

# Blossoms *of the* Savannah

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H. R. Ole Kulet



# **Blossoms of the Savannah**

H.R. Ole Kulet

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**Dedication**

This book is dedicated to my beloved wife, Jane, and children.

# **CONTENT**

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## CHAPTER ONE

Taiyo stood in the shadows by the window, her back to the room. From her **vantage** position on the third floor of the building where their flat was located, she had a bird's eye view of the sprawling town. The rising sun shone on rooftops, giving them a yellowish tinge. Across the roads that crisscrossed the town, **diminutive** figures of men and women hurried briskly to their places of work. Uniformed school children, rucksacks on their backs, jostled boisterously as they alighted from one matatu and boarded another. Beneath her, down at the courtyard, she could see her father moving and fussing. He was organizing and directing, with obvious shortness of temper, the loading of two ten-ton lorries. He was gesticulating violently, apparently reprimanding loaders for being slow and inept in carrying out the task before them.

Taiyo knew her father well. He was not a man who cared to have his well-laid work-plans delayed or disrupted. She had noticed that he had become even more belligerent ever since the family learnt that he had been retrenched and they were now being forced to vacate the house and relocate to the rural town he had left many years back. Although the distance would not allow her to hear what he was telling the loaders, Taiyo felt a mild but quite genuine twinge of sympathy for the poor fellows down there, for she knew the sting of her father's tongue.

It reminded her of her own recent battle with him when he denied her permission to travel to Mombasa with other young men and women who had been selected by an F.M Radio Station to attend an

extravaganza. She had stubbornly put up a spirited struggle but the battle was so predictably and utterly lost. That had left a wound in her heart that was still too raw to probe. Her rage, she realised, was still seething within her. The simple faith and certainty of childhood upon which her life until then had been found, had failed her. Also, her trust that her father would give her whatever she requested for had been badly shaken.

Stemming those thoughts out of her mind, she raised her head and looked through the morning sun beams that gleamed brightly across the rooftops of Nakuru town; that beloved town that was the mother of all flamingos. A town that she was now about to leave. Tears welled in her eyes. She blinked suddenly and rapidly.

Taiyo did not hear her younger sister Resian approach. Briefly and in silence, they stood by the window side by side in the empty room. As far back as the two sisters could remember, they had always stood by that window every Sunday morning before they went to church. But their little habit of observing what went on below the streets of the town was made poignant that morning; it was going to be the last time they would do this.

Resian leaned forward and lifted her face to look into her sister's large, brown eyes. She spoke very softly but her words were distinct and her voice very clear in the silent empty room.

"Taiyo- e - yeiyo, what do you think life is going to be like in Nasila?"

"For heaven's sake, Resian," Taiyo said, turning round to face her sister. "How am I supposed to know?"

"I suppose it's going to be very different from the kind of life we are used to here, isn't it?"

"Most likely so, yes."

"It seems so very strange," Resian pressed on relentlessly; "to be leaving Nakuru town."

"We have always known that it was our father's plan to end up in Nasila," Taiyo told her sister, trying hard not to answer her directly, "That is why he built that shop that he has always spoken about. Now that he has been retrenched ... " she hesitated a moment. It transpired that the more she spoke of the relocation, the harder the reality that she was about to leave Nakuru town for good hit her. The twenty years of her life had been spent there. She loved its crowded streets, the bustle and excitement of its wholesale and retail markets, and the boisterous bus stage. But the most painful to leave behind was her boyfriend Lenjirr, the lanky dark-haired, blunt-faced young man whose big languid eyes had always smiled at her warmly, fostering in her the dreams of young womanhood.

"Taiyo-e-yeiyo?" Resian called, lifting her head to look up suspiciously into the face of her tall sister. "Is something amiss?"

"No, nothing is amiