred to the genie that knows you, but there was no mistaking the threat. His exact words in Kiswahili were, "Zimwi likujualo halikuli likakumaliza", in case my English translation is poor. But whoever didn't understand then understood later when he started giving out the new standing order in the prison and gave power to his subordinates to treat us any way they pleased. For almost ten years, everyone wished he had never been born.

I, for one, started to regret that first day at the age of 15 when I had been enticed by a young pick-pocket into the dangerous paths of crime. Having listened to our new Commander describing himself as a genie that sucks blood, I no longer knew where I stood; but I knew that from then on, this prison was a strange place where every prisoner held his life in the palm of his hand.

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About two weeks later, some prisoners were allowed to go to the Industries. It started with the inmates of Block E, who had escaped being beaten during that day of the massacre. The artisans in charge of the various sections were told to pick out the inmates they favoured in their section. During the first two months, only a few were going to the workshop. About a month after, many people were called back to their sections. Even in this, there was still favouritism because not all were recalled. About 500 were left in the Blocks for no obvious reason.

Being still a new person in this prison, I was not known by any of the artisans and I stood a slim chance of being called back to my old workshop. I knew it so I did not bother much about it, despite the fact that I liked my trade and had learned a lot already. Yet, I sensed something sinister ahead . . .

A man in power should never joke with his words because whatever he says is taken as law by those beneath him — any wise leader knows this. But woe unto us who were at the mercy of powerful people who spoke loosely. Because of the words of the Commander, we suffered for nothing.

A systematic plan was hatched by the warders to segregate those they considered *bad boys* from the *good boys*. Now we were at the mercy of warders who were quite free to exercise all their petty prejudices, hates and tribal chauvinism. Their plan was to take those they favoured to the Industries and leave those they despised to rot in the blocks, giving officials the impression that we had refused to work.

\* \* \* \* \*

We who were considered *bad boys* were put into Blocks A and B. There were about 500 of us. It was alleged that the bad boys consisted of two groups — the *Black Power*, who were connected to the murder of the warder, and another notorious group that had a secret motive which was currently under investigation. To

me, this was all *Kiswahili* but fed on it, the authorities at headquarters let it pass as truth. Their disregard of our rights and welfare was not all that hard to understand because, after all, this was the Naivasha Maximum Prison — the place where all the toughest, meanest cats who had robbed banks, killed people, raped women, and even eaten a warder's brain were known to be safely behind bars.

Who could protect the innocent when no one outside those grim walls believed there was good in anyone of us?

## Chapter 7

Mr Kagi was now planning to implement the words so carelessly uttered by his boss. So far he had succeeded in having over 500 inmates segregated. We were to spend each day sitting in the hot sun in lines of five. We were to use only one toilet.

The next phase of victimisation was to make us work in the oppressive heat. We were given coir to make ropes and mats used for prisoners' beds. This monotonous work replaced any of the useful and more creative skills we had learned in the Industries. Our work gang became the rock bottom of prison life and anybody who made the slightest mistake in the Industries was thrown in with us, the outcasts.

For everyone in this work gang, any *good old days* were over, and the small privileges that had made prison life tolerable now became hopelessly beyond reach. You were given a quantity of coir which you had to make sure was woven before you went for lunch. If you didn't finish the job in time, you were beaten and punished.

While in this work gang, you were not allowed to talk to anyone, not even make eye contact with friends. You were to concentrate on your work without once looking sideways. If you wanted to go for a call, you knew where to go and squat, waiting in the long queue, at the same time aware that the time for completing your work was running out. Afraid of wasting time, most of the prisoners urinated where they sat, careful that they were not noticed and then maimed.

The whole prison now smelled of blood. You could not talk to a warder looking into his eyes; you were to keep your eyes lowered, your hands behind your back like a seven-year-old child talking to his master in school. Those who did not experience colonial life were experiencing it now. Things became worse as the days passed by. A small error could easily get you into deep trouble.

Things that had formerly been taken lightly were now so serious that one was afraid wherever he was. Take smoking for instance. Warders had always known the kinds of tricks we used to play, smoking cigarettes in groups, in order to hide the smoke. They used to turn a blind eye, knowing that this was really a minor offence; but now we were no longer taken as human beings. Now if a prisoner got caught with a cigarette, he would be sentenced to anything up to 18 strokes.

In 1975, one unfortunate prisoner was beaten to death because he was found in possession of a small piece of Rooster cigarette. That was how serious matters were in those dark days now long past.

During all that trouble, I was in this place now called Induction. We were bored to a point of idiocy. Because the prisoners had nothing better to do, they began playing really idiotic games like watching the sky above the prison walls and looking out for the airliners that used to pass by. They had given each plane a name and would bet on which one would be flying over next and at what time.

By this time, prisoners had been beaten for so long without any reasonable cause that their hearts had hardened and they talked as they wished.

Mr Kagi had selected a special unit of ruthless warders who hung around the Duty Office for this purpose only. Every day they came on duty and went straight to work with their sticks. The work of the other warders seemed to simply be to make sure that this special unit was fed with enough prey to keep them busy, so any small offence was enough to take you there for a thorough and merciless thrashing.

The old practice of sending people to the punishment block was no longer feasible in this violent atmosphere since you would have needed at least 100 more punishment blocks to accommodate all the prisoners streaming through the Duty Office on charges of bad behaviour.

The warders were enjoying themselves. All they wanted was to have you thoroughly beaten and quickly taken back to your

section to work. Usually, you had to be carried back half-unconscious after they were through with you, but you were still expected to snap back to work or you would get more of the warders' *medicine*.

Those warders in the Duty Office were really bad. They didn't bother to ask what error you had committed or how much beating they should mete out to you. When they saw a prisoner who did not have his sandals on, they just set to work. Sometimes they didn't even bother to check if you had sandals on.

Everytime you turned around you found you had just committed a new offence. Whistling to yourself, calling to a friend from a distance, speaking in your mother tongue, standing in a group of three or more or, worse still, not taking your hat off when a warder who you couldn't even see because he was behind you, was passing by with his stick, looking out for a bad boy like you, all could earn you punishment. The whole thing would have been a bad joke, had it not been so painful.

A prisoner summoned up to the Duty Office merely as a witness in a case against another prisoner would find himself being pounced upon before the warders even had a chance to know what he had come in for. Before you had been identified as a witness, you would have been badly beaten. Those warders at the Duty Office had their orders. They had their batons ready for their work and they were there to beat every part of the body, especially the wrists, elbows, knees and ankles. The repeated hitting of these joints was so bad that once a man got back to his bundle of coir, he could hardly move again. That was one reason why so many urinated secretly right where they worked.

Some unlucky souls were condemned to the punishment block and these had it even worse. The distance from the Duty Office to the Punishment Block was about 400 yards. Once condemned and after being beaten severely, you were forced to run those 400 odd yards with a group of warders at your heels, beating you mercilessly whenever they caught up with you.

The prisoner had to follow a set path to the punishment block while the warders always took short-cuts so they could waylay

you. Only a few managed that hell run. Most collapsed in the middle of the field to be collected and dragged to the punishment block half unconscious.

People suffered so much here that their hearts became harder than ever before. If I had ever believed that prison life was supposed to make one a better man, during Kagi's heyday I saw boys I had known to be mild-mannered outside now being transformed into beasts. Now we had no illusions — we believed that the final aim was to maim or destroy us. Now many started figuring that if you wanted to be handled like an egg, you just had to do a great thing before getting cracked and crushed.

The beatings had made prisoners wild and they fought each other every day. When a fight broke out, one now made sure that he hit his enemy not just once with a fist, but most likely with a chisel before he was whisked off to the Duty Office to meet his fate. You let your enemy have several slashes before a brave man could catch you. A friend of mine received more stabs on his body than his sentence of 15 years. The prison alarm was sounding every week and whenever it did so, the warders automatically began beating inmates before finding out the cause.

Some inmates who had soft hearts crumbled under the pressure, planned suicide and hanged themselves quietly, leaving more sorrow, more despair and, therefore, more violence.

The whole prison — not just our work gang — was in a state of war. In sections where there were deadly tools, an inmate would suddenly seize one for self-defence whenever the alarm went off. Now everyone, not just us, believed that no one was meant to survive in this prison, not the way that fellow Kagi was running it.

The artisans, who were only trying to pass on their skills, observed the potentially explosive situation inside the workshops, and reported to the authorities. From then on, whenever the siren sounded, all tools were taken from the prisoners and locked up. Then the prisoners were told to squat outside the workshops where they would remain under guard until the situation was returned to normal.

\* \* \* \* \*

Inmates in our work gang or in Induction continued with their bets. Because of the nearby airbases, there were plenty of planes to bet on. The stakes were, of course, the meals we got. If you bet on the wrong kind of plane, you had to give up your lunch-time ration, console yourself with a pint of water and wait for the evening meal. If you continued betting and lost again, you went hungry the whole day. This game was to develop into a full-fledged gambling racket which I'm told still exists today. If you had lost your daily ration, you need not go hungry that day since you could go to someone who had won an extra ration and borrow one from him and pay with interest after two days. The interest then was the piece of meat that inmates got three times a week. If your luck was bad and you couldn't pay up after two days, you could push the credit forward with the promise of a second piece of meat. So if you were really unlucky, you could go on eating *ugali* without meat for days. But still, the game made life pass more easily since the hope of one day winning a piece of meat made life just a little sweeter within these hellish walls.

Those with lucky stars were doing a roaring business in the prison of those days when cigarettes were not only rare, but also risky to have. Some people were known to be worth fifty or more rations of *ugali* and maybe twenty pieces of meat in *interest*. They would then be said to own *wholesale shops* and they were known as the new prison *tycoons*. And so, life went on.

\* \* \* \* \*

Still, tragedy followed. One Sunday morning I was feeling bad so I woke up late. I had successfully manoeuvred my way back to Cell No. 88 where my hundred shillings was still tucked away in a crack in the wall. While I was still lingering in my cell, I heard someone yell for help. It sounded close by, so I stood by the door of my cell looking around, wondering from where the yell had come. To my right I saw someone walk out of Cell No. 94, closing the door quickly behind him. I didn't take much

interest because he was a pansy and I hated his type. I watched him disappear down the stairs, but then I heard the sound again. This pathetic yell of pain was heard by another man whose cell was just opposite mine. He had just finished cleaning his chamber pot, and was just as curious as I. We both went to No. 94 and looked through the peep-hole.

A Luo inmate was being beaten up by his pansy who was three times stronger than him. When I saw that, I just left my friend peering and went my way. If a man was being beaten by a pansy he fed with his own rations, in order to get a lay, that was none of my business. Obviously, a sordid prison love triangle had just exploded into violence! The pansy who had been getting double rations from his lover had become stronger than his 'husband' and was bashing his brains in.

\* \* \* \* \*

The alarm sounded just as I was about to finish my pint of *uji*. As usual, people rushed back to their cells, locked themselves in and waited. I had a vague idea of what was happening but I did not know it as so serious as it turned out to be. On the second floor, a warder was still blowing his whistle. He was pointing at Cell No. 94 where a number of inmates were struggling to look inside.

Mwathi had killed his homosexual lover with his bare hands. It was easy because that queer rarely ate. The pansy had gone wild trying to prove himself a man after all. He was now picking his prison 'husband' up from the floor, bashing him in the belly, the chest and the head, and letting the body fall again. He did this more than ten times, apparently not realising that the man was dead. He then started jumping on his chest, which seemed to be the practice in this prison, once a man had killed another and was now waiting for the worst.

Soon, of course, the authorities arrived. Seeing what had happened, they telephoned the cops. The police came and left with both the body of the murdered man and his pansy lover. He, too, died in prison four years later. That was prison life.

\* \* \* \*

In the Induction section, the demand for mats and ropes went down, and soon there was no more coir to weave. People now got time to sit together and talk although it was still illegal to do so. It was around this time that another interesting incident took place. There was a vehicle that used to bring stones into the prison to be dressed by some political prisoners who were locked up with us. The vehicle brought the stones and poured them outside the block, and then it was our job to carry them inside to where the political prisoners worked on the stones, breaking them into small pieces.

Frankly, I never pitied these political drop-outs because some of them, when in Parliament, had never thought that anything could happen to them, let alone that they could be thrown in among thieves. While in Parliament, they would talk ill of prisoners, some even saying we ate three square meals a day. Well, now they were eating their words not three square meals.

What, to me, was more interesting was a reckless group of hardened inmates who looked at the whole situation and thought they saw a chance to escape. They planned to hijack the truck. This Let-Us-Try-and-Fail gang of desperados had the nerve to come to me to seek approval for their mad plan. I listened in disbelief as they told me of their impossible scheme to hijack the vehicle (they were all good get-away drivers), drive it in reverse at great speed, smash through the prison wall, and land themselves outside where they'd make a quick get away. Foolishly, they convinced themselves that it was possible; but I tried to tell them that I wasn't Joshua and these were hardly the walls of Jericho. These were the solid stone walls of Naivasha Maximum Prison Security and there was only one way it could end.

"It is something quite impossible," I said coldly. "It's all up to you, but never, never drag me into such a foolish scheme. You'll know how foolish it is after you have tried."

But there was this ex-Army character who was so packed with philosophy that he could convince them that white was blue,

and so they ignored my advice and decided to go for the wall, come what may!

When the truck came the next week, they put their plan into action. That day, because I knew what was going on, I removed myself from where the warders would select the people who would do that day's unloading of stones. My wall-bashing friends were right in the front when the selection was being done. From a distance, I watched and wished them well, since they badly needed all the luck in the world.

At precisely 11 am I heard a thunderous bang followed by shouts from inmates. As I suspected, the alarm sounded . . .

That abortive escape bid landed my philosopher friend and another six in the Segregation Block where they remain today even as I write this book.

\* \* \* \* \*

Months turned to years and the horror still haunted the prison under the brutal leadership of that unscrupulous tyrant we called Kagi. The rations had now become terribly bad. Some people lost their sight completely and were taken to the hospital wards to join those who had been maimed during the historic massacre. Inmates selected from among us would go up to him periodically to plead with him over various aspects of our welfare; but it was all in vain as he had emphatically stated that he would never change his "principles", even if we smeared him with perfumes.

For stew, we ate salty black water and the *ugali* was an ugly mush which was hard to eat with our bare hands. People lost weight, but no one realised that this was one more of Kagi's sinister strategies. He wanted everyone to be thin and weak.

Work in the Industries remained heavy. When we complained that many of us were losing our sight, he asked very politely, "When you are eating your food, can you see the bowl?"

Not knowing what he was driving at, you gave a frank answer, "Yes, sir."

"Okay, what else do you want? Do you want to see Zambia from here?"

On another occasion, an inmate went to see him in connection with his health. When he got to him, he pleaded, "Sir, please help me. I'm suffering very much. I want . . ."

But Kagi did not listen. He turned to one of his subordinates and said, "Ah, Mr Kafire, can't you tell this boy he's very lucky he's still alive. Aren't people dying every day?"

Another inmate saw him near the drum where the stew was being served. Taking his share, the inmate went up to him and said, "But sir, can't you see that this stew is very watery?" The inmate demonstrated by pouring the stew back into the drum to show that it was like dirty water without a leaf in it. Kagi asked, "What do you mean? Do you people want rocks?"

He was like that. The most ruthless of his type. Under his regime, many inmates lost their sight. Many could hardly see the next step and had to be helped by fellow inmates who held their arms. If Kagi happened along to be around and saw the inmates holding onto each other, he would turn to the officer near him and ask, "What is the wedding for, officer? Can you go and investigate?" Smiling, he would go east while the officer went west to investigate.

\* \* \* \* \*

Hunger brought jealousy, greed, envy, selfishness and lust. Worst of all were the rumours. Our internal news agency daily fed us with the most hopeless lies which we very much liked to listen to and even believe.

"There's a presidential amnesty which will be given to all prisoners who have served from five years on, regardless of one's prison sentence."

Another piece of news said to be more reliable stated that the amnesty would be for first offenders only and those with clean records. Yet another stated that only those who were not bank robbers and had never carried a firearm would be released. And so on and so forth.

Our news agency had something good for everyone, so we liked it. Even when you knew it was pure lies with no foundation whatsoever, you were still willing to listen. Word travelled from prisoners to warders and then back again. Or maybe it went from warders to prisoners and back; it was especially good to listen to news coming from a warder who you believed must have listened to a radio. It was hard to realise that whatever news the warder had given you, he had heard first from a prisoner. This type of news is called *munyugi* in prison.

Take this one that circulated everywhere: "The Commissioner of Prisons has been sentenced to seven years imprisonment because of the April 24 Massacre. The case has been going on for a long time, since the Government takes its cases very slowly and very thoroughly. Some prisoners who passed through here and lodged in the Reception Block said they had been with him in the same prison. The slender tall brown warder told his cousin, the cleaner of the Hospital Block, this same thing, and therefore, this news is from a very reliable source."

Everybody was happy about it. They now believed that Kagi would be transferred since it was the Commissioner of Prisons who kept him here. But immediately after this news broadcast circulated, the Commissioner turned up, apparently to see how everything was going since the last time he had come to visit.

One day I was called from Induction. My first thought was that now that we had been given permission to receive visitors, I probably had one. Since the April 24 all outside communication had been cut off. You could not receive visitors. You could not write home or receive any letters. The radio and the newspapers we used to have had been withdrawn. The only news we got was the pack of lies the warders fed us, but they did not even own radios, and did not even have an idea of how much *Taifa Leo* cost.

Warders who relied on our *munyugi*, which consisted mostly of night dreams, reported the following morning as if they had obtained their news from an infallible source. The few of us who could speak English would always ask, whenever we heard

any new rumour, "Is this news from a reliable source?" or "How reliable is today's *mumyugi*?"

These words became popular everywhere in prison until even the illiterate ones who didn't know English could at least say, "Reliable news, *inasema*?" We had a terrible lust for news which was never satiated. It was even hard to know what the other corner of prison was like.

## Chapter 8

I followed the warder who had called me up to the Reception Block. Here I was supplied with a job-card indicating that I was, as from January 10, employed in the Polishing Section once again. I didn't know how this had happened since I had no influence anywhere in the prison.

I had a clue when I was escorted to the Polishing Section. I was asked questions in connection with silk screen printing, and when they were satisfied with my replies, I was immediately taken back to work.

It turned out that a boy I had talked to in this section, when I was there briefly before, had remembered about a trade I knew and he had told the officer in charge of the Industries. A very special printing job needed to be done for the Government and they knew that I could do it.

That evening, I was transferred to the upper blocks where the inmates working in the Industries stayed.

The period which one was serving did not matter now and people were mixed up. Before I went to my new abode, I slipped into Cell No. 88 and extracted my hundred shilling note from the hole in the door. I knew it would one day help me and I was not in a hurry to spend it.

For a long time, I hadn't made contact with my friend GG. This boy had the worst luck in prison. Whatever chaos arose, he always found himself in the thick of it. Right now he was in solitary confinement with another group of inmates, charged with trying to organise an unsuccessful daylight escape. I can say with certainty that this was not true. GG did not have the slightest connection to the escapees and neither did he have any knowledge of such an attempt.

The truth was that two inmates wanted to die. They believed that with 33 years each, the kind of treatment we got and the starvation in the prison, there was no point in sticking around.

They had, therefore, planned a more advanced method of suicide than hanging themselves, something they regarded as cowardly. They wanted to die with a bullet hole in the head, chest, heart or any other vital organ. They had therefore broken some pipes that brought water into the bathroom. In the evening, just before we were locked in, they went to one of the prison walls, hooked the pipe there and started climbing. They were doing in the full view of the warder on the watch tower. He picked up a self-loading rifle, pointed it at them and warned them that he would shoot if they did not step down.

"What are you waiting for?" they cried. "That's your work! Shoot."

They continued climbing but, of course, they were not climbing the outer wall but a wall that bisected the resting yard. Anyway, if they had wanted to reach the outer one, they could have done so by crawling over that one to where the two joined. So this warder was justified in thinking they might be making a serious attempt to escape.

All the prison alarm bells were now ringing. Minutes later, more than forty warders had surrounded the two boys. They climbed on and jumped to the other resting yard, which was locked from the front and where more than twenty warders were waiting for them at the door.

Holding the pipe, the two boys rushed at the warders and every time they did so, the warders would run out of the way and then surround them again. It soon became a big joke, for the warders knew that there was no chance of the two boys escaping. It was like playing cat and mouse, and the warders were even laughing.

The wall they had just jumped over was just behind them and so they were out of firing range for the guard at the tower. But they were now caged in like trapped animals just waiting for the Commander to come and decide what would be done next.

Soon he was at the scene, and he ordered them at gun point to drop the pipe, put their hands up, and go towards the door.

"I won't shoot to kill; but what I will do to you, if you don't do as I say, will bring you into our hands anyway, just as easy as catching a chicken. So, will you drop that pipe or not?"

The two boys wanted death, not just to get maimed and so they complied and fell into the hands of their eager warders. Before they reached the Duty Office, about 300 yards from there, they were both unconscious. They were carried to the punishment block in that state. Each time they regained consciousness, they were given more of the same treatment, and it went on for three days.

Meanwhile, in the block where this incident had taken place, a curfew had been announced. No more movement, not even going to Induction. This block had become very naughty and beyond control. There had been several abortive escape bids.

Soon after breakfast, we would be locked in. We were no longer allowed water to wash or to drink. For one week, we in the Block all suffered because while being locked in about eighty warders were giving us the Kagi treatment.

So cowards and traitors once again emerged with their mischief. After murmuring among themselves, they sent for the officer in charge and told him they were ready to come clean by exposing the ringleaders of all these attempted escapes.

That was the way Kagi liked it. He was given the names of six inmates, GG's being top on the list. They were all quickly taken away. I would have defended GG but then I felt I was very lucky to have been omitted from that list. \*

As months passed by, I gained much influence with the senior officers in the Industries. My work had proved far better than they had expected. I started gaining power over other inmates and the artisans started trusting me with more responsibility. I could even record the things that came from various carpentry sections to the Polishing Section.

By the fourth month, I was known even to those high up in the prison hierarchy. Back at the blocks, I had already made many friends as most of the recognised criminals in that prison had known me for a long time. I was known by many more I didn't even know. I had a motive for letting them know me and get used to me despite the fact that I wholeheartedly hated the prison fraternity. I wanted to have GG taken out of segregation. I knew

how bad it was to have a friend there and he could easily remain there for as long as his sentence lasted. I wanted him taken out before it was too late.

Knowing Kagi as I now did, after three years in this prison, I realised there was only one way to convince him of GG's innocence. Kagi had a certain simplicity of nature which made him susceptible to people who knew how to handle him. I had realised that all he hated was to hear about food shortages, people being maimed at the Duty Office, or demands for certain amenities such as soap, toilet paper, medicine, water and so on.

If you didn't approach him on such matters, he was quite willing to listen, obviously because this was his only way of getting to know about his own prison. He liked to hear opinions about different people and situations in the prison and, in such cases, he considered matters carefully and acted quickly.

I, for one, had learned to hide from him my most burning desires including one that I had of publishing a book while in prison, for I knew that that way I stood a better chance of coming to an understanding with him. So I used this kind of knowledge and cunning to approach him for GG's release from segregation.

As I say, I had made many friends from all sections in the prison, from the cooks to the cleaners in the blocks. I had even managed to get to know guys from the block where GG, through his own secret network of spies, had managed to get two packets of cigarettes for his release campaign. Such was the power of cigarettes. The two packets were more than enough for the job.

We who were working for his release arranged among ourselves that whenever Kagi was going around on his rounds, one or two inmates would approach him and shower him with praise for his outstanding leadership and the fantastic security he had established on our behalf. Kagi was the sort of person to lap up that kind of praise like a cat laps up warm milk. Deep inside, we knew he harboured his own insecurities and vulnerabilities. These could be the only reason to explain Kagi's cruelty. So each one of us had to remember to mention to him, at every opportunity,

that his prison command had a fine style of its own, and that he was the ideal person for this maximum command.

However after the praise, each one of us had to mention something or other that we were afraid of, especially some innocent people being segregated without proper cause. If he didn't ask, "Such as who?" and he wasn't likely to, one had to mention GG's case and how he had been victimised.

So on June 2, Kagi was on his usual rounds. He was in the Polishing Section at around 11 am. Luckily, I was working on some very important items that all the prison authorities were seriously concerned about. They were being specially made for the Government. He stopped to admire my cooking methods and then he started chatting. He wanted to know where I had learned my trade, but I was careful not to disclose that I had actually learned it in another prison. Here was my chance to mention GG's case. I said we had been doing it together at a certain company where GG had taken me and taught me the skill. I was quick to mention my friend's misfortune after having been framed by certain people who had a very sinister motive.

"Are you sure he was not involved in that last attempted escape?" he asked.

"If he had been, sir, he would have done it himself. Those two boys wanted to die; nothing else. If they had meant to escape for real, they would have climbed over the outer wall. Anyway, you did what was right with those two boys, and they got exactly what they deserved. But as for GG sir, please see to it."

We met once again in the block with my friends, hired with cigarette power. I had learned, through experience, that to get perfection out of any contract, you had to pay well. I had paid them well from the two packets and so I expected maximum cooperation.

The boys came to me as soon as each had finished his lunch. They said that Kagi had visited Workshops A, B, C and D that day, and in each section, an inmate or two had sung our tune as rehearsed. What I had told him now had satisfied him beyond reasonable doubt that an injustice had been done in GG's case.

Shortly after lunch, the loudspeaker called GG to the Duty Office. I stood near where GG was passing, hoping to alert him about the story I had told Kagi about our work in a fictitious company. Unfortunately, he passed, more than sixty yards away and I missed my chance. He was guarded.

Back in my section, I talked over GG's situation with the CO II in charge of workshop D. He asked for GG's name and number, which I gave him. In Kagi's regime, every officer above the rank of senior sergeant had the power to take an inmate in or out of any dark corner.

"I'll see about it," the CO II said at length. And I knew he meant what he said. When we closed for the day after the usual counting (we were counted four or five times a day), we went back to the blocks and on the way, met GG being taken back to his segregation block. Unfortunately, he hadn't seen Kagi. The Prison boss had received an urgent call and had gone out of the prison compound. When he came back, he was too tired to see anyone.

GG was to be taken back to him the following day at 10.30 am. By this time, I had managed to pass on to him vital information on to how to go about his case. He now knew exactly what to expect and what to say. And so, by lunch time, a happy GG was with us once again.

I was happy, too, for I had managed to get one very important friend out of a dark corner where he could be even today as I write this second book.

\* \* \* \* \*

I went on struggling until I was eventually able to have GG employed in the same section I was in. With me now as supervisor of the other prisoners in my section, he stood a good chance of having a comparatively easy time here.

But as the months went by, our difficulties became more acute. Certain amenities like soap, toilet paper, clothes, and worst of all, water, started disappearing. When we saw Kagi about it, he

argued that if he didn't get those things from headquarters, we shouldn't expect him to buy them using his own resources. This was all very well for him to say, but we knew that he pocketed the cash headquarters allocated for buying those things. If we had been given a chance to challenge him we would have asked him why all these things became available whenever he went on leave, when we were left under the command of his deputy. He sneeringly told us that since we were so good at convincing warders to bring us such things as cigarettes, we might as well convince them to bring us things like soap as well.

"Yes, come to think of it, you can also tell them to buy you calico sheets. You have sewing machines here and you are the ones who operate them — not me or my subordinates. You can make yourselves good uniforms."

So things went on deteriorating as the long days dragged by. Our rations became something that would not satisfy a seven-year-old child. In the Industries, inmates were completely unable to work. They would totter up to their benches and talk about how the hunger would see them to their graves. Then they would begin to doze off.

The artisans who were always with the inmates in the workshop reported this to the superiors and even made it clear that if work was to continue, the rations had to be improved. They all witnessed how little and poor the food was. In the evenings, when we had beans for stew, the prisoners would count them and the luckiest would find, say, about forty beans in his bowl if he counted one by one. Some got as few as 27 beans. But no one argued for fear of being taken to the Duty Office and coming out maimed.

On the eighth day, after our rations had been cut by two-thirds, Kagi talked to all the prisoners from the Duty Office, claiming that the Government had reduced our rations to the amount we were presently getting. He claimed it was a big Government plan to reduce our rations so we were to put up with what we got until the Government thought otherwise.

I could imagine him smiling as he talked because this man was at his happiest when he was inflicting pain on us. Very often, we would wonder if he could ever get a wife. Then as if to convince us that he could, he brought her one day to the prison soon after his marriage so that the three prison choirs could sing for her, and she could hear how we praised him.

He never knew it was all mockery.

People grew thinner still and became very emaciated as we underwent the so-called Big Government Plan. It lasted exactly 42 days, between May and June. This period brought out the worst in the prisoners. Homosexuals snatched this opportunity to pounce on fresh victims. Hatred seemed to take over as men divided themselves into small gangs. After 42 days of starvation, things returned more or less to normal for some unknown reason.

Right around this time, the warders stopped pushing us around as they had done before. Certainly, it seemed that some force intervened on our behalf and even illicit habits such as smoking became rampant. The market value on cigarettes soared as men started smoking in large numbers.

Taking advantage of this inexplicable mood of freedom that had suddenly swept over the prison, the whole place became like one mammoth black market for cigarettes. Since only one in ten prisoners had access to an outside supply line of cigarettes, there was cut-throat competition for this much-sought-after commodity.

An inmate could take any risk for a packet of cigarettes. They became so valuable that one cigarette could actually buy you six pieces of meat! And since each prisoner only had one piece of meat at a time, six desperate prisoners would gang up at a time in order to afford one cigarette. It was sheer madness and once again, the warders stepped in to take full advantage of the situation.

They became even greedier than the prisoners. Their lust was for the hand-made products that we in the Prison Industries produced, as well as for some of the work tools like the chisels

and hammers—that we regularly used. They had the best of times from the prisoners' miseries.

A metre of upholstery cloth costing Ksh 200 would be sold to a warder for eight packets of Rooster cigarettes which were worth Ksh 16. A tough warder could smuggle out three metres of such cloth on a good day.

In one incident, a warder wanted a table clock he had seen in the prison industries store, and he knew that, for a few packets of cigarettes, the prisoners would get it out for him. He offered ten packets to whoever could smuggle it out for him. Many were willing but the trouble was how to get it through to the blocks, for it had to be smuggled through the Duty Office where people were searched in the nude every day after closing time.

A group of daring teenagers happened to be working on that side of the Duty Office at this particular time. They belonged to a group calling itself *Congo By Force*, which had almost collapsed when their leader fell during the April 24 Massacre. His deputy had tried to keep the group together, but he wasn't strong enough and so *Congo By Force* had merged with another group of dirty teenagers from Nairobi going by the name of *Black Power*. They had a word with this warder, promising to deliver the table clock to him by the end of the week, after checking out what the search would be like. At times, the search was not all that thorough, and it all depended on the shift on duty.

The boys managed to smuggle the table clock through the Duty Office as promised; but Kagi and his subordinates happened to be standing by that day as we marched down the road from the workshops to the blocks. When the boss was around, we were forced, of course, to move in a rather orderly manner. The group from the Duty Office came and we all met at the centre of the field. As bad luck would have it, the alarm of the table clock went off precisely at the time the prisoners met the warders (and Kagi looked on). There we were marching silently and respectfully before the boss when the damn alarm went off, frightening the hell out of everyone. As we were in a mob, no one could quite

tell who had the clock and so we waited for all hell to break loose.

The thieving warders — all as criminal as any of us — were suddenly alert, forcing us to squat. The eyes of the boss and his party all popped wide open in disbelief. Kagi loved this kind of scene and he gleefully awaited the culprit's apprehension. As the warders were busy pushing us around and searching for the clock, the clock mercifully stopped ringing. In the confusion, *Congo By Force* managed to shield the boy with the clock and the next time anyone saw the clock, it was about ten yards from where we all were. No one — not even I — knew how it got tossed, but I have to confess, it was a neat piece of work spoilt only by the timing of providence.

We were dismissed thirty minutes later and, mercifully, no one was punished. Remembering the collective abuses that we had received in the past, I wondered what Kagi was up to. But I didn't contemplate the change of climate too long since one never quite knew when the blows would rain down again.

## Chapter 9

All those boys working on that side of the Duty Office were rejects from other sections. They were quite an odd combination because each of them had been taken there as part of punishment. They had either been rejected by the artisan from the section they belonged to for some reason or had been caught with cigarettes.

Such people were really hated by the boss as he called them the masterminds of the illegal transactions in Induction, yet another place for rejects from the workshops. They would not be taken anywhere else but in front of the eyes of the boss, whose office was just a few yards from where the boys were kept, surrounded by a wire and given lumps of stones to break into small pieces. Anyone caught with a big offence was brought to this area where the boss knew and believed they would not get something to sell to warders, he looked on. But our learned boss was wrong. This was the place where he had put all the contraband masterminds. They had managed to steal a clock and other things that had remained a mystery to the storekeeper until a member of the gang turned traitor and squealed.

The area, just in front of where the stones were being broken, was where the Prison Industries store was situated. It housed all types of tools used in carpentry, metal work, polishing, tailoring and upholstery sections. Whenever any of the sections needed new tools in exchange for the old ones, they went there. In this sense, the strength of the industries lay there, and just opposite the store was this most dangerous bunch in the whole prison. A bunch that believed that in cigarettes lay the only secret with which to beat long stretches. Without cigarettes, you were not worth any recognition. Recognition was their main objective, if you remember that a great majority of the lot were terrible homosexuals. Prison life without women had made them so.

This store was built like any other store in the prison and they didn't need to put much security, as it was within a place where

security was most intense. It had, in this case, no ceiling but a large gap from the top of the wall to the roof.

With such professionals around, the authorities could not have made a bigger mistake. One day, the store clerk noticed a jack plane worth Ksh 200 missing. He concluded that he had made a mistake somewhere. Another day, he missed two hammers and concluded that, since he had exchanged a number of hammers of the same type, he had given out two in excess. He promised himself never to make such a mistake in the future. On another day, he noticed more than half a dozen paint-brushes were missing. He hadn't recently exchanged any. He started suspecting those people who went to exchange things and decided that, they would in future stand at the door while exchanging their tools and no one would enter the store. They would be making their requests from the doorway and he kept his table across the doorway to block the way. But things kept on going missing. He knew even as he was blocking the way that to reach some of the places where he had kept the tools, one had to climb up a little bit, a thing he could not have failed to notice no matter how busy he might be. Now this became a mystery. He also became afraid that he might have lost more tools than the ones he had noticed and one day locked himself inside to count. He almost fainted at the realisation that he had lost tools valued at over Ksh 2,000~~00~~

When he opened the store door, he was trembling in a manner very noticeable to the wise guys around.

He went to the officer in charge of Industries and reported this grave matter straightaway. He gave his story, fearing that the officer-in-charge wasn't going to believe him and would accuse him of engineering the whole thing. But, to his relief, the officer-in-charge told him that there had been similar reports the same day from two other stores within the workshops where things like door locks, hedges, upholstery, pins and other materials were kept. The storekeeper felt much better.

Even days later, things still went missing. Then some sort of misunderstanding arose between the two combined gangs, *Black*

*Power and Congo by Force.* They had become tycoons now and were proud of being the queers who owned the best pansies available. A very, very, dirty thing to be proud of. This game made the whole prison stink of murder. Ruthless fights and endless quarrels erupted in prison because of this homosexual thing. There was nothing else these two groups thought about. Whatever they did was centred on the act. They concentrated all their interest, thoughts, respect and everything else on this thing. It was the thing that made the gang disintegrate and made fifteen members be segregated.

They quarrelled and fought on this particular day because often packets of cigarettes a warder had paid in advance for the supply of two jack planes, three half-inch chisels and a hammer. The inmate who received the advance payment refused to part with anything until half the job had been done so that the warder wouldn't become violent if they failed.

He was right, of course, but there was an inmate who was in dire need. His pansy had just found a new jacket (made of old blankets salvaged from the waste store) which would be sold to another if he didn't bring the cigarettes needed in time. So this guy, Mlevi, went to Young and begged him, "Brother, my kid's screaming blue murder. Let me have one packet to meet his demand. I will make sure I climb up there and at least drop out with something. Just relieve me of the pain in the neck for now. One of these days, this kid will make me go nuts. I just don't know what I'll do without him. I have tried to get rid of him but I can't."

"Take your nightmares somewhere else, Mlevi," Young said. "You talk of going nuts but you are already nuts. What is all this you are telling me? I would have considered what you told me from a human point of view but, having mentioned kids to me while you know I don't have anything to do with them, you have spoilt everything. Go and sweat it out with your so-called kid."

No one talks such language to a member of the *Black Power* gang and lives to enjoy life. Minutes later the power was in action.

The order was, "Fetch Young! Get all the cigarettes he has, at any cost."

At least, the members were quite co-operative and took orders as they came. These boys had been beaten half to death several times for similar cases but they were not the type to reform. The more you beat them the more you hardened them, and the more daring they became.

Young was sitting at a certain corner talking with two boys from his group (a group which was strictly anti-homosexual). It was a large one although they didn't sit together as they, too, were divided between the educated and the illiterate. The youngest of the Black Power group called Young. It seemed that Young knew straightaway what to expect. He was not a character to be bullied by two to three youngsters. Black Power and they knew it, so the whole group had come for him in full force. Minutes later the whole block stank of blood.

Two lost teeth, more than three got broken noses, one had half of his left ear bitten off, while others suffered several cuts on their faces where flying heads had caught them. The two groups fought for over forty minutes. By then, there were guards selected by the Black Power leader to make sure that the alarms weren't interfered with.

To avoid the eyes of the warders, they fought inside the block where they were sure not to be interrupted.

Thus for about forty minutes, over one hundred inmates from the two main groups fought almost to death because of one packet of Rooster cigarettes worth less than Ksh 2.

Somebody slipped out and called the warders. The prisoners were ordered to squat in lines of fives as usual. The Duty Officer came and found the mess. He took the injured aside. There were many casualties. Clothes were torn to shreds but the wiser ones had quickly rushed to their cells and changed into clean ones. Looking at the damage done to people who were not willing to say anything, the Duty Officer merely chuckled and ordered that they all be locked in. As far as he was concerned, they no longer existed.

The security officer arrived the next morning to announce curfew for all. But the inmates had thought about it the whole night. Three jailbirds who could talk themselves out of the grave stood up to speak, and could they talk! When the security officer went, he took with him 15 inmates given to him as the ring leaders of the *Black Power* and the *Congo By Force*. With their leaders segregated the two gangs almost collapsed.

\* \* \* \* \*

Prison. The only place where you can really learn the character of a person and see him in his true colours. Since there is nothing better to do once outside the workshops, one is occasionally forced to stand aside and watch people and their strange behaviour . . .

Something happened just under my nose that made me hate prison and what there was in it even more. As anyone might guess, we sat in groups while taking meals or when resting. This was for protection. Here I was always with my friends, old friends like GG and the group I was imprisoned with, including an old friend called Ramadhani Mwangi; an odd combination of names I must admit, but a Kikuyu all right. He was once a salesman for a motor vehicles company and he was a good, talented one. Then he stole some money from this company. The company was kind. Instead of having him imprisoned, they considered his past service and, decided to only sack him. From a place like that, where one is used to big money, the usual place to turn to when one runs broke is the other side of the law. This other side has plenty of quick money . . . But, my dear friend, it is hard-earned and can easily lead to death!

This friend of mine owned a Peugeot 404 matatu plying between Nyeri and Nairobi. He also owned a Datsun 1600 which he used very often for personal business outside crime. Unlike ourselves, he had made good use of the money he had earned from various jobs and his wife was still looking after the businesses he had started — such as a retail shop in Eastleigh.

where his wife still lived, and a few kiosks in different parts of Nairobi.

Lust for money still persisted in him and one day, in 1970, as they were breaking into a store in Nairobi South C, they were ambushed and he got twenty years as a reward for all the bad things he had done.

I was always with this man and I noticed that he ate two rations daily. I was not too interested in his appetite because I knew double rations came about in two ways. One was from the cigarette business and the other was from sodomy. I was positive my friends did not subscribe to the second method, and I knew Ramadhani was a man with dough outside. His wife came to see him every three months and I guess that he made arrangements so that he could be left with some two or three hundred shillings to push him in prison. I was not interested in knowing further because prison food did not interest me. Even the usual ration we got was sometimes too much for me.

Then my man got himself fought over in broad daylight, a thing that left me very disgusted.

We had ~~q~~ closed work to go for lunch and as usual we went to the labour distribution yard where all inmates from all workshops met to be counted. We had arrived earlier and we were waiting for the inmates of Workshop E, where Ramadhani worked.

A certain queer was sitting behind me and talking to some boys beside me and others in his line. It was as if he had a meeting. These boys belonged to the same Black Power gang that had nearly collapsed. They were discussing someone who had come from segregation with a group of seven other people after staying here for one and half years. He said that this particular one was having affairs with his *Yankee* as they call pansies. He complained that he had warned them several times and no one seemed to heed him.

\* Amos claims that this kid belonged to him back in Kamiti Prison before they were both transferred and that he won't leave him. Now I want to see the end of this. I told him that if I ever saw him once again with my *Yankee* I would fight it out there and

then, any place anywhere. He says he is ready to fight and you know he is depending on those toughies whom he lived with in segregation. Don't they know who we are?"

\* \* \* \* \*

Workshop E inmates started covering the two hundred yards between us. This boy was quite uneasy. His eyes were on the coming inmates, tension written all over his face.

Then he said: "*Unaona Mzee vile nakueleza?* (Do you see, friend what I am telling you?) They are coming hand in hand. See how they walk). *Hayo ni madharau na yataisha leo.* (That is contempt and it will end today)".

I followed his eyes and the only people who were holding hands were, as far as I was concerned, not in the homosexual game. I could see one of them was my friend Ramadhani. A friend of mine could not be involved in this game and continue being my friend. I was not telling this to anyone in particular. It was just something I found myself thinking, after sadly realising that even though I had refused to admit it, the person the boy meant was the friend I knew so well and trusted. And he was handsome all right. At the same time he bore a backside flesh, the kind that boys loved.

Yes, yes, it could be true. I was deep in thought when I saw what was happening. Mohammed, the jealous one, had risen and gone to meet them just as they were entering the gate of the distribution yard. It was fenced in by wire.

He went straight to the two and talked viciously to my friend "Rama! Didn't I tell you not to involve yourself with this boy?"

Rama? I thought I had heard that name uttered by queen somewhere. Why hadn't I figured out that it was short for Ramadhani? Why do I always trust people further than I can throw them? Okay, we learn through mistakes, I concluded.

A calculated blow hit Rama on the face. He staggered and fell against the wire fence. Rama's friend, Amos, attacked Mohammed with blows. Amos was in turn attacked from behind by a membe

of Black Power, buddy to Mohammed. The toughies, as they were called by Mohammed, came up. They knew their work well. Flying heads, flying legs and fists; the whole field smelt of blood.

As a tough one myself, I liked watching such a mess. I went and stood close by to enjoy the scene. Maybe I knew I would one day need to remember the details of that battle day to write and tell you about it.

The battle continued as the rest of us watched. No one took the trouble to separate them. As often happened, many others who had enemies within the crowd took this opportunity to exact revenge. The fighters swelled from fifteen to twenty, from twenty to forty and, eventually, a quarter of the prisoners were in it, roughly three hundred.

We watched those numbskulls relieving each other of teeth, marking each other with permanent scars on the foreheads and on the cheeks. It went on for a considerable time and then the alarm went off.

Inmates started running to the safety of the blocks, but the gate was too narrow in an emergency for over a thousand people in a rush. An inmate fell down and more than seven hundred people ran over him. He has been lame ever since.

After everybody had fled to safety, four inmates continued fighting, not knowing that the alarm was on and that all the others had fled. Then they realised it and they too fled, each holding his right hand. Simiyu was left crying with pain after being trampled under a thousand rushing feet. Twenty minutes later, when all of us had been locked in, the loudspeakers called out a number of names. My queer friend Ramadhani was among the nine called to the Duty Office. After answering to several charges they were all sentenced to eighteen strokes. The security officer who passed the sentence told them, "We are not going to tolerate this nonsense. You are going to receive those strokes in front of all the other prisoners so that it may warn them while teaching you a lesson. You call yourselves Black Power, but you should realise we are also a power. We shall soon see which power is stronger. You will all go to Punishment Block till we call you."

But after some thought this officer-in-charge felt that if this was done in our view, unlike the case in other prisons, we would try to rescue our friends: therefore the punishment was carried out elsewhere. It was then decided that the same inmates be brought before us after they had received their strokes. The same day, they were passed between us in lines pulling up their shirts and shorts so that we could see the damage on their buttocks. I watched Ramadhani with sorrow, knowing I had lost a very close friend whom I once knew as very brave and very generous. The same generosity perhaps had made him part with his manhood. That is prison life.

\* \* \* \* \*

On August 13, I was called from the section I was working in. At first I thought I had a visitor, then realised I had had one less than a fortnight before. According to the standing orders, an inmate could be visited only once a month which had completely slipped my mind.

I had, however, a debt with the authorities. I hadn't received the 48 strokes of the cane imposed on me by the judge. I had already forgotten about the whole thing because of prison rumours saying that those who hadn't received their strokes were lucky as it had been ruled that, because innocent people had suffered in the April 24 massacre, those who hadn't received strokes had been forgiven.

I had believed the rumour because for over three years, since that time, no one had been called for corporal punishment. This was one rumour that everyone cherished because the majority hadn't received their strokes yet. Well, we were wrong. The icing on our sentences was still coming.

I was taken outside the workshops towards the Reception Office. At the labour distribution yard, I found a large group waiting and together we were taken to Reception Block.

Taken by surprise, I didn't know whether to be afraid or not. I now superstitiously believed that Wednesday was an unlucky

day for me. It was the day I was arrested, the day I was sentenced to 20 years and 48 strokes, and now it was the day when I would receive the strokes which, I was sure, were going to mutilate my buttocks.

What happened is that when I was taken to the slaughtering yard, at the back of the Reception Office, I saw a stand taller than me. At the top, it had two handcuffs one on the right and one on the left about three and a half feet apart. My hands were tied to these. It hurt because I am short and I had to stand on my toes to reach it.

At the centre of the stand there was a wide canvas belt with a large hole in the middle. This covered the viction from the waist to the lower part of the buttocks, leaving a neat protrusion for the whip. The belt was adjusted to fit my size and tied so tightly that I knew that jumping about was quite impossible. At the bottom were two more handcuffs, one for each leg and you had to stand feet astride to reach them or to be more precise, you were forced to reach them regardless of your height and size. They could even dissect you if that was what it took to fit you in the space.

My legs were fastened. In another corner, about five yards from where I was, I saw long *jarahani* sticks, worse than a whip. They were put in an open jar with hot salted water to increase their sting.

A red linen cloth was put in the same salty water and spread on my protruding buttocks. This helped to hide the blood that would start oozing from the eyes of the warder whipping you. Needless to say, I found this unnecessary because even if the warders saw blood, they wouldn't stop, for they knew their work. They were all well-built, bigger than an average man. The officer-in-charge was there to witness the punishment, as was the Medical Officer who wasn't of much help as he could hardly ever say that you were unfit for punishment.

He was an Indian with sun glasses on this gloomy day and he was smiling for no reason at all.

"Jack Zollo," called the officer-in-charge, "you were sentenced to 20 years imprisonment, 48 strokes and hard labour, and five years under police supervision after your release."

"I was told that in court, sir. You need not tell me again," I said stoutly.

"Cool off, young boy. I want to tell you that you are today, right here and now, to receive 24 strokes as part of your corporal punishment. The doctor has announced that you are fit to receive that number."

"Carry on," someone said to the warder holding the *jarahani*. It was swung once, then again, piercing the air until it made a whistling sound, making the blood run cold. The third swing landed on my buttocks. Surprisingly, I did not feel it, and don't mistake what I mean by that.

Two more swings in the air and the third was on me. I heard the voice say "Two!" Some more swings and the third one was me again. "Three!" said the voice. It was the Indian doctor.

Now, every stroke bore more weight and more pain than the first. If you didn't yell, the warder was accused of being friendly. When you yelled, a chorus of them cried out, "*Hapo! hapo! hapo!* (*There! There! Right there!*)". So what? I couldn't yell. I knew what I was paying for and I paid. I heard the doctor count eleven, twelve, thirteen and then I couldn't hear the counting any longer. I was still conscious though. Then the pain was louder than the voice.

\* \* \* \* \*

I felt the upper handcuffs unlocked, then the belt and the leg cuffs, I could hear lots of voices.

"This is a murderer, he can't scream."

Yet another, "*Unatudharau, eh!* (*You just despise us, eh!*) Do you want to be given more?"

In pain anyone is apt to be insolent, especially me. So I said, "Why don't you use a *panga*? That didn't hurt much." Blood was oozing terribly and some iodine was put on my back. It made

the effect of the caning even more painful but that didn't matter much as far as I was concerned. It had taught me what to expect next time. For if you cry out, who will help you? You're just paying your dues.

Days turned to nights and nights to days then weeks and months. Things had started cooling down. As it is with human nature, we started to forget what was within the prison, or may be we got used to the horror.

Another thing I have known for certain is that whatever measures you take with a man who has no alternative, he sooner or later gets used to it. A man with an ill reputation can never change no matter how badly he is treated or beaten. What changes a man is what is fed to him spiritually or with reason but not beatings or persecution. Beatings will only make him worse and this is exactly what was happening in the prison we were in. It would have saved both sides a lot of grief had they approached it from a humanitarian angle. Too bad there were so many sadists, not interested in our reform but in getting our blood.

## Chapter 10

We were seated outside our block in a group of friends when I heard my name called. We all looked at each other because it never ended well when an inmate was called, and especially if the caller was a warder holding a piece of paper with names of inmates on it.

I was the type of person who could be called for trouble at any moment, as my prison conduct was far from perfect. In most cases, when one was called, the first thing to do was to take off his boots, if he had any, or the tyre-made sandals we were officially provided with.

I took mine off and left them with GG telling him that if I didn't come back he should do the necessary. That's how it is.

Whenever you were called, your friend would only have peace of mind when you came back in one piece.

I walked bravely towards the door, every inmate staring at me, wondering what would befall me this time. Well, I was a popular inmate, both with the authorities and fellow prisoners. I was then the clerk of the earning scheme and it was nearing the end of the month when I would quote their purchases and they would not have liked to lose me at the eleventh hour. The door was opened for me and I stepped in.

"What are your other names?" the warder asked me. My heart started pounding because that question could mean many things. It could mean a court production order had come to call me to court for more cases they had fished out, for it never mattered how long you had been in prison when it came to that. Also, I hadn't received my second instalment of the 48 strokes and I was expecting them any time.

Well, I had to face whatever was on the menu, but I had to steady myself and be cautious.

"No other names, sir. But they have nicknamed me *Master* here, if that might help."

"Don't be silly. Is there anything else you people think of except what you have in prison?" He was now holding my shirt and propelling me towards the Duty Office, the same place we were taken to and came back limping. But he had told me something that had hurt me. "What good things can one think of in prison?" I asked myself.

Aloud, I asked him, "Sir, have you ever sat down and thought that some of the prisoners you deal with here are wiser, cleverer, stronger, and even richer than you people?" He stopped moving and even let go of my shirt.

"Are you mad? How dare you tell me a thing like that? *Leo, utapata maneno* (Today you will see!). You tell me you can employ me? You are richer than the Government that has employed me and even cleverer and wiser? I . . ."

"Now see what I mean? I tell you this, you translate it that way. Who said I can employ you?" I demanded.

We reached the Duty Office arguing. It was routine here. If you happened to be called by a warder who was new in prison, all you needed to do was to show him you were not all that afraid and that you would create a new case between the two of you if he didn't move cautiously.

We didn't stop at the Duty Office though I had squatted outside to await being ushered inside for a beating. At the reception, the warder handed me to another one and left without a word.

This reception clerk could do many things with me. He could transfer me to a new workshop, transfer me to another prison, read for me a court summons, remind me I hadn't had all of my medicine (strokes), deprive me of my remission as directed, have me sent to solitary confinement (prison within prison) for one thing or another: but on the other hand, he could give me good news. The trouble was I wasn't used to getting good news in prison and such a thought would never cross my mind. He said "You are Jack Zollo, aren't you?"

"Yes, sir." \*

"Your other names?"

"No other names, sir. You have my record, sir."

"That's not the question. Is there any other name you are known by?"

"I don't think there is, sir. Known by who?"

"I think then there is a mistake. You can go back to your block."

I turned to go. At the door he called me.

"You said you do not know a lady by the name Miriam Nyambui?" I had to see with my mouth wide open.

As I said, at times you could be called for good news, and this was good news. I had a visitor. Milly, my wife, if I could call her that, had come to look for her long lost boy. This being her first visit to Naivasha, she wasn't aware that I had changed my name after being imprisoned.

Memories of the happy times I once knew started flowing back to my tortured mind. I remembered Milly the way I knew her years back. It was a long time since I saw her last because we were denied visitors after allegedly drinking the blood of a warder. I was eager to see how she looked like after five years of separation.

Was she the same girl I knew? The same girl that fate had given me, perhaps to help me be good to society? The same girl who was always ready to share with me whatever problems I put myself into?

That same beauty I was just about to wed when the long arm of the law got hold of me? What was she going to tell me? That she had found another to take my place as I had suggested to her? Would she know I wasn't serious and that I had told her so because I pitied her?

How was she dressed? Had she been given any trouble by these warders after saying that she wanted to see a long-term prisoner? Would her visit mean she still had a place for me in her heart? Did she love me that seriously...?

Those were the thoughts passing through my mind. I forgot I was in the office of a senior officer. I came back to reality when he asked again, "You do not know her? You mean to say you do not have other names?" You must realise these prison officers have experience in every sort of human kind. They could be as cunning as the criminals themselves.

"In that case, sir, I am Jack Zollo, alias Albert Wanjohi, alias John Ichamwenge alias . . ."

"Okay, okay, young man. Don't get excited. I'll give you enough time to talk with her." I liked this particular officer forever after. I looked myself over. My uniform was new but dirty. I tried to dust it a bit but that didn't make much of a difference. I combed my short hair with my barehands and saw bits of grass and blanket fall off my head. I tried to smile for the first time since I was imprisoned and, hoping that the smile was just as Milly knew it, hid it back.

It then occurred to me that I was barefoot. I had left my sandals behind, thinking that I was going for a hiding.

Cursing myself for being so pessimistic, I followed the officer to the visitors' room.

\* \* \* \*

I sat on the form and waited, expecting her to appear any second. I am sure I waited for only two minutes but, if you asked me right then, I'd have sworn I had been sitting there waiting for five hours. I was badly longing to see her. And then Milly came in.

The smile that met me buried all the miseries which I had gone through and which would pursue me for many more years. We couldn't shake hands. I couldn't even smell her perfume which I so much admired, simply because there was a barrier between us. There was a glass panel six feet high. But it was clear and I could see her very well. What was so disheartening was having to talk through a telephone receiver. You have never encountered such an odd thing. Normally we talk on phones to those we are not seeing, who are far from you, where you cannot see their faces. But right now, I was talking with someone I could see, staring at her eyes and, at times, going down to her feet to admire the legs I once knew.

Well, it was a good sight after years of seeing men only, men clad in cheap white shorts and shirts, men who barked and roared like wild animals thinking they were just talking. The soft voice

that came through the phone wasn't the one I knew, yet, it was Milly I was talking to, my old Milly. She was wearing a full dress, very white, and I could see it wasn't far from being transparent because when she turned I could dimly see the brassiere underneath. She was holding a lady's coat which looked like it had cost her a few hundred shillings.

"Well, Jack, how are you doing?" she asked.

If I told her I was doing well, it would have been a lie because I wasn't doing well. Right then I was curing the effect of twenty-four strokes of the cane (which lasted six months without my being able to sit properly). I had also visited the Duty Office for some "correction" less than two weeks before, so all the joints in my body were aching, for that's where most of the correction goes. Practical rehabilitation, some call it.

That question intended to be a greeting reminded me, before anything else, of this guy, a queer, who had forced me into a fight with him. In many cases, this place of ours did not have water in the blocks, so we were supplied with plastic buckets.

We went to the Blocks to draw water from the only tap which usually remains kind and active. It doesn't have enough so it takes about twenty minutes to fill one bucket. And you know the time taken by about one thousand inmates to draw water before being locked in? About two and a half hours. So we were forced to draw three mugs each and if you wanted more than that, be ready for a good beating. So this guy swore his bucket was going to be filled because he claimed to be tough, which he was anyway, only that he ignored the fact that there were tougher ones in this hellish place. I could see my bucket was ten steps behind and the bell at the Duty Office had rung to warn us that we had less than thirty minutes to lock up.

When I argued this fact with him, he retorted, "*Sitaki ushoga Yule anasikia vibaya ana weza kuiondoa athubutu*," and he stood aside about five metres from the tap.

So I got annoyed and took the plastic bucket and threw it away with the water half full. The first thing that happened, was that the bucket broke and to get another one, he knew he'd have to

sacrifice a good number of the rations we got. When he came for me, I was kicking out like a mule and the next moment we were both bleeding through our nostrils. Our white shirts became bloody and, of course, torn to bits, so what next? The Duty Office. This place was tough. I was known as a person who could talk himself out of anything, but, man I rarely managed it in this place. My joints were still aching.

Milly interrupted my memories by adding, "You do not look very bad, Jack. How is the treatment?"

"Well, let's say I am fine, Milly. And as for the treatment, it depends on how these fellow inmates want you to be treated."

"What do you mean by that, Jack? Do some have power over others?" she asked pitifully as if she understood that fellow inmates could be worse than the warders, which was very true from my point of view.

"Well, when they go throwing fists at me, I've got to throw back some, and, as a result, we get punished. I can't help it, Milly, no matter how good I want to be."

"Jack, won't you ever change, please?" she interrupted. "Haven't you learnt how bad it is to fight?" I knew what would follow, the same thing we used to have years back when she happened to hear that a robbery had taken place and I came home late, gasping for breath. I wasn't going to allow it when I was in trouble and with a warder behind me also clinging to a phone and listening to whatever we were talking about. He listened in so that he could stop us if we talked of things we shouldn't talk about. So I quickly changed the subject.

"Forget about that, Milly, and tell me about how everyone is. Are you still with my brothers or . . .?"

"As far as I am concerned, they are my children. Wambui is in secondary school now. Waitiga didn't do well, though. . . . I am sorry he left school and I cannot persuade him to go back. Mum tried as well but never succeeded."

"Don't worry about him and don't blame him either. He's probably following my foot steps. He'll learn in due course."

"I am afraid so," Milly said.

She continued, "What were the results of the second appeal?"  
"The second appeal?"

This girl was still feeling it. She was sharing my miseries, as usual, with me. I could see she was going to weep and I hated to see her in tears. The idea of breaking out of prison started recurring to me, impossible as I knew it to be.

"Milly, please don't weep if you want me to have peace of mind. It won't do either of us any good." I wish I hadn't tried to comfort her. For instead of stopping the tears, she burst out crying like a baby. You know how women do it, especially when they are in love. This gave me the worst feeling I had ever had since landing in prison. The warder behind me gave me a hand in comforting her, but to no avail. Then to my surprise in came the good Samaritan.

This day was a nice one to me. It had started off badly in the morning because I had had a fight with my cellmate and we had had to be separated. But by afternoon, I had started getting some blessings. There was a man who was to be my best man when the law thwarted my plans and put me in on the eve of my wedding (see *My Life In Crime*). I saw the door behind Milly open and in came William Magenda Ndegwa. He stood his 5'10" before my eyes and his smile faded when he saw Milly wiping tears from her face with a handkerchief. So he interrupted me a bit and comforted her.

It surprised me that Milly was able to smile again. When he took the receiver, it was to chide me.

"Look Jack, you must learn not to be rude. I am sure you made her cry. You must grow up at least."

I couldn't blame him. He knew at times I failed to comfort Milly but fired her with words. This time I hadn't and I had to let him know it.

"Now man, can't you tell her to explain before you run to unfounded conclusions. I was trying to be good . . ."

"I know, I know how good you are, you do not have to tell me. But you can be better than that."

"It depends on what you have in mind." Things weren't going

well with me. All the time I was talking with this friend of mine (who we had nicknamed Fadhili years back in secondary school) my eyes were on Milly. Having stayed for a time seeing men only, men who could never really be nice or friendly, the sight of a friendly soft-spoken girl was a tremendous experience. What was so heart-breaking was the thought that she'd soon leave me behind and go back alone to that world I knew now had all the happiness one required. I couldn't help being stabbed by jealousy. I knew in the midst of men, she would spot one and probably admire him.

This thought almost killed me. I looked at William Ndegwa and tried to fit him in a love affair with Milly but, remembering he was always faithful to his wife, and the fact that he was my best friend, and so far the only friend who took the trouble of constantly visiting me, I ruled him out. But there was still a possibility of temptation in matters of sex, so the whole thing didn't help much. I felt desperate.

And what of the millions I didn't know? Was there a chance that Milly had never invited a man into my apartment in Wood Street where I had left her with the children; my siblings who were then in secondary school? A man to share my bed with Milly? The pain was too much. Supposing I got a break and went to see Milly, only to find a man in bed with her? I saw myself drawing a gun, shooting both of them and running off this time to Zambia. These thoughts were not doing me any good and I was glad when they interrupted me.

I saw Milly look at my bestman. She smiled. It was the same look and smile I had got used to during the week before our abortive wedding. I envied my bestman.

She talked to Fadhili who then told me, "She has brought some six hundred shillings. Can you be allowed to take the amount?

That was good news.

With that amount of money, I'd have some fun. I turned to look at the warder behind me. Most of the warders would allow one to take such money illegally, provided they got a third of it. A good number would do it for half the sum.

But some wouldn't allow it and would even report the matter to the authorities. This one looked as if he had so many problems that he could use all the six hundred for himself. He had heard the question and had not commented. I knew if he was good enough, he would allow me to climb up on the glass from where I'd know straightaway in what category he belonged.

It didn't take long for me to find out.

"These boys are men like us. Anyone can be imprisoned so we try to help where we can to prove to our brothers here that we understand. But it is risky to give him the money here because he'll be searched on his way to the Block, so do this. Can you wait for me around Naivasha town? I am going out to town soon after finishing with you here. You can give me the money there."

"I think I can do without it," I said quickly; I knew the warder's class and I wasn't going to risk losing the money.

Back to Milly, I asked, "Now that you certainly know I am sunk, what do you think about our relationship? We can not go on this way."

"Please let's not talk about that. You know what to expect of me. What other suggestion do you have for the money? I won't go contented, knowing I left you without a penny with all the problems you have."

"I'll make the necessary arrangements. Are you in the same place?"

"Yes, where else can I go?"

"Wood Street? With your son?" I had learned she had delivered a son while I was in my "insanity" period.

"Our son! Not my son. Don't make one feel guilty. I'll come with him next time I visit you."

"That will probably be next year? 365 days from now?"

"If you have nothing to tell me, please let me go. It looks like you'll never change." I had annoyed her by sounding heartless.

Another five minutes' talk brought our meeting to an end. We were both very happy to see each other but our parting provoked buried memories. I, for one, didn't have enough sleep for a whole week. But at least the visit kept me busy in the following days, telling friends the news I had gathered. When inmates realise

you have had a visitor, they keep coming to you and surrounding you for the slightest news you might have gathered, whether or not it concerns them.

\* \* \* \* \*

Cells at night were another thing. People sat together in groups. Some sat together because of the sexual hunger in them.

They talked of women they used to have and enjoy, remembering all the sweet details. Others stuck together because they traded in *ugali*. A good number stayed close in order to plan the next chapter they hoped to open when they emerged in 2020. A few stayed with their “kids”. Others stayed close because they were educated and liked to discuss intellectual matters. I stayed with one group because they were from the remotest part of Kenya, some of them aged and ignorant, and I wanted to practise teaching on these unfortunates.

People talked for years. Some had stayed together in one cell for ten years. They talked of factual past experiences night after night till they had told everything they could remember. Then they started creating fictional experiences sweeter than real life. It is for this reason that they misled each other, and this was why this prison was filled with gossip and unfounded rumour.

At times while I was writing, I was bothered by the chatter of voices, some singing loudly out of boredom, others talking to friends on the second floor. Others were sending coded messages to friends opposite them by knocking on the door in their code.

And, of course, every now and then one guy would go nuts and stand at the door talking twenty inaudible languages at his highest pitch.

All this gave you very little time to concentrate on whatever you were doing until the law intervened and ordered everyone to sleep. In this case a person like me was forced to sleep early and wake up in the wee hours to do a bit of study. Whatever the case, days dragged on at a snail’s pace towards the goal — the freedom we all lost when we decided to take shortcuts out there in the free world.

## Chapter 11

August 24 was another day, the only other day which brought the same kind of horror we had experienced on April 24.

It was around 10.45 am and most inmates were busy at their work in their respective workshops. In Polishing Section I was trying a bunch of keys on a chest of drawers whose keys were lost, when I heard the alarm. I remember I had taken the hundred-shilling note intending to give it to a warder friend of mine who was new in the prison to change it for me.

I knew there was trouble right then and I went and hid the note before we were ordered to squat. This time we were not taken out of the section to squat outside. Artisans and inmates started exchanging jokes. But fear increased as the alarm continued.

Of course, something had gone wrong somewhere. Inmates started shivering with fear as this long cry of the alarm continued, reminding them of April 24.

Then the authorities got to where we were. We were ordered to get out of the section and, in twos, squat outside.

"You are to move in twos up to the Metal Section resting yard," we were told. Here we were arranged in twos according to blocks.

"Put your hands above your heads and hold them there. Facing down, move that way to your block."

Even after we were in our cells, five minutes later, the alarm was still ringing in our ears and still going strong. It was horror packed.

\* \* \* \* \*

The mood of the whole block was weighed down by a heavy silence but for a little murmuring in various cells. From where I was, I could guess what they were murmuring about. They were enquiring from each other and speculating on the cause of this alarm that resembled that of April 24 and what they had witnessed on that day.

My cellmate had heard something from the security officer as they were being escorted to the block. He had gone to their section in civilian clothes. He carried a club which was bigger than the length of his arm and he was bleeding a little on his right hand and on the back of his fingers.

He had called an inmate he hated and asked, "Manuthu, how many more years have you to go before you are released?"

"Two years, sir," the inmate had replied.

"You think you will see the end of those two years, eh? What you people have done today . . . But then you'll just realise who we are."

He had gone but not before finding out which block Manuthu stayed in. It was a routine then whenever the siren went off. The warders rushed to the places they had enemies so that they could beat them in revenge, perhaps maim them. Every now and then warders threatened us with "*Ngoja king'ora italia tuonane* (Wait till the siren sounds and we meet)".

This had gone on for a long time until one day we saw the second-in-command and reported the matter to him. He had promised us (a group of about eight) that we should never be afraid of such a thing.

"I tell you for sure that you'll never witness another deed like that of ~~the~~ 24th of April."

That, however, didn't take much effect because, whenever the siren sounded ~~we~~ we were still pushed about and hit a little bit. This was a thing I hated. Being pushed about for nothing and at the same time being hit with that baton, be it just a little bit, made me lose my temper very easily, and could easily spark of another mess.

I was almost maimed once, but for a trick we played on the new warder. He had just been transferred to this prison. It so happened that whenever a warder was brought here he was warned about us and, in some cases, a new warder would be very harsh or pretend to be so that we would be afraid of him.

On this occasion the alarm had gone off because of an inmate who was trying to commit suicide by hanging himself with a

rope. In Block C, we had just taken a pint of *uji* each. Some hadn't finished when the alarm went off. Inmates started running into their cells and locked themselves in. Those who were outside squeezed each other at the door, spilling *uji* and scalding each other. At the stairs, this warder was hitting people in the ribs, telling them to hurry. I was not even aware of his presence when I felt an abrupt pain pierce my whole body from the ribs. He was also aware that he had hit me more than he intended and instead of apologising, he told me, "Move on. Who are you staring at?" I went two stairs up away from him and, seeing only red, hit him with my heel in the left eye until he fell over. I took off my sandals and rushed upstairs. When he gave the story to the other warders who were outside, he was blamed for entering into the block alone.

Then they told him to stand at the door and point out who had done it to him. He was positive he could pick out the culprit for maiming. The alarm stopped after thirty seconds. A report reached our block that it was only an inmate who had tried committing suicide. He had been saved.

In fact, in Block E, the inmates were still eating their breakfast without the slightest commotion. Block D had also known about the incident within a short time and nothing had happened. In Blocks A and B, there was still trouble with inmates being pushed about.

My friends suggested that I disguise myself as I passed before the warders. There were only two methods to do this but they were good enough — to put — on a pair of spectacles from another inmate and a sling on my left arm.

As I passed before the staring eyes of the new warder, I felt safe. He didn't even glance at me when he saw the sling and a man with glasses. I passed and joined the others. For a new warder it was the right treatment. He was given time off-duty after seeing the medical assistant.

Now we waited to see if a friendly warder would pass nearby so that we could enquire further, but none did. It seemed as if every warder around had gone to the place where the trouble was.

I stood at the door and peeped outside. There wasn't anyone around. Then I thought I had heard a gunshot from somewhere. My heart beat faster. I listened harder. I was sure I was right, for a shot sounded for the second time.

My cellmate noticed I was worried about something and asked, "What do you think it is, Master?" (a nickname I hated but which was stuck on me as hard as the twenty years imprisonment. No inmate called me by a different name).

"Have you heard something strange?" I asked him.

"How strange?"

"Very, very strange."

"I mean what sort of a thing?"

"A gunshot."

"A gunshot? For God's sake, you can't be right!"

"I am quite positive."

As we argued, I heard someone call me from another cell. The voice was funny. It was loud enough for me to hear yet too low for anyone else not concerned, and even if he had heard by accident, he wouldn't have known from which cell the caller had spoken from. This was one method learned in prison through the experience of being in a dangerous place. I thought for a second and knew it must be GG calling from the same floor as me, and I answered,

"Yes, Kigira?" That was his code name.

"Have you heard those two things?" GG asked.

"Very distinctly," I said.

"Know what's happening?"

"I have not the slightest idea."

"They have pinned a COI (Commissioned Officer 1). Mr Kafire."

"What do you exactly mean?" I had understood all right, but it was too bad to be believed.

"I mean they have *murdered* him."

"How? Where?"

"Punishment Block. The duty officer went to rescue him and was given the same treatment."

"You mean they pinned two of them?"

"Yes. I guess that's the reason for the shots."

"Skip that thing, I just don't believe it. How did you get the message?"

"From my cellmate. He has been in hospital and had just been brought back. He saw the second one being carried to the hospital, bleeding like hell."

If it was as bad as that, I decided, then it was as risky talking about it with a person in a different cell.

I started now thinking of the whole thing. The trouble must have come from the Punishment Block, if it was Mr Kafire involved, as he was a discipline officer. But what about the shots I had heard?

I started thinking about the people I knew in the Punishment Block, in solitary confinement. I remembered Geoffrey, a friend of mine and the boy I had once tried to escape with while we were in Kamiti Prison. He was serving less than five years then and when I was transferred to Naivasha, he was transferred to Gathigiriri Prison where he escaped a month later. He was, however, later arrested in connection with another case involving robbery from Tesco Self Service Store. He been sentenced to twenty years imprisonment. Because of his bad record in prison, and because he had proved himself a professional escapee, he was segregated while the authorities studied him.

I also remembered an ex-GSU officer called Titus, who had been sentenced to 18 years for robbing a bank in Nairobi, an old friend of mine, too. There was also Mbugua, sentenced to 20 years because of another bank raid on Government road. He was the one who had introduced me to Titus back in 1969. There were other tough boys imprisoned for various bank raids at different places and all had been known as professional escapees. I started wondering what would be happening in this area where, I was now sure, I had heard gunshots.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Those boys are dangerous and can start up something nasty. Now what can it be that should necessitate the use of an automatic rifle in the compound of a single block?"

From what I had learnt of this prison and its leaders, I was afraid they could create a mammoth out of a flea. Although the word was that Mr Kafire and his rescuer had been pinned, I didn't believe it. My instincts were giving me a different feeling of the whole thing. I tried to convince myself that the boys were all safe down there, but I could not. Not after the two shots I had heard.

The cells were unlocked at 3.30 pm and we were served our lunch and supper, combined. We didn't get time to talk to each other especially because we didn't eat our meals in our usual dining yard. We were locked up in the guard-walks. The guard-walks are on every floor. They are behind the cells and are used by night guards, to go round each floor.

Every floor was opened each at its own hour and the inmates let out from one side of the floor. So if you weren't on the same side of the floor, you didn't meet during the meal either, for each side was locked in on its own side of the guard-walk.

A number of prisoners were called before we were locked up that evening. Luckily, they had started serving meals from the second floor and it was from this floor that a group of six people were called, including one of my cellmates. They came back at 6.30 pm.

Our cell was opened and my cellmate entered. I looked or rather stared at him expectantly. He had come with two plastic bowls full of ugali and beans with a lot of fat. He put them down and wiped the sweat on his face with a handkerchief he had left on his bed. He then went to the bucket with our drinking water and drew some with his plastic cup. As he did so, I noticed something on the side of his shirt.

When I looked closely, I saw blood on his back. I noticed another bigger spot. I started becoming impatient as he washed his hand slowly, as if he had all the world waiting for him.

looked once again at his face and saw that he wasn't at all pleased with whatever was on his mind. Feeling that I couldn't wait any longer and that this man would take ages before he read curiosity on our faces, I asked him, "Where have you been? In the kitchen?"

I indicated the food he had brought with my lips and pretended not to know or guess anything further than the fact that he had been to the kitchen.

"*Haisemeki kaka.* (It's unspeakable, brother.)"

Sometimes I find myself wondering just how some people happen to have male sexual organs. The way he behaved! All this time this boy is concerned with smearing his body with a toilet soap I had bought, yet we were in the cell waiting to sleep. He started washing his legs which were already cleaner than mine and mine are always clean, if you must know.

I asked him again: "Have you been in the kitchen? Is that where you were taken after you were called?" My other cellmate started smiling. He knew I was dying of curiosity. "We went there later. We were in the Punishment Block."

As if I didn't know, I felt my heartbeat rise again. "What was there?"

"You were right about the gunshot. The things we saw there are unspeakable."

"Just how bad are they? Have those boys killed an officer?"

"Not at all. He was only slightly injured. They had no intention whatsoever of killing him although they had a chance to do it."

"Exactly what happened?"

Instead of replying he asked me a question, "Do you happen to know a tall massively built handsome boy who is between 28 and 31 years old?"

I said I knew him very well. That was Titus.

He continued, "He was shot in the mouth and when we took him to the hospital, he was still alive."

"You mean the shots I heard were at prisoners?"

"Yes. That one and another dark character with a beard and much hair on the chest. He has very white teeth." That was Geoffrey, one of my best friends.

"That one died on the spot," he continued. "Most of the rest have almost been broken into pieces with clubs. Of the eight people we took to the hospital, only two were alive and that tall one won't see tomorrow from what I saw of him. But my brother, I have never seen such violence visited on a human being. It is the ugliest thing I have ever seen. I do not even know whether I am going to sleep. I will be haunted for the rest of my life. I am quite certain that six of them are already dead."

"And did you happen to see the officer they are supposed to have killed?"

"I am telling you he was only scratched. I would even say that was done by a thumb nail. He isn't even bandaged, though he seemed to bleed a lot. He was turning the bodies of those boys with his foot."

That was enough for me. The first narration had told me that the other one was also dead. I covered myself and went to dreamland. Unlike most people, when I am overwhelmed by anger, I sleep very heavily. The trouble always is the dreams I have. If I told you about them, you would think I was right in hell.

\* \* \* \* \*

The following morning, we took our breakfast on the same guard-walk. The word had now passed round to several prisoners because through coded language they were able to pass the news right from their cells to the other floors.

Some of the warders were also talking about it. One of them had gone as far as telling us, "You just scratch one, even with a thumb nail and seven of you will die. It will not affect everyone now but, in the particular area where it is done, they will be lame, if they are lucky to get away with their lives!"

That, at least, was telling us exactly what had happened down there. Those who didn't die were maimed. Things went on that way for three days and, on the fourth day, they started going back to normal. We took our breakfast together this fourth day

and even went to work. There was still something odd in the air even this on day and I noticed that the warders were standing in groups.

That Titus boy was well liked, even among warders. He was a bright boy who knew how to make friends with almost everyone, and his death saddened many.

\* \* \* \* \*

A new year was at hand. No change whatsoever. We got the same salty water for stew, the same amount of *ugali* and, of course, beating on the joints in the Duty Office.

I had by then received my second instalment of strokes and ceased to worry about them. As it turned out the second round was quite bad. I had bled until I thought I was seeing the end of my days in this world.

As years passed, I knew, or inwardly got the hope, that we could manage this thing, if only there were some slight changes. Punishment to prisoners is normal and, at times, we surprisingly regarded it as proper, but things became sad when people were punished without good cause.

What brought all this was the hatred introduced among us, the inmates and the warders by Kagi. The new warders who were brought to this prison these past few years weren't as tough as the old lot. This was simply because they had come here expecting to meet with cruel and insolent prisoners just to find them very peaceful. If there was a certain body of inmates that could play the part of cooling their hearts and giving them a nice impression of inmates, then things could be easier for us.

I found myself looking at things from that angle several times but wasn't quite sure where my thoughts were leading me.

For a time, I had given up keeping to any particular group in prison and thought of each and what help it would give if well organised. I had now come to a conclusion that I was going to form a syndicate which would be unlike any other.

I thought of the two gangs that had operated in this prison for over five years yet it was made up of primitive people whose only idea was to form a robbery gang of perverse homosexuals.

I saw that one could form a syndicate of a different type that would remain unknown to the authorities. The chief aim of the syndicate would be to try and bring peace and love in this prison if it was at all possible. But what type of people should I have?

One thing, I figured out. They must be the most understanding and wise characters in prison, because I could only get good results if I was to start with people who were convinced without the slightest doubt that after some perseverance the thing would work out well. So I started figuring out the kind of groups we had in the prison at the time and how they could be organised to be more ~~loving~~ and responsible.

Why do  
you exist

## Chapter 12

The first group we had in the prison was of the educated people who had got involved with crime in one way or other, say after being sacked from their various posts. These people kept away from homosexuals and hated them fiercely. They spent most of their time discussing serious matters and had a certain leaning towards politics.

They were more power hungry in all sections than others who couldn't read or write. In most cases, they spoke English more for show than for communication. Apparently I hated braggarts so I ruled this group out, though at first it seemed the most promising of all.

I took the second group for consideration. It was a group of skilled robbers, most of them bank bandits, big stores raiders and those involved in big takes. Ex-police and the like. Even in prison, they thought of nothing else but robberies, the ones they committed in the past and those they would commit in the future. They made future plans and discussed new methods they could apply in the sort of crimes they were convicted for. They were anti-homo too and whoever fell into the habit was dismissed from their group. They entertained gossip to an alarming extent which, when you come to think of it, would make a syndicate collapse and I was not intending to see it collapse. I ruled this one out too.

Then there were the gamblers. All the time, they were playing draughts, cards, and the six-sided dice for cigarettes, one's rations of *ugali*, soap, toilet paper and so on. They went straightaway to gambling the moment they were free and they had no time for news. Sometimes you'd surprise them with news such as that the Duty Officer had been transferred or the Senior Assistant Commissioner had been in the vicinity forty minutes back and had told us one thing or the other.

Because these people had no time for anything else, they were dangerous to the syndicate. They had an average of two to three

fights a day, though their scuffles didn't go further than the gambling ground. I ruled this group out, too, because they were nothing more than irresponsible, mindless gamblers who could gamble our chances away.

Then there was the queer group consisting of pansies and their bosses. It was a queer one all right. Their discussions barely went further than discussing their "kids". Whose "kid" was snatched from who by which queer.

This group was the cause of most of the trouble here. But their group was divided. Some were learned figures who did not like exposing themselves and were rarely involved in any scuffles. There were also pansies of the same class. They liked *Munyugi* to a certain extent and had reporters among them but they were shameless. To rely on such a group that could never stay two days without one taking the other to Duty Office over a sexual quarrel would only land you and the syndicate into trouble.

So just like the other three, I dropped this one like a hot potato.

After the eliminations I had done, I had to ask myself some key questions. What next? Drop the whole idea? No. Act on my own? Impossible. Then what? Give myself time to think, studying people as I did so. And, of course, there were those lone wolves.

Take time.

After doing all that thinking, I had already identified a group of six who I knew, disregarding their characters, were the ideal type for the syndicate. I had seen them in turn and taken down their ideas because I was taking this thing seriously and my memory was not as good as it once had been. They had different opinions on the whole thing and I approved of most of what they told me. GG, of course, was one of the first men I approached.

"The syndicate," he suggested, "should disregard a member's character provided he can keep secrets and obey the orders given. Our duty is to decide what should be done and to try to gain influence from as many warders as we can. We should first be financially secure, otherwise we can't manage the type of

syndicate you are dreaming of. Money can achieve anything, and I am always telling you this. We should be very serious if we mean to. We should have enough fags to pay the inmates we employ for special missions.

"The most important thing," Thuku said, "is to have enough capital such as GG suggested. I don't believe we can go any further without that — not forgetting that cash means nothing to prisoners. So we'll have cigarettes. In this case, I suggest that each of us who are to be the organisers of this thing should ask for a certain fee from wherever we can. Once we have this money, we can achieve peace between us and the warders. I would request any of you who can smuggle out a letter smuggled to volunteer and have mine sent to Nairobi. I will, after that, be able to supply the syndicate with a substantial amount of money."

I decided I would do that because at that time I had a friend who was willing to give me any type of help. We decided that same day to make Thuku the syndicate's treasurer.

Now I was certain the syndicate would operate well. It had occurred to me that two minds or more were always better than one. I had become thin, worrying myself sick, yet I couldn't have imagined such wonderful things on my own. The way the suggestions were offered pleased me and I decided that if each of us could do his bit well, we would certainly succeed.

Migwi suggested that we should have as many members in the syndicate as possible, provided we could trust them. We were to make sure that we had enough members in every block, hospital and even in the kitchen. We were also to make sure that in every workshop, there was a good number of our members.

"This would make easier any type of peace mission we undertake." So we made him the organising head of the syndicate.

What remained now was to find a secretary to put all the laws in black and white. There was this character who was once a bank clerk and who was sacked because of helping himself to some money. He had then joined the other side of the law to become a robber. He was serving over twenty years for a raid on

a self-service store. He didn't have much to do in the Industries because he had more lead in his body than was healthy for anyone. He had had a terrible gun battle with the police, trying to resist arrest. After it was all over, it didn't matter whether he had won or not, simply because he could not move. The getaway car had hit him when he jumped off it as it was still moving (after realising the driver had done the same). His legs had just started recovering from some bullet wounds he had received in another raid. He was very sick afterwards. We gave him the office of secretary and we were right. If ever there was an ideal person for the secretarial seat, it was Mugo.

That able group was enough to organise and direct a syndicate that helped to bring to Naivasha Prison peace among the inmates. It was the syndicate that put light into the eyes of many ignorant prisoners.

Each of us wrote a letter to their relative, friend or wife, asking for aid. Apparently everyone seemed to have friends or relatives living in Nairobi. We decided that instead of having the letters posted we could have a man go to Nairobi and personally see all our people.

I donated the hundred-shilling note which hadn't been spent up yet and which the syndicate decided would be paid back to me if all went well. You should realise that there was a distinction between syndicate and personal money. There was some subscription fee each of us had to pay into the syndicate. We hoped, that our subscriptions would add up to Ksh 1,000. This amount had never been dreamt of by a person in prison before. But then to get it was the problem. At that time, our aim was not to rule over anybody but to bring peace to all so that we could at least be sure of beating the long stretches of time imposed on us by the judges.

On March 3, the syndicate met in Block E in a private cell where we gave the treasurer Ksh 1,000. To keep such an amount of money in prison in a way that it can't be detected is no joke at all. After discussions, we were able to agree on how it would be kept. That date marked the official opening of the syndicate.

Months later, we had about twenty members in each block taking orders from one leader among them. These were sure to keep discipline and make sure that no prisoner fought with another. They were to separate any two inmates as soon as they started fighting and make sure that they brought them to a compromise before further steps were taken. If they wouldn't give up and continued arguing, our men were to lift both of them and take them to the authorities giving the true story as it was. This method was approved by the officer-in-charge at an open-air meeting one day. Only the members of the syndicate knew how this was done. The whole crowd clapped their approval, making me realise just how right I was to dream up the syndicate. All these boys in this prison wanted peace but didn't know how to realise it. Now we knew.

Things went on as planned. We managed to plant a senior member of the syndicate in every post we found necessary. In almost all sections, we managed to see to it that senior members of the syndicate were supervising the other prisoners. We had Kariuki in Cutting, Thuku in Carpentry Section Two, and Miguri in Section Four, which was the parent of all carpentry sections. We had Wahuruu in Printing and Jack Zollo in the Polishing Section. And so, there was no workshop in which we did not have a big man in the syndicate and had over fifty other members. We planted four in the kitchen and the same number in the laundry. Things were humming. We expected very little trouble from the pansies and other troublemakers from then on.

Within six months of the syndicate's formation, signs of peace had appeared and within the same time we even had a few dangerous warders sacked or transferred. This was easy to accomplish. These warders, we had come to learn, were very greedy and very eager to make profits where they had not sown. A member of the syndicate would approach such a warder and offer to give him anything available for nothing at all. In most cases, he wouldn't turn such an offer down. He would therefore be given what he desired, after which we would have someone tip the higher authorities. We could use another warder whom

we knew disagreed with him or see to it ourselves. The greedy warder would be stopped at the gate and searched. After that he, was sunk.

There were others who were very wild and couldn't play easily. For them, we had another method.

A syndicate member would go to him with a ten-shilling note and say he had found it lying somewhere; and since he hadn't any need for the money, could the warder have it?

"You could buy yourself half a kilo of *unga*, sir, and do well for some time."

As if the money couldn't afford anything better. Certainly no man would turn down such an offer and only a few would suspect something sinister in the offer. Unfortunately for them, and fortunately for us, such intelligence was rare here. The warder would take the cash and from then on would trust and favour the inmate. Such cases resulted mostly in the warder asking the prisoner for one thing or other he greatly desired.

"You are a boy who can be trusted. In fact, I had proved you are not like the others and that is why I have asked for this thing from you. I trust you will not tell any other person."

And so he would enter into the trap head first. The trap closed so fast that no one could do anything to save him. With such techniques and several others, we were able to have over ten warders who were on our black list sacked or transferred! The syndicate operated secretly and got rid of the enemies of peace. It didn't matter who was put where if he was a troublemaker. We did the same to the inmates who were stupid enough not to realise that peace was the only secret to beating the long sentences imposed on us. We had several segregated. We even let others be punished in such a way that they would never again create trouble. By December of the same year every inmate noticed great changes, though many were still ignorant about the source of it. We of the syndicate were at least able to smile a bit.

The greatest peace reached the prison on January 13, the following year. I do not know of one inmate who did not jump for joy. Some even gave their rations to others. The report reached

us that the big man had been transferred from the prisons to another company. Such news was too good to be true but it was confirmed before long.

The first question an inmate asked after hearing the news was, "What will happen to Kagi? How does he bear the news?" He had entrusted himself entirely to the man. And now the man was no longer the Commander. He had no more power over a prisoner than I had. No more being honoured as if he held half of the world in the palm of his hand. Prison was only a name to him now. Rumour reached us that, to take him out of the office, the General Service Unit had to give aid! I couldn't fail to believe it because the honour which was given to that man whenever he visited prison could make anyone with a weak heart break down after receiving the news that he was no longer boss.

Another report confirmed that Kagi hadn't heard the news until late in the day as he was off-duty. I personally heard a very senior Mkamba officer (SP) say that when he told him he was lost for words and only asked. "Eeh, eeh, are you sure? I haven't heard about it."

"It was announced last night and in the morning," he told him. Kagi took the telephone and dialed a number just to confirm. By the time he hung up, he was sweating. I overheard this from the SP talking it over with the Duty Officer. The SP was then the acting deputy boss. At such times, we got very reliable news.

Sometimes they thought of us as mere criminals who could not understand anything apart from holding a gun or a *simi*. They spoke English, forgetting that there could be one around who knew the language. I was still writing this book when a certain officer was protesting that they should not talk in our hearing. The other told him, "Just go on. We will take advantage of the English language."

They had talked a lot of things including that the hanging bill had been suspended. The following day over twenty prisoners were brought to Naivasha prison from Kamiti where they had been waiting to be executed as they had already been condemned to death.

Things started taking another course. Mr Kagi was aware that inmates were very happy about the changes at headquarters and he became even more fierce, maybe to show us that nothing would change, that he still had power to reduce our diet, and even beat us harder than ever. He was able, once again, to corrupt the warders who had now started to cool down. The prison once again became unstable and the prisoners uneasy but not as in the earlier years. The syndicate met and decided to take action. Kariuki renewed his plea that we write to the new Commissioner. Being new, he was not aware of whatever went on. This job was given to a member of the syndicate who wrote the letter and gave it to the secretary for approval. It was sent a day later and the next week, every warder was talking about how a letter had been written to the new Commissioner accusing the officer-in-charge, and that he was blaming them for it.

The Commissioner visited the prison the following week. Not knowing what action would be taken or what decision the Commissioner would take, Kagi looked sick for almost a week.

The Prisons Commander with him visited Naivasha Prison in March. We expected a large group like what the former commander used to bring. The man came alone. The only outsider was the Provincial Prisons Commander.

Having been notified in advance of his coming, the syndicate had met to arrange the questions we would ask.

There was a programme pamphlet printed in Printing Section and the syndicate had stolen one. It showed that he would be introduced to the inmates during an open-air meeting that would last about twenty minutes. He would listen to the prison's choirs and then go to meet warders at the canteen. We had three choirs: Catholic, Anglican and Muslim. From the pamphlet, it was obvious that there was no time for us to ask questions. There was only enough time for introduction, the songs and a few minutes' talk.

So we acted quickly. We had a few members in two choirs who could talk if they got a chance.

It was therefore arranged that before each choir started singing, we would have one person stand and go forward as if to introduce the choir to the Commissioner. Each was given the words he would speak and the few questions he would ask before his choir began to sing.

Using that method we were able to tell him of our troubles fully. This took not only Mr Kagi by surprise, but also shocked the prison catechists who had arranged the welcoming party. They were not in the least aware of when such an arrangement had been made. The accusations we forwarded so ably that day made the catechists differ bitterly with Mr Kagi. No wonder they were transferred some time afterwards.

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The choirs sang new songs which had not been chosen by the catechists, after first singing the ones that had been arranged. These songs were giving the story of Naivasha prison since the 1972 tragedy. Each choir finished its song by comparing the new Commander with Moses.

"Just as Moses was selected by God to go and save his children from the deadly Pharaoh, you have also been selected from millions of people in Kenya by the same God to come and save us from the same type of Pharaoh. May God give light to you, sir, so that you may lead us well from this hellish part of the world!"

For the first time since he had entered this prison, he smiled. The songs were so spirited that everyone clapped their hands as each song came to an end. The syndicate had played its part very smartly this time. No one, except the top members and the conductors and their choirs, had been aware of what would happen. So everyone smiled except poor Kagi and his close friends. They didn't like any of it.

The Commissioner eventually stood up. He spoke in a bass which added to his personality. Some of us knew him when he was the Provincial Police Commissioner, especially those who

had done bad things in the Rift Valley where he had been in charge. It was from this post that he had been nominated to command the prisons.

"Thank you very much for your songs. They are not exactly songs, if I may say so, but a very good method of letting me know of your troubles. I promise you that I will look into all you have told me and I promise you, too, that I will be remembering you everywhere I go. Remain patient until such time that you'll hear from me. Thank you."

Then he sat down and waited for the next item. He was led away immediately by Kagi and company before we could add more accusations. After such occasions, the whole prison never talked about anything else for a month. Inmates cook up a lot of things from such meetings and such words from the boss. They were very pleased about how the choirs had presented our troubles and even joked that the choirs would be banned by Kagi from that day. They weren't banned, but for a considerable period, they didn't go for their usual practice.

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Before we crossed into the next half of the year, murder reared its ugly head once again in Naivasha. With Kagi so angry, it was inevitable. The boy had to be killed, regardless of his tender age of twenty years. He was working in Carpentry Section Four and had just joined the syndicate. For reasons of his own, he had remained in the section as the rest of us came to the block. The usual counting had been done and he had been counted. It was very hard to know of his absence until the final lock-up, which was normally at around 7.00 pm. This boy had approached me a day earlier wanting some aid. We had decided, that if any junior syndicate member had some trouble he was sure he couldn't handle, he had a right to apply to see the director or the supreme head.

In most cases, those applications had to pass through his block leader to the secretary then to the director or the supreme head.

This boy had received, as he told me, a letter from home a month earlier telling him that his father had died, leaving his mother miserably alone. His elder brother had been injured in a car accident earlier on and had a leg and his arms amputated. He was not of much help to his poor mother. Now this boy wanted me to help him send a letter home through the back door to inform his mother of some important things. I did this the following day, for we had a ready stock of stamps and envelopes. Then, I gave him a lot of aid to make him try and forget his sorrow.

I also told him a false story that my parents had also come to such grief a few years after my imprisonment and that since there was nothing I could do about it, I had tried to forget it and had now completely got over it.

"You shouldn't cry over spilt milk, even if you are given the whole army to help you, you couldn't gather it. The best thing to do is to ask yourself: What will I do next? Then try to do it. You have now done the best thing you could by coming to me and proposing that we write a letter home. Now I suggest that you go and rest and try to forget all of this. If you think of anything else we can do, come straightforward and tell me. We will no doubt try our level best."

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I would have succeeded in calming him down completely if a new message hadn't arrived telling him that his mother had despaired of life and committed suicide.

This news had been brought by a warder who hailed from his home village. He was sent by the boy's brother, who had also acknowledged receipt of the letter we had sent. I wouldn't have given him the news if I had been asked. Unfortunately, I was hearing it from him.

Now I couldn't find the words to calm his soul. He was understanding all right, but too young to take the sad news gently.

There was nothing I could do to have him released because had I the power, I would have done it before anything else. This was a real tragedy and I pitied him. I did the only best thing I knew. I gave an order that he be supplied with whatever he wanted because in the syndicate, we could afford most things a prisoner needed within these sad, grey walls.

I told the rest to try and channel their monthly interest to this young boy who had been brave enough not to be made a pansy of like most boys of his age.

When the siren sounded on June 3, at around 7.30 pm two days after the boy's sad news, I did not know what it was all about. This was simply because I was sure that, by this time, every prisoner was in and locked up safely and the master key gone. We had been counted twice by then. But it wasn't so surprising because it had happened before. The siren continued for another five minutes, then stopped.

We were sure of our safety but very eager to know what it was this time. All of us had now come to know that Naivasha Prison was a place of surprises and this had to be one of them. The inmates were silent, listening. We could hear the warders coming to the prison in large numbers. We then heard them heading towards the workshops. Anyone intelligent enough knew right then that a prisoner must have gone missing in some block and was still in the Industries. Whoever thought so was right.

The poor boy had hidden himself in the workshop after the 3.30 pm count. From the blocks, at 8.30 pm we heard a lot of noise and even whistles. It was from the warders who had found the boy and who were beating him with the usual fury and venom.

The sad news reached us soon after because there was almost a fight between the warders. Some didn't see the point of having the boy beaten so badly, while others, who were believed to be Kagi's special squadron, giving the prison its bad reputation, wanted the boy dead. They certainly succeeded, I'm sad to say.

The warder from the boy's home area, who had given him the news, was present and trying to save his life. He received two cuts, because it was cutting time. The boy had more cuts than

his age. It was even said that three of his fingers had been chopped off. This warder had gone to fight with one corporal who was of the Kagi squadron and who had done the boy the greatest harm. The Deputy Commander had also tried to save him but in vain. The squadron had all the power from their boss, Kagi.

I remember weeping that night like I've never wept before. Not because this was anything worse than I had ever seen before but because I had seen the end of the Musa family. It was also because I knew why he had done what he did while these ruthless men had no way of knowing about the boy's heart-break.

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The investigations into the boy's killing went on for some time. The Provincial Prisons Commander, a kind man, was now becoming suspicious of this command and he had personally visited the scene of crime. He wanted first to know for sure whether the young boy had been counted at 3.30 p.m. He therefore ordered every warder around that area to go to the position he was supposed to have been in during the 3.30 pm count.

Every prisoner would try to remember his position that day and sit in the same place, while the person who counted did just as he had done that day. After positions had been taken, the boy's place was vacant.

The chief warder sighed with relief. Had the number of the prisoners present differed with the number required, he would have been in hot water. Apparently that wasn't all the Provincial Prisons Commander (PPC) required; he wanted the motive of the murder. One of Kagi's squadron members had been instructed to say that the boy had attacked him with a hammer from the position he was hiding which was in a store next to Carpentry Section 4. It was high up, over nine feet, where various store items were kept. The warder had a slight cut inflicted on him that night and this seemed to substantiate his claim. Because of that, Kagi had given him a week off duty.

Kagi was using everything in his power to cover the murder. Unfortunately for him, the Provincial Prisons Commander (PPC) didn't look at it from that angle. This time he seemed to want to nail one on the other side. He had even uttered angrily in front of the inmates "*Mimi ninaona hii jela yenu mnaiendesa na viswabili.*" (I can see you are running this prison with cunning). He didn't like the way they were running this jail, he said. To his surprise, the prisoners clapped their hands. This put even more weight to his suspicions.

Quite unlike Kagi, the Provincial Prisons Commander (PPC) wanted to know why an artisan could claim himself competent in his work, whatever it was, if a ladder could be made in his section without his knowledge. They had, produced a ladder, claiming that the boy had made it. "We should not have such a sergeant in the force," he said.

The sergeant was transferred the same month. The boy was the last one killed, not because the inmates got any better than they had been but for two reasons. First, the syndicate had seen to it that there was cooperation between both sides. Secondly, the bloodthirsty prison boss had been replaced by a man with a heart.

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On August 22 1978, everyone seemed to notice a peculiar thing. The weather was neither cold nor hot. There wasn't any sun, yet there were no clouds. From where we usually surveyed Lake Naivasha on the first and second floors, you could not see it; yet it was not a misty day! No one felt any need of talking to his fellow inmates even as we squatted in the morning, ready to be counted. For an unknown reason, there was a deep, uneasy silence.

The corporal who opened our block was usually a noisy man and had even been given a nickname for a crazy person. Usually you knew he had arrived or was around minutes before you were unlocked. This Tuesday, he was very quiet for some strange reason.

We took our breakfast silently. An inmate who claimed to have been converted stood in front of the rest of us to testify. He was almost stoned. Unlike the Christians who are ready to suffer for their faith, he sat down and hid his face between his hands. As far as he was concerned, we sinners no longer existed.

We went to the workshops in twos. The day was still gloomy and there was still no news. I thought I saw the two flags at half-mast but lacked further evidence or explanation. So I shut out the idea that was building up in my mind. After all, what did it have to do with me? There was no polishing material in our section and in such cases we would go out to bask in the sun. On this day, there wasn't any sun, but since it was not a cold day, everyone preferred it outside. When we did not have something to do while resting, we would gossip and engage in futile speculation. On this day, only a few chatterboxes were talking.

I remember one remarking, "What is it with everyone today? No one seems happy."

He had noticed the same thing I had, so I told him. "I don't know either. I noticed the same thing. Did you notice the flags were flying at half-mast?"

"Really? I didn't notice."

I looked to see if there was anyone to support me but finding none, fell back to daydreaming. At around 9.30 am, warders started gathering and, just like us, speculating. We felt that whatever they were saying was important.

GG came from inside and asked me, "Do you think there is something wrong somewhere?"

"Yes. It could be. I can see the warders are giving each other some sort of news and whoever hears it either holds his mouth or makes over twenty wrinkles on his face. This is the time I always tell you people see with their mouths more clearly".

Just then, a young warder came from inside and was beckoned by the others. He was either asked or told of the news. He could not conceal his shock. He opened his mouth wide enough and

then stared vacantly into space for fifteen good seconds. They saw an officer coming and dispersed.

Positive now that there was something amiss, we set out to enquire. I met the Commanding Officer II in charge of our workshop at the door and followed him inside. Even without asking, he called me into his office and, after a few questions as to what was hindering the progress of work in Polishing, he placed the sad news on a plate for me to chew.

"His Excellency, the first President of Kenya, Mzee Jomo Kenyatta, has passed away," he said.

No wonder the news had staggered the young warder. I realised just then that I, too, liked the old man. It was my first time to be so shocked about the death of someone not so close. Well, I went outside and passed the news to GG and another friend. Word passed from this to the next inmate until everyone was in the picture. Frankly speaking, some people are great and I would say even God recognises them. This was like an eclipse of the sun. It seemed as if the sun was blocked by something translucent. You can't see the sun, yet you can't see the thing covering it. At least in Naivasha Prison, that was the sign from the sky that we got after the death of the honoured *Mzee*.

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The death of the President shocked and worried a number of prisoners but for quite a different reason. One thing they were certain of now was that, this year, when the nation was in mourning, there would be no presidential amnesty. They were sure they would wait for another full year before they were considered or even remembered. This was no real concern of mine because inmates like us who were serving long stretches were certain they would never be given amnesty. Past experience had taught us just that. Yet, even with this knowledge, we liked speculating that we would be considered, a thing we very well knew would never happen.

Take for instance the remission. Over half of the inmates there had completed two thirds of their sentences which was all that was required of a prisoner. All prisoners not charged with robbery don't spend a second longer in prison after completing two thirds of their sentences. Many had served two years above the required two thirds, some even four years.

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We saw 1978 end peacefully and celebrated with the usual loaf and pint of tea without milk, but with a little sugar. Something we always looked forward to as a change of diet.

January 1 1979 started very badly for us prisoners because I can well remember that there was no water and so no food. We were supplied with a single potato each during the night! The following day, the same thing happened. So for two days, we ate two potatoes. This is what I find odd about Kagi's reign when I come to think of it. When we had his deputy in charge at such times, I saw water brought by trucks from the Ministry of Works or some other place, and everything ran as usual. But a bad beginning sometimes makes a good ending.

Around November, word started spreading that Kagi was going. No one could believe it because that was the fortieth time I had heard the same thing. This one was a light rumour yet it was the one that finally bore fruit. I happened to see the duty roster for the months of November and December and noticed that where Kagi was supposed to be there was the name of a new person bearing the same rank! My heart this time did its worst. It either added beats or slowed down so much that, for a few seconds, my breath became laboured.

Earlier on, Kagi and a big number of others had been promoted. He had been promoted to an Assistant Commissioner of Prisons (ACP). He had visited the prison on his usual rounds in his new rank. After he had gone, I entered the office of the Commissioned Officer (CO) II in charge of our workshop and asked, "Won't this man go now that he has been promoted?"

It was more of a statement than a question. What I saw of my officer that day told me that I might have been under the care of a lunatic all this horrible time of my life. You won't believe it but he actually screamed like a person being strangled until some inmates outside the office looked at us. He took up his stick and hit me on the chest twice. Dumbfounded, I stared at him not knowing whether it was my words he hadn't heard properly or something else was troubling him.

His words gave me an answer. "You people, you bastards, you blood-drinking beasts. We all know you don't like this SSP because he doesn't allow you to kill us the way you did during the old days. This man, God has blessed him and has promoted him because, if it wasn't for him, you would have killed almost half of us and now he is going to run this Command as ACP."

But Kagi was deprived of this title two months later.

"He is going to stay until he has softened all of you!"

I wished I had not talked about it and wondered why I had been given such a loud telling-off.

He was going to talk the whole day until everyone knew what I had said. Luckily, the officer in charge of Industries came to my rescue. By then I had already started sweating. Without knowing and without intention I had made the officer sick. I would always remember that day. So even when another time I approached him after the realisation that Kagi was no doubt going, I knew what to expect and what I was doing.

The happiness in me could stand anything from this old man. Smiling but keeping my distance and pointing at the new name on the duty roster which was in front of him, I asked him, "That name, isn't it new in this prison? Could it be that you got the wrong copy, sir?"

I saw him swallow something. He looked at the roster without moving his head. I knew he was hurt, but I sometimes joked with him, for I was used to his temper.

He didn't answer me even though I waited patiently, so I repeated, "The SSP I mean. Do we have two here now? I meant

there could be a mistake in typing this thing." I said this like a fool who did not know what he was talking about.

Surprisingly enough, I didn't get what I expected. Instead he talked very politely and told me, "Please get out of this office and stay out until I send for you." That was all.

So I got out to spread the good word. Inmates had now gotten used to relying on my news as it was often factual. I had therefore taught myself not to talk of something I was not sure of and it had worked very well.

\* \* \* \* \*

At the end of November, Kagi held an open air meeting to say goodbye and introduce his replacement. It was a wonderful day, a long-awaited one. What I realised of this man that day was that he was fluent. All that time he had pretended not to be able to talk in front of us, but it was only one of his many rushes to win the battle between us. He had earlier told us that he didn't like such meetings because he wasn't a born orator and so he would be talking through action. He had evaded meetings with prisoners.

This day I couldn't think of anyone whose oratory I could compare his to. He could talk. He knew he was going and he had selected the best words for us. Words filled with disguised apologies and sympathy. Genuine? I couldn't tell.

He said, "It is sad that after staying with you for such a long time I have to leave you. I will let you know frankly that I honestly feel I'll miss you and I do not know how long it will take me to be able to put you out of my mind. You know very well that I have shared with you the happiness as well as the misfortune and horror that has been in this prison. You know that it is in this prison I got married. It is in this prison that my mother died. While in this very place, my brother died, and eventually my father."

"It is you who made the coffins for all these people, so I know you have no doubt whatsoever about the truth of my words.

Therefore, when I say that I have shared with you happiness and sorrow, you'll see I am right because, as you know, there is nothing as shocking as losing your own mother."

People have different hearts. I could see that from of his well-selected words, he had started changing the bad attitude many towards him.

One fool muttered, "He is right. This man could turn out to be the best leader we'll ever have." I couldn't tell him anything, I only knew he was a complete fool.

Kagi then called the person who was to take his place and said, "Let me introduce to you the officer who will be in charge from now on so that you may weigh him and know how to bear him. I already know you are professionals at that."

His last sentence was meant to forewarn the new man. Kagi could not help, however much he tried, to give a bad impression of us.

It was all for nothing. The smartly dressed, medium built, brown Nandi gentleman knew his way around.

He told us: "I am only new in Naivasha Prison but not new to prisons. And if you are *ordinaries* I am *ordinary plus, plus*."

The word "ordinary" has a peculiar meaning in prison. It denotes a person who has been in prison several times and who knows everything about prison life. He can handle anything. He continued. "I should assure you that I know I did not come here to wage war on you but to try and bring peace and understanding. *Tunagombania nini?* (what are we fighting about)"

This man knew exactly what he was talking about. It was after he came that we got new hope that we would no doubt see the end of our sentences and be free once again. Just as he had said, he was *ordinary plus, plus*.

Kagi's former subordinates tried to feed him with the same poisonous stuff with which they had fed Kagi. But he would never swallow their lies and he was the ideal type to rehabilitate the inmates. Under Kagi's torture, the best inmate could have turned into a murderer any time. But with hope of one day being free, any man was likely to change to normal.

Time brought about changes and we bore witness to this. Everything that Kagi fed us with was changed. The communal beatings, the deaths of the innocent, the going blind because of deprivation of our rations and so on.

Inmates got back their normal faces and shapes, except for a little aging. They no longer went in lines led by one who had better sight.

Every inmate everywhere in the command knew that at last, God had sent yet another Moses to their small tragic world to give these sinners new hope.

\* \* \* \* \*

The syndicate continued operating as years passed and we were marching towards different indefinite destinations.

The syndicate's work had been made so much easier by the arrival of the new commander. Kagi's men had been scattered over different prisons and new warders, who did not know of the hatred between the inmates and warders during Kagi's reign, were brought in. The syndicate intermingled with these new warders and did wonders. This time there was no point in trying to make peace as this was already there now. We had now entered the eighties we had believed we would never see. As is with all humans, we started forgetting the old tragedies and remembered Kagi only when we saw him coming to check on some of the personal furniture he had left in the workshops, unfinished, because of his unexpected transfer. Whenever you had his item on your bench in his reign, you sweated hard, knowing you stood to drink a pint of milk daily for a full month, when he liked your work. It surprised him later, when he came to see how his work was progressing, that it was kept pending by the inmates doing it.

When he enquired he would be told, "I'll see to it, Sir, and right now." Sweet talk amounting to nothing. The thing that surprised us was his health. The Kagi we once knew had a protruding belly, a short fat neck and a twinkling face that appeared smeared with oil. He drove a Mercedes Benz.

This new Kagi who at times came to visit the industry had no tummy and had a thin, long neck. His height was the same but his face seemed to need massive doses of vitamins. He no longer drove a Benz but a Peugeot 404. Not too bad, but at least a step down.

And this taught us that everything good or bad has its ending. We had never really believed, though we talked about it, that Kagi would one day be a once-upon-a-time story in Naivasha.

So the syndicate went on operating, getting the same type of stories from warders when we sent them out with cash for some fags.

"My wife came last night and in fact, I had to buy some sugar, a kilo of meat and vegetables since I had none," one would say.

Or "My elder son has held an urgent wedding and I had to give him all I had, just to realise later that I had your Ksh 40. Now I will see what I can do about it by the end of the month." A lame excuse which is said to be better than none at all. But as it is said, the secret of happiness is to learn to like what you have to. We had learned to like, we had learned to like all these lies because if we didn't, we would only have suffered.

As I write this in prison, it is 1982 now, over eleven years since I lost my freedom. But, what a life! You never know till you have tried. I have tried so I know. Please don't try. I know what makes a man is not his shape or his gender but his deeds, plus what lies behind him. I know that man is the wildest and the fiercest beast on earth and it's of paramount importance to keep him on the right side. I know that it is not how long you live in this world that makes a worthwhile life but it is what you pack in a life time that counts. I also know because I have proved that dead men tell no tales. But what a way to learn!

Unlike the first time, I now knew what to do with my manuscript. So when I completed it, I gave it to GG, not to make any amendments, but because he had suffered as much for it as I had. I felt he should have a glance at it before I sent it forward. It didn't take him long to read it over and he brought it back to me a week later. From the way he looked at me, I knew he loved it, for it spoke for him, too. He opened his mouth to talk to me,

threw a glance at me and burst out laughing. He found the story more real when written than when it was being discussed. He was the type of a character who believed mostly in what he had read than what he had heard. That is the funny thing about him.

He is the type of man you couldn't convince blue was really blue before he had seen it on paper, or if possible tasted it. Because I know he won't talk before I do, I ask him: "Last time you said I ought to have written something about prison. What do you say this time? You are never without a comment."

"Christ, what can I say, Jack Zollo? You have done it better than the first time. But still you haven't detailed everything. Write everything you know we have seen."

"It would bore my readers to tears. Enough said."

A pansy passed nearby as we were talking. He was short, fat, brown with even, white teeth. He was handsome, all right, this queer. He moved sexily in front of us, with slow calculated steps as if intending to impress us. The calves of his legs were fat and smooth, his whole body well washed and smeared with a sweet-smelling toilet soap, which could only be afforded by prison tycoons. He had protruding buttocks, which trembled with every step. A hyena would have followed him for miles expecting them to drop at any moment so that it could eat them.

I glanced at GG, shook my head then looked back at the picture. I knew right then I would insert the incident in this book. I told GG: "Know something else, brother? A great number of inmates would have gained something useful in prison were it not for this type of fool."

"What do you exactly mean? Haven't we gained wide knowledge already?"

"I don't mean you or me, but this type of sex maniac. They don't have much to talk about outside that topic or haven't you noticed that either? Okay I'll give it to you in writing before long. Right now, I won't waste time teaching you what's obvious. Remember what I told you last time when you read my first manuscript? I had told you not to remind me about prison and the things men do to others. I meant it, GG."

## Chapter 13

I followed GG's suggestion and wrote almost everything we had experienced in prison. I was sure I had not written all because some of the things would only have reminded me of what I wanted buried and forgotten. But I was satisfied with the bit I had done.

So far I did not know how far my first book, *My Life in Crime*, had gone. I had received a letter from my publishers telling me that the book was due to be released soon. I waited eagerly for the big day when I would hold the book in my hands. Its publication would give me the inspiration to write more. It would give me self-confidence, so I waited.

The book didn't take long to come out. But when it did, I wished it had taken longer for the happiness and the excitement I had hoped for turned into sorrow. I experienced days of loneliness, hunger, bitterness and cold, sleepless nights. I regretted for a time that I had ever written it because when it was discovered, I was thrown into solitary confinement for one hundred days. After that I was stripped of any power and influence I had over the other prisoners (I had, for instance, become their paymaster). After my solitary confinement I was given one of the lowest jobs in prison -that cleaning.

\* \* \* \* \*

I had just finished talking with the warder who was inspecting the cleanliness of the cell block and locking up the wet rags in the store (from where we would collect them early the following morning to start the daily ritual of cleaning the floor again) when I heard my name being called out.

We were on the second floor. Looking straight down from where I was standing, I could see the man calling, a reception officer. I felt fear grip me: it was the same officer who had come for me when I was sent to solitary confinement, a prison within prison.

My mind was not as yet cured of the misery and loneliness I had undergone in solitary, as I had been let out from there only about a week earlier. I shrank at the thought of once again encountering the same loneliness, cold, boredom and hunger, all of which had made me wish I had never written my book.

I had little time to meditate, for one learns to obey orders quickly in jail. So I descended the stairs with a heavy heart, hoping for the best but prepared for the worst. As I marched towards what I believed was another cold lonely cell, I had only the book in my mind.

I remembered how I had hit upon the crazy idea of writing a book, the discouragement I had got from my fellow inmates; how I had finally decided to write, without knowing what I would do with it when it was finished. It had occurred to me that my life was worth writing about after reading a novel by the Kenyan writer, Mwangi Gicheru. The main character in his book, *Across the Bridge* had led a life that was not very different from mine. A life of struggle in the shadowy world of crime.

Feeling excited at the idea, I had applied to see the officer in charge of the prison where I was interned. I wanted to seek permission and, if possible, assistance to write the book. To my great disappointment, his answer was negative. I kept trying, and after getting several 'not approved' decisions, I finally decided that I would do it my own way. As I didn't have a place to do the writing and the necessary material, I knew this meant having to break prison rules.

\* \* \* \* \*

There were several ways of getting the book written, and I picked on one I knew would not involve too many people, for the secret might leak out. The prison had a printing press, which naturally meant there were papers and lots of off-cuts, which most inmates used in place of toilet tissue. To get even these, you had to bribe the inmates at the press.

You could, for instance, give them your day's ration of food. But cigarettes were even better — cheap Rooster cigarettes.

I happened to have had a few packets, so I picked out four hard core inmates who would not crack under pressure if found out. I supplied each with four cigarettes. That evening, they supplied me with a bunch of papers, which I took and hid under a basin in the toilet while waiting for a chance to get a pen.

We were allowed to write letters to friends and relatives and that gave me an opening. I managed to persuade a friendly warder to get me a pen. Soon after that, I embarked on my project in earnest. I would write a few pages during the night and carry the hand-written papers to the prison workshop where there were enough hiding places.

As I continued writing I got so carried away that I would sometimes write into the wee hours of the morning. For the first time in my life, I was doing something useful with my life.

For only two or three packets of cigarettes, I wrote a two hundred and sixteen page novel. It took me about six months to write it. Then the complete manuscript lay in the workshop awaiting my next move.

Luck was still with me for, soon after that, an adult education programme was initiated in the prison. Exercise books, pencils and rubbers were handed out. Some inmates were also allowed to buy better items at their own expense. I took this opportunity to try and reapply for permission to write a book.

Such petitions were always listened to by different senior officers and, in this particular case, only three such officers could give consent. I took time to make sure I applied when there was one we regarded as peaceful and sensible, and when I was taken before him he approved my application on condition that I handed over whatever I wrote to the social welfare officer who would peruse it and edit out any sensitive parts.

Finally I got a fully signed consent and the welfare officer was requested to assist me with whatever I needed for my work, but as I did not want my book interfered with, I got another idea.

I wrote and filled two exercise books with a rambling story I

knew they would not object to and, under this cover, transferred my actual book from the off-cuts to new exercise books I had received from my relatives.

When I had completed this task and done all the corrections necessary, I smuggled the book out through an inmate friend of mine who had completed his sentence. Following my instructions, he delivered it to the publishers.

Trouble struck when the book was advertised in the *Daily Nation*. The paper declared truthfully that the author of the book was still serving his prison term in the Naivasha Maximum Security Prison. The authorities could not believe it. From their records, there wasn't a prisoner by the name John Kiriamiti, and yet there was, the author of the book!

They were not so dumb, for they had dealt with people of all kinds. They knew the author must be within the walls, officially known by another name. By that time, I had qualified as a sign writer in the Polishing section and had been detailed to work in the Reception Office, where my work was to write the numbers and names of new prisoners on labels sewn on prisoners' uniforms.

I had had a busy day and had just cleared a long queue. The last new prisoner had sadly put on his shirt, ready to begin paying for his crimes to society when I heard my name called.

I turned. The caller was a very senior prison officer. He knew me as John Changamuse. I didn't suspect there was anything wrong; quite often I was called to do various jobs after usual working hours, for I was then the only silk-screen printer there. So I went expecting to do a nice piece of work for my boss and master. But all hell broke loose. This time I was in for a serious charge.

"Yes, *Bwana* Kiriamiti."

I didn't answer. I didn't utter a word, I even pretended to look behind myself to see the Kiriamiti he was talking to. But my heart was racing; the book must be on sale!

Seeing my blank face, the officer came to the point. "What are your other names?"

"Batista Mwangi," I said. He wrote that on a piece of paper, then stared hard at me.

"What are your other names?" he asked but I just stared.

"Your father's name?"

"Albert Githure."

"How many brothers have you?"

"Five," I said without hesitation.

"Their names?" But it was the name Kiriamiti he wanted to hear and I was prepared to hide it for as long as I could.

Then he said, "Have you a nickname like Jack Zollo?"

"No, sir."

"Have you ever been to Congo?"

I denied having ever been to Congo, the setting for many adventures described in my book.

"I know we will understand one another," he said at last, knowing I knew what he meant because I understood prison language. It meant I would be beaten till I spilled all the beans.

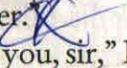
Yet as we looked at each other I could feel he wasn't all that angry. I could sense he had read my book and it had left a deep impression on him. So I broke the silence and admitted I was the author. He relaxed. We talked about the book and he frankly admitted that he had liked it. But my troubles were not yet over. He told me to follow him and he took me to the officer-in-charge.

The officer-in-charge (OIC) was a peaceful man who always treated us all with impartiality and much understanding. But I had gone against the prison's standing rules, and although I wasn't sorry about it, he had his duty and he sent me to solitary confinement. I was to stay there indefinitely — and this cruelty of the system was hard to take. I stayed in solitary confinement for 100 days.

It was the first time in this prison that I had been sent to the punishment block and I could hardly bear the loneliness and crushing despair. But at times, warders would come to see me and congratulate me for the job I had done and to tell me that my book was a sensation. One brought me a copy he had bought, and I stared at it with deep emotion.

Yes, I was glad I had done it. I felt it was worth the cruel punishment of my dungeon. But when the warders had gone and there was no one else to talk to, the sickness and despair would overwhelm me again.

When I had completed 100 days in solitary (those who live in freedom can hardly understand what that means) the officer-in-charge came. In this block were mental cases (the largest number) and prisoners on penal diet as part of their punishment. I was the third from where he started. I had just pushed aside my half-eaten dish and was preparing to have a nap when my cell was opened. I stood up as required of an inmate and waited.

Officers of every rank from the lowest to the boss stood outside. From my experience, I knew some illiterates were wishing that I would be punished forever because mine was regarded as one of the worst offences ever committed in prison; but the boss knew otherwise. His first words to me were moving. "John, you are a good writer." 

"Thank you, sir," I replied. There was a lump in my throat.

He turned to the security officer who couldn't believe what he was hearing. He was using his mouth for eyes.

"You can release him. But he should stay in the block without doing anything till further notice."

I was freed from solitary.

A month later, on August 30, 1984, the Reception Officer called me. As I reached the first floor I was met by three inmates who came running in great excitement. One of them told me, "Good news! You are going home!"

I only looked at him thinking he must be mad. I couldn't believe it. The second one demanded a pair of boots I had on doctor's orders. Another one wanted my prison uniform, while another wanted to exchange his old blanket for my new one. That is how it goes: whenever an inmate is being released, he bequeaths anything of value to those he leaves behind. That they were asking for these things told me that I was finally going home..

All this time I wasn't talking. The good news was too much for me and I was only able to move when the officer called me again.

I descended the rest of the stairs. I was told to join a group of ten other inmates who were squatting in pairs at the duty office and we all walked towards the Reception Block. But I was still not convinced we were about to be set free. You don't take prisoners' words seriously. As there is so much time for talk in prison, there are so many rumours within those walls that, if you believed whatever you heard, you would go nuts. Besides, the warder hadn't mentioned a word about release. They normally wanted things like blankets, towels, cups, sandals to be returned on a prisoner's release but this one said nothing about that.

But studying the group I was in, I could tell that things couldn't be bad. The men were a mixture of all tribes and there wasn't a single tribe that had more than one person in it. The prisoners were of good conduct, the qualification needed for a recommendation of release.

But what about me? It was hard to imagine why I had been put in this group of goodies. I was known all over prison as a person who could not hold his fists back when rubbed the wrong way. That was not what the authorities regarded as "good conduct". Fortunately, I had never been booked for it; no fight was in my file. But, I had written a book . . . The breach was still fresh in everyone's mind.

We were ushered into an officer's office. It was the same officer who had interrogated me about the book and we heard the magic words. "Because of your good conduct in prison, you have been recommended for an early release and here, in front of me, is a letter ordering your release. So, by tomorrow, each one of you will be transferred to the prison near his home area where you will be officially released on September 7, 1984."

To me he added, "You, John, are you still writing books? Would you rather we gave you some more time to write another one? Why couldn't you wait and write your books when you were released?"

I didn't utter a word but I almost asked him whether he was sure prison offered the best opportunities for a literary career. I

couldn't spoil it. Right then I was like a person floating in space, lost in the bliss of a nice dream.

On my way to the block, I was alone with my thoughts. I did not share them with those with me because although we had suffered together, we differed in many ways. Some of them were cattle rustlers, others petty criminals. Some were now elderly, having lived in prison for many, many years and were ignorant of the present life. Now we were parting, each to gather the threads of his life again and start anew.

I remembered the judge who had sent me to prison. I saw the EPD (Earliest Possible Date of release) which read August 1990, but this was 1984 and I was free. In a week I would be out in the world again. I felt like going down on my knees to thank God.

The following day, handcuffed and in my prison uniform, carrying a white bag which contained my only suit, a pair of shoes, a tie and socks, I was led to the bus stop from where we would board a bus for Nairobi.

\* \* \* \* \*

The one kilometre walk from the maximum security prison to the bus stop would have proved tough for me as I had had little exercise during my fourteen years of confinement, but the knowledge that each step I took brought me closer to freedom made the walk a pleasure. But I still wasn't free. My escorts were taking me to Murang'a Prison near my home, from where I would be released in a week.

The first step into the free world was a revelation. I stepped out and tasted the fresh air, listened to the chirping of the birds as my eyes feasted on beautiful greenery outside the prison gates. How my heart rejoiced to be outside after staying for so long within prison walls.

I was very happy. I had another week ahead of me, but anywhere else was preferable to this prison in which I had spent so many years of my life. I was looking over my shoulder every minute to reassure myself that the jailers weren't following me to tell me that it was a mistake, that my twenty years had not been done.

We boarded a bus for Nairobi from where we would take another to Murang'a Prison. I found the journey to Nairobi shorter than I had ever known it to be. Although the scenery was dull, I was starved for any sight that proclaimed my freedom.

Something else made me very happy. As we were boarding the bus, I had seen a long queue at a bookshop and been informed by one of my escorts, who had gone to investigate, that the people were all buying copies of my book and that it seemed to be selling like hot cakes. This gave me a strong heart and the faith that there was a future for me out in the world; perhaps a fortune.

The Isuzu bus rolled and roared on the road as if the driver knew there was a soul inside the bus that was on the way home, almost home. We got to Nairobi in the evening. It was really wonderful to see the big town again after so many years.

Though I managed to hide my excitement, it gave me a kick to listen to different sorts of sounds — the sounds of free people going about their business, different from the monotonous drone within prison walls.

I didn't bother to strain my eyes as I knew that, in a short time, the town would be all mine to explore once again; to cross the streets any time I pleased and go anywhere I chose, without an escort. But for now, the long arm of the law was still around me and I couldn't make one free move. As there were no vehicles to Murang'a, my escorts took me to the Industrial Area Prison. It was a small prison, which added to my sense of reassurance about the promised freedom.

Word had passed to all inmates in this prison that one of the Naivasha "long-term boys" was around and, in the morning, literally hundreds of inmates came to see me with thousands of questions about life in the big prison.

As I still looked young, some of them couldn't believe that I had spent fourteen years in prison. They started wondering why they were worrying themselves to death because of six months or one year.

Just seeing me made them feel hopeful. If I was free, their time would come, too.

None of my relatives, not even those in Nairobi, knew I was around; I hadn't had time to let them know and, in any case, I wanted to take them by surprise.

My escorts came back for me at 10 am. There was a transport problem as the prison vehicles were all busy with other duties and none could be spared. There weren't buses from this place to town, except *matatus*, and you couldn't expect a *matatu* to take three odd passengers like us who had no cash, only road warrants. I knew my escorts were too lazy to walk all the way to Machakos bus stop and would listen to my idea.

If my sister Connie knew where I was, she would come for me. I wanted to see her very much, for we had been very close. I told them about her and gave them her telephone number with instructions. Ten minutes later, Connie and my brother-in-law John parked their car at the prison gate. We went to the gate to meet them.

As we drove to the bus stop, Connie couldn't believe it was her lost brother seated behind her in her car; the sight of the handcuffs and the ugly prison uniform distressed her. In the bus, they stared at me as if I had plague. Some in the seat behind mine moved away to sit somewhere else, a thing which made me uneasy about the society I was about to join. But my sister was there to comfort me. She sat beside me, smiling with excitement, and only left when the bus was ready to go. By lunch hour, I was in Murang'a Prison; by 3.30 pm Connie was there to make sure I had arrived safely.

On September 7, I was called at around eight in the morning. It was my last day in prison. In the office of the Commanding Officer, I met a prison dignitary who was to give me the final words.

"John, you can see how lucky you are to be free. But life these days is different from what it was years back. The cost of living has gone up drastically. Please do not let it force you to run wild

again. Go home and have a few months rest while you think of the best thing to do. I am sure you have learnt a lesson . . .”

But I didn't need to hear all that because I was already reformed. Not because I had been punished and whipped in prison; the change had come from within my own being.

The feel of civilian clothes is soothing for it tells an inmate that he is no longer part of the prison fraternity. With joy and relief, I put on my only possessions in this world, a three-piece grey suit from my days as a free man. The gate was opened for me and I slipped out, free at last.

\* \* \* \* \*

Outside the gates, I saw my sister Connie. She was with a ten-year-old youngster, Wallace Wanjohi, my nephew. On seeing me, he ran and jumped on me, to hug the lost uncle he had always heard about but had never seen.

It left me without words that the first person to come to my arms was a child born when I was inside. Putting him down, I turned to see, for the last time, the wall, which had separated me from such a loving boy. Hating all that had happened to me, I turned and led the way forward.

Blaring music started reaching my ears. Everything looked strange. The feeling was to linger in my mind long after I was home.

I passed the same spot where a bullet from a cop had missed me by inches, years back. This spot reminded me of my abortive marriage with Milly. It reminded me of my arm in a sling, a cold lonely cell in a police station, a Senior Resident Magistrate in spectacles.

I had some business with the police that same day, so I parted with my nephew and my sister till the following day. Later on I went straight to where I knew I'd get a vehicle to my home. I didn't feel much of a stranger and, comparing myself with the people around me, I was sure I didn't look out of place. Fifteen minutes later, there came a *matatu* driven by a young man whose

face looked familiar to me. He left it with a tout and came and sat on a form outside a shop. Our eyes met. He was my brother.

When he recognised me, he couldn't believe it was me. To him, it was a daydream, and he stayed where he was, astounded and transfixed. He was ten when I went to prison. He was now an inch taller than I, and had grown a beard. I could see him trying not to weep.

"Let me take the *matatu* and drive you home right now," he said. He was almost stammering, and now I realised I was sharing my misfortune with my family.

When he got into the car, he didn't even remember his tout or look for another passenger. I took the seat next to him and, at a slow speed, talking with excitement, he drove me straight home.

I found my mother seated outside with two visitors. Thinking I was just another visitor, she stood up and offered me her seat.

"Oh, welcome, young man, have a seat. It is very warm inside and that's why we decided to move out here."

"Thank you, I am all right," I told her. I moved to the edge of the compound as if to admire the piece of land.

My own mother had looked at me and not recognised me. Yet she didn't look much older than she did when I had left her. But so many years had passed, and prison life must have changed me beyond recognition.

I could detect some pain and agony on her face. I was to know later that she had just got home after taking my father to Nyeri Provincial General Hospital where he had been admitted that night.

It was for her a day of joy and tragedy. It was great to be back home after fourteen years, wonderful to be away from barking warders, from ill-treatment and so much loneliness, but it hurt terribly to see my own mother looking at me like a total stranger. What had I done to her and to myself? I went for a walk, my mind in a daze. An hour later, I came back. She had been told who I was by my brother and she received me with great joy.

We went to see my father in hospital the following morning. He had last seen me fifteen years back. Then I had more flesh on

my bones, was browner and without a beard. Out of the eight people who stood by his bedside, he knew seven. When asked about the eighth, he said, "I've never set my eyes on him in my life."

But I was reunited with my family. Here now was the free world before me, the world that I had, years back, carelessly handled until it had slipped between my fingers. It was a mistake I swore never to repeat.

After resting at home I went back to Nairobi. If it was the place where I had wasted my life, it was where I intended to pick up the lost threads. But where was I to start?

The first thing that struck my mind was to let the world know I was a different man. So I went to the *Daily Nation* and gave my story. It appeared in the Sunday edition. As I moved through the streets, I was afraid the cops who used to know me as a hit-man would spot me, think I had broken out of jail and excitedly shoot me. But if my own father and mother had failed to recognise me, how could the cops? As I wandered around, I saw new faces of young cops who must have been in school during my activities.

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Some people are ready to accept the unfortunate in the city while others take advantage of the desperate. From the papers, ~~Mrs~~ Mwangi traced me with great concern. Together with a few relatives I was staying with, we said prayers to welcome me and wish me success in whatever I chose to do.

A week later a Muganda, a wolf in sheep's clothing, offered me a job as a silk-screen printer for I had mentioned to the press that I had learnt silk-screen printing in prison. Happily I took the job, certain that Mrs Mwangi's prayers had been answered.

I started work, waking up at around six and going to Kibera, where my boss had his workshop. I was seriously ready to start a new clean life. I only knew what I had got myself into when, at the end of the month, I went to the man for my money. I had spent about Ksh 300 on bus-fare alone. I had lent my boss Ksh

200 out of the Ksh 400 I had earned in prison for fourteen years. But the man callously said there was no money!

"Wait till next week please. I'll see to it," he said curtly.

Two more weeks passed. Still there was no pay. So I quit.

I went to ask for the money again a month later. He was not even ready to part with the Ksh 200, my hard-earned prison money! He threatened me with the police, talked of my past, the prison I had just left, claimed I knew no printing, a thing I was sure I knew better than him by far. I realised I had fallen prey to a ruthless, hungry, mean operator. It hurt to know that there were many now in our society. And yet I was supposed to begin a new productive and constructive life.

At least the experience proved to me one thing, which made me glad. I was wholly reformed. I could take this kind of treatment calmly. Had he done this to me when I was called Jack Zollo, he would have regretted it ✓

In the next half-year, I criss-crossed Nairobi streets, like a bee without a hive. I wanted to start something! I was in real trouble, for I was penniless. I did have old friends, former classmates who had done well in life and who often visited me to encourage me, but I knew they were busy with their lives, trying to improve their own lives.

I decided not to bother them with my troubles. It was hard to know where to start. I had seen what happened to school dropouts, the scarcity of jobs, the cut-throat competition and the high cost of living (just like the prison officer had warned me).

Eventually I started my own screen printing business and, with hard work and dedication, managed to get it moving. I took two recruits, trained them and then left them to run it for me because my heart was in writing. While they looked after the business, I went into freelance journalism.

\* \* \* \* \*

The first six months in this free Kenya were not easy. The cost of living was a thing to reckon with and I had to put in an honest effort if I was going to pull off anything. I was once a man of expensive tastes. I still am, I guess. But the time wasted behind bars had taught me plenty. I knew now I had to lower my tastes quite a bit and reassess my values. Still, at times, I felt like hiding from those who knew me. Stooping low was not easy.

I hadn't stayed outside long before I once again met the lady who started it all. At times I felt she was to blame, making me land into a world of living corpses, all because she couldn't hold back and let things cool down so that we would marry without fear. But I know it was only because she loved me so much.

In a way she was to blame for my arrest, for it was she who begged me to marry her, when I was lying low after my return from Congo. I was forced to show myself in public while arranging the wedding and the law caught up with me on the eve of the wedding.

I still remember her with affection, for she was loyal to me during the time we lived together. One time I had asked Milly to allow me to write a few words about her to satisfy my readers' curiosity about her and she said, "My consent, Jack, is not necessary now. Did you ask me before you wrote those things in the first book?" I knew Milly, and this was her way of saying that she didn't mind.

After I was arrested, Milly remained faithful, and for seven good years visited me regularly in prison. For a woman with her kind of steady enduring love, twenty years seemed to be nothing. She would come once a month, according to regulations and give me news about the outside. She told me she had left her job in the Airways and had become a teacher.

I believe Milly would have stayed loyal to me to the end. It was I who stopped her from coming to see me. I knew she was doing the right thing, visiting me to show that she had not deserted me, even when I was a prisoner. She made it clear that she would

cling to my family until I emerged. She brought my young brothers and sisters with her some of the times, and I appreciated that. But something was going wrong inside me. Her visits always left me sick. I got crazy dreams. I knew I was in a horrible place that was never meant for my soul, and ached to be back home beside that girl. Opening my eyes, I'd see the hideous wall. My heart would ache intolerably, all over again.

I didn't want Milly to continue seeing me! Anyone else was welcome, any time, but not Milly! It was so hurting to see her walk away and leave me behind bars. And I couldn't help feeling insanely jealous, knowing she would go walking in the midst of men who would perhaps be delighted to know that her husband was sweating it out in a dungeon. It hurts to have your woman where you can't reach her, knowing there can always be another man in your place.

With all this in mind, I couldn't stand the sight of her so I decided I'd get her out of my system. The last time she came, I let her know. I knew I would stay inside for a long time, for the law doesn't joke. I was always certain to do the full twenty years that the judge had given me. There was then no need of making Milly think there was any hope. I did not want to ruin her life as I had ruined mine, so politely I told her, "Look Milly, you have been coming to visit me now for seven good years. You agree with me it is long enough. Yet, that is not even half of the time I'll be here, Milly. There are thirteen more years and I am sure I can never survive with this sort of treatment. What will be happening to you all those years? Stop wasting your time! Forget we ever met and I'll try to forget, too, and I guess it will be easier for both of us that way. Do me a favour, stop seeing me."

Milly cried. I was trying to be good but I had made a mistake. I guess women at times don't understand when men mean to be nice to them. I told her I was doing her a favour. How else could I have put it to make her understand I was sacrificing my happiness for her?

"Is that the best you can do to me? I didn't know that stopping seeing you would be a favour!" she said. Those were her last

words. She turned and left. As far as I was concerned, she had done the right thing. I wanted both of us to be free from that thing they call love, and I had managed it — at a great cost in pain.

My next meeting with Milly was two months after my release. I had thought much about her when I emerged but I was not ready to see her. We came face to face in town by accident. I couldn't even decide whether I was supposed to be happy or sad.

She was in the company of a man, a tall stout man who I tried to ignore. I could see from the look on his face that he was the one who had stepped into my shoes while I was languishing in jail. To make it worse, Milly looked very heavy with child. I could tell she had only a few months to go before she had this fellow's baby.

She was still very young and beautiful. I remembered all the many things we had shared and felt a deep regret for having told her to go. Perhaps if I had been patient we would still be together.

"Jack . . . I can hardly believe my eyes," she said, "How are you? I have to pinch myself to make sure I'm not dreaming."

Prison had changed me a lot. I had forgotten how to handle such a situation, so I simply gave her my hand. She looked me over just like that time I had come back from Congo. But there were no kisses this time. The man stood dumbly, watching.

"Oh, Kimani," she said, "this is John. I have told you so much about him."

The man nodded uneasily and did not bother to extend his hand. This was unpleasant for both of us. Milly, stammering, continued, "I . . . I have told you so much about John that I do not need to repeat it. All I ask you is to let me buy him some coffee some place. I'll see you tomorrow, if God wishes."

I waited to see the man's reaction, for I had noted he was somehow tipsy. Something told me he didn't have the guts to object. They weren't married yet and I knew Milly, who was a tough girl, had power over him.

To me, she said, "Let's go Jack. You look hungry."

She was right. But right then I had no appetite, the meeting had killed it. The man crossed the street and I saw him enter his

car. At least, Milly wasn't in the wrong hands and I couldn't help feeling happy for her.

Things weren't going to be easy and I sensed it. Milly looked confused. But she looked more composed than I was. She took my hand as we walked, and I was happy that she was still a warm friend. The cafe we went to was a new one to me. I pulled my hand out of hers and managed a smile, my heartbeat almost audible.

"Milly, who was that character who looked like he was limping?"

"Please, hold it till we get to a place we can talk peacefully," Milly said. Uncomfortably, we drank our coffee and then Milly invited me to her flat in a school compound.

She had style and taste as in the good old days. The sitting room told the story. But there wasn't anything around to indicate there was ever a person like me in her life. But that didn't surprise me. Fourteen years had passed. I took her album, which was on the table and felt some excitement as I saw photos of myself, Jack Zollo, as I was called. Then I looked up at Milly heavily pregnant, and recoiled. "Milly, who was that character?" I asked again.

"Can't you let me prepare lunch, for Christ's sake? There's time. We'll talk, John. We'll talk."

"No! Let's talk now."

"You told me to look for someone else," she said, smiling to make it light.

"That doesn't answer my question. Who is he?"

"I'm engaged to him. We'll get married during the school holidays, in December," Milly said.

"Oh, that's your headache," I said rather unpleasantly, "But where is my son?"

"Your son?" she said calmly, "He is in school. He is in Form Two, now. Oh, John. Since you left us for the hawks, let us be!"

"Milly, I am sorry," I said. "I shouldn't have come home with you. We weren't meant for one another. Meeting you was a bad accident which we should forget. Remember how we were so many years ago?"

"It will never be the same again Jack," Milly said.

"You are right, Milly. Things will never be the same. But from you, I have learnt a lesson. You were always nice, very faithful and everything else nice. But all that landed me in a muddle."

"You talk as if I was the cause of your misfortunes," she said.  
"You can't blame me!"

I was serious. But it was hard to convince her I was. At times I knew I was careless, though I was always able to fight my way out of the jams I put myself into. I at times convinced myself that if Milly hadn't insisted on having that wedding, I wouldn't have had any need of hiring a car and visiting Murang'a when I knew every policeman was looking for me. Yes, I loved Milly. But it was this love that had landed me in jail.

It didn't turn out badly at long last. Milly and I would never argue without coming to a conclusion. And true love doesn't die so easily. I was sure I would have made her change her mind but that would have put us into more trouble. So I let her marry the man.

She's a teacher now, and I have no doubt about her competence in that field. A mother of two, she is, now; and still so beautiful to me. The ties between us were so strong that she was not angry with me for writing all about us in the book. She understood. As she had been part of my life she had to appear in my book. She has no regrets of having ever met me, and would give me a hundred-bob note when I needed it in those months I was settling down. But I guess I'll never need it again, not from her. A cup of coffee when we meet is enough. At least it lessens the pain.

A cup of coffee when we meet. We'll always share it because I can afford it now without much struggle. But there is one thing she promised never to forgive me about -my life in Congo.

I think these strong ties between me and women will always haunt me. Milly read and liked *My Life In Crime*. As she told me, she did not mind my making her almost the centre of interest in the book. But she hated the part about Congo.

She was not ready to forgive me about the affairs I had with the Greek women. She would have liked to think that I was as

faithful as she was when we were apart. And I was foolish enough to write about strange Greek women after I had sworn on the Bible that I hadn't met a single woman for the eight months. Well, I couldn't help it. If she thought I could do two months without one, she was the one to blame.

And Hellene?

\* \* \* \* \*

In my life – and I am not old yet – I have missed death by inches or by minutes. Arriving two minutes earlier in a place has saved my life.

Two minutes: just enough time to unlock a car, switch on the engine and take off like a bat out of hell . . . Yet there were times when I wished a particular moment would last forever, like when I met Hellene and realised she had badly fallen in love with me and I with her, despite who she was, a Greek millionaire's daughter. Yes, some people are capable of undying love. Hellene believed I was a politician's son on the run; but even after she knew I was a crook, she still loved me.

Hellene did not know who I was when she first met me. All she knew about me was what I had told everyone else in Congo, that I was Albert Ngure from Kenya and that I had fled to Bukavu in the then Congo for political reasons involving my fictitious father. I had arrived there illegally, in a sleek car which I had got off an Indian through blackmail.

The moment I got to Bukavu town, I was the son of a politician, a leader of an opposition party that had been banned. Hellene didn't know that when her father had employed me as his chauffeur he had saved my life. Her father knew nothing about my criminal past. He was a busy man with many things on his mind.

He wanted a good driver and he found one in me. I was to live freely in his bungalow, do what I pleased in my free time, be as happy as his own children, but not get anywhere near Hellene, his only daughter.

I obeyed all the rules and was a good chauffeur. But he had made a big mistake and he didn't realise it until very late. By confining Hellene too much in the bungalow, personally taking her out whenever she wanted to see a bit of town, he had made her long for other things which she couldn't get from him or her two brothers.

Then Albert Ngure came into her life and proved to be very exciting company. I was a youngster with a wide knowledge of the world and could understand exactly what this young Greek girl was missing in life. I soon became her lover. Then just when she was deeply in love with me, I vanished . . . leaving her in the family way. The reason I had to make myself scarce was that my boss's secretary was also heavy and was blaming me for it.

Hellene tried to trace me when I vanished from her dreams, the bungalow and Bukavu. She had warned me that she would commit suicide if I didn't elope with her but her father intervened. He had received a note I had written to him, warning him of his daughter's threat. He talked to her like a father and won his daughter's life back. I had not known I had made a blunder in the bungalow until I came out of prison and met Hellene again. The only mistake I thought I had made was to escape in the millionaire's Benz to the airfield, knowing it would be traced there within minutes of my escape.

In my hurried packing I had left behind enough evidence to trace me up to my real home. I had left two letters from home as well. Luckily, all this evidence landed in Hellene's hands. Hellene still loved me, despite what I had done to her. She covered up for me. She didn't give the evidence to the police when they came. She decided she would trace me herself.

I guess the greatest surprise I ever got was to meet Hellene after sixteen years. I could not believe my eyes. But she didn't look all that surprised herself. It was as if she expected to see me any moment she landed in Kenya. She hadn't changed much after all those years and looked far younger than her age. She had come across *My Life In Crime* in London by sheer accident and had bought it without knowing who the author was or what

to expect. She had always wanted to know about Kenya and used to read much of its history, so when she came across a book by a Kenyan author, she decided to buy it. That it was my book she bought was an amazing coincidence. You can imagine her surprise when she read the book and came to the part where the story was about her and me. She was no longer confined to her father's bungalow in Congo. She was now a restless tourist, her favourite destination being Kenya.

Standing inside a bank in Nairobi waiting for my cheque to be cashed, I saw a white girl. I thought her face looked familiar. I waited to see her reaction at the sight of me but she passed by without casting a glance at me, and went to the next counter. The swinging of her hips as she walked told me I had seen her somewhere, not in a movie, but in real life. Or had I seen her on the street? I hadn't had any white friends for over sixteen years so I shrugged the matter off my mind.

The cashier called my name and I forgot all about her. I started to count the money the cashier had just given me. Hellene looked at me and recognised me. She came to me breathlessly, just as I was about to go away.

"Oh . . . Good God, Ngure, how are you?" She said. I thought she was talking to the cashier. But I was wrong, the cashier was looking at me. Ngure, that was me! I had completely forgotten that once upon a time I was known as Albert Ngure, far away in Congo. And this girl, could she be . . . ?

"Don't tell me you have forgotten me, Albert," she said. "I am Hellene."

She stood there, sure of herself. Her memory must be great. I looked at her face and my own memories came flooding back. But for a moment I longed for escape as I remembered all the things I had done to her and her family. But Hellene was smiling.

When I stretched my hand to take hers, that wasn't enough for her. She was reaching for my whole body, arms open wide to take me, her lips searching for my cheek, then my lips, while the other customers used their mouths for eyes.

"Ngure, what have you been doing with yourself? You look nice, you haven't changed much. Except this . . ." she touched my beard.

I didn't have a beard when we were together sixteen years back. Her smile and the tender touch of her lips brought it all back and made me almost forget where we were, that people were watching us. It was a joyful reunion.

From the look in her eyes I could tell Hellene had forgiven me, probably because so many years had passed. I relaxed and was able to talk.

"I am very sorry, Hellene. I guess my memory is withering as I get old. I couldn't remember where I saw you last. You look even younger than when I knew you! And very healthy, too. What are you doing in Kenya?"

"Just visiting, Albert," she said.

The cashier two feet away was hearing news. He had just cashed my cheque with the name Baptista Wanjohi and here was a white lady who knew me as Albert Ngure. He shouldn't have worried. I was not a crook any more. It was all in the past . . . But I decided we had to get out of that bank. "Are you through with this place?" I asked, "We could go to some place and have a chat."

"I had come for some currency exchange but that can wait," Hellene said. It seemed to me that everyone in the bank noticed her excitement. By the time we reached the door she was giving me news.

"I have got a copy of your book, Albert. It is wonderful."

"Thank you."

"You know, I couldn't believe it. I mean it was incredible. Buying a book to find my name in it — everything about me. Incredible."

"You have been to Kenya before?"

"Well, yes. Three times. But I didn't buy it here, if that is what you mean."

"Where did you buy it then?" I asked in surprise.

"Take it from me, I bought it in London three months ago," Hellene said.

It was my turn to use my mouth for eyes. For this was the third time to hear of my book having been bought abroad by different people and as far as my publishers were concerned there had never been outside sales. I thought a little about the book piracy I had been hearing of and decided I must be one of the victimised authors. I had a sinking feeling in my stomach, for I hate being cheated. Then I let the thought slip away. After all, I was only a budding writer and such thoughts would only discourage me. To hell with it. Hellene was here with me.

Just then, she burst into peals of laughter and I had to laugh too, not knowing why. She said, "Just tell me, please, what do I call you? Charles Lukindo, Jack Zollo, John Kiriamiti, Albert Ngure or Peter Gichoya? I guess I still do not know you!"

"Which one do you like best? They are all mine," I said lightly. But her question made a lot of sense, of course. Having read my book, she could not help being confused. During my days in crime, the names I took up depended on the town and country I was in, and what I was doing. I had so many names I do not remember some myself.

"Please be truthful at least once in your life," Hellene said. "The book says you have reformed, should I believe it?"

"Then why do you ask? The book has given you my true name."

"So I take it that you are John Kiriamiti, not Albert Ngure or Jack Zollo? Hellene said.

"I am Kiriamiti."

Hellene sighed. "Now, please tell me, to satisfy my curiosity. You can't have been serious about some of the things you wrote. Like..."

"Oh forget it and tell me a little about yourself. We've talked enough about me."

Inside Plaza Inn, at a street corner, I took out a packet of cigarettes and lit one while we waited for our coffee. I was still a little nervous and confused. I had not expected to see Hellene again in my life. And I couldn't forget the way I had run out on her back in Congo.

"Can I have one cigarette?" she said. This came as a surprise. As far as I could remember, her whole family hated smoking and Hellene had persuaded me to stop.

"Don't tell me you have gone that far Hellene," I said as I gave her one.

"I guess it is a surprise to you, but that makes for no comparison with your surprises, Albert . . . I mean John."

"You were about to tell me about yourself," I said. "Can't you see I am dying of curiosity to know a few things?"

"About Pietro and Makarios?"

"About who?"

"Your two sons. From me and another woman who is not around. If you will not be taken to hell when you die, then hell will be empty," Hellene said.

"Two sons?" I cried, "You didn't have an abortion? You looked as if you would."

A little sadness crossed Hellene's face.

"You didn't have to run away like that, John," she said, puffing on her cigarette.

"What? With two of you crying for my blood and the repeated warnings I got from your old man? You think I wasn't enjoying living in that comfortable bungalow and driving a Benz? There are times I wish I never touched you, Hellene. But you were telling me about the two boys. Who is older than who? Who is the son of which mother, for the father is one and known to all. And how and where are they?" I was perplexed and the words just tumbled out.

Hellene said, "I have come to Kenya three times, hoping to see you. I wasn't surprised when I saw you. I believed that one day I would. But I was excited, I have always wanted to see you again because, despite what you did, I still loved you. I tried to reach you through the address you had carelessly left behind but all in vain. When I read your book, I knew why you never replied. I wanted to pay you a visit in prison but I was not sure I would be allowed in. And anyway, my visits here have always been brief. My daddy forgave you when he read your letter to him because it

saved my life. When I knew you had run away, I decided to kill myself. I bought some tablets intending to take an overdose. Daddy realised I was mad about you and, taking that advantage, convinced me you did all that because you loved me too. He convinced me you'd come back for me, John. Like a fool, I believed you would come back, so I waited patiently, month after month, imagining how I would hold you when you came back to me. By the time I gave up expecting you, I was nursing a baby boy. Looking at him has always reminded me of you. He is now almost your age when we met.<sup>f</sup> The funny thing is that his best friend is Makarios, the son from your other woman, Elizabeth Makarios. They started school together and are now both in London studying law. Through those sons, we have become intimate friends, Mrs Fataki and I. Elizabeth married an African about six years ago, they have two more kids."

"Who did you marry and how many more kids do you have? I have heard enough of Miss Makarios."

"Mrs Fataki," she corrected me "I'm not married. I hated men after that. I am still single and, with Pietro, I do not need more children. How is your wife?"

"Could you ask that again?" I said in a cloud of smoke from my cigarette.

"Your wife," she said, smiling.

"I do not have a wife, so that question is unnecessary. You said you hated me ever since. Is that so?"

"I had to hate you, John. Imagine the disappointment you gave me. How could you leave me suffering all that shame?<sup>f</sup> And why did you have to tell Dad about it in the first place? I think I hated you for that. It is . . ."

"Do I understand you have no place for me, Hellene? Remember the good old days. The double bed we shared when you sneaked out of your room. How can we waste such great love?" I had started opening up. My buried memories had been brought back by this Greek beauty I once called mine, one I had sworn I'd never share with anyone else.

There was this thing which had come back inside me. I remembered how easily I was able to handle her even when I had wronged her. She had a simple heart, a heart that was always ready to forgive, plus the love I had shown her and which was such a new experience for her. It was I who had shown her what she missed in life.

For a long minute, this Greek woman didn't say a thing. She only sat there, puffing and looking vacantly at the cup of coffee in front of her. I had brought up something she couldn't forget in her life. I could see her love for me flowing back. I talked again.

"Hellene, have you dismissed me? Please don't look at me as though you have seen a ghost."

"There are times I wish I never met you, Albert. John, I mean what we should have shared was normal friendship. I do not think you have any love in you, John. I do not think you know what it is like to love somebody deeply."

"I taught you all about it, Hellene," I said lightly.

"All about what?" she said, her white cheeks blushing.

"To love. To cherish. If I didn't know what love was, I wouldn't have been your teacher. I was always good to you. Try to forget what you read about me, remember me just as you met me the very first time. I am the same person, Hellene. It is only that I no longer hit banks." I thought I saw her laugh.

"It won't be easy to forget some things, John," she said gently.

"Such as?" I demanded.

"What you wrote about yourself and that girl of yours. That was the most hurting part in the book. You never remembered me again when you went back to her, and during that time the time you were both enjoying your reunion, I was dying with thoughts of when you would come back to me. Imagining you beside me forever. The dreams I always had never showed you being unfaithful to me. You shouldn't have done that. How could you . . ."

Trouble had struck, I could detect some tears, though they were not flowing. I had to move to something else.

"Can you forgive me, Hellene? Do you know how I felt about you? I've been through a lot, too, Hellene. Why don't we forget

it? I admit it was bad, but should we go back to the dark side of the whole thing?

I stretched my hand and took hers, off the table. She looked at me as I pressed it hard between my fingers. I caressed the hand till I saw her smiling. When she smiled, I knew I had won the battle.

We spent two days together before she took off for London. I loved the two days. Hellene was always nice to me. I hated to see her go and she hated to leave me behind, but that had to pass, for she wasn't meant for me and I wasn't meant for her. At least her visit left me with a lighter heart. I had wronged a lot of people in Congo and my conscience had been bothering me very much. But now that she had forgiven me, it was all over.

\* \* \* \* \*

Life hasn't been that bad, after all. It is several years now since I left that place I was rotting in. As I said I gave up crime. I joined the society and fitted in beautifully. But it is a funny society. A mixture of people who can love and hate. Some will never believe a violent robber can ever reform. But many are now my fans. I love the freedom I have, ignoring those who make life difficult for others. There are those who treat me with suspicion not believing I am different from the Jack Zollo of nearly two decades past. I turn a blind eye to such self-righteous people.

I am still haunted by prison and its harsh memories. I am not sure how long it will be before those memories fade. I thought that if I avoided the places I used to frequent when I was a notorious gangster, searching for adventure, I would forget.

But often I find my thoughts going back to those I left behind bars, pitying them for what they are and knowing how wretched they are.

You cannot hate a friend for what he is, for after sharing trouble together for many years, you become like brothers. I have always thought of a way to reform those brothers. I know what they need — love and forgiveness from their fellow men.

Why didn't talk about Jackline (or wife) as in Milly's story?  
THE END

1 Luv ~~the~~ SACK WOAH!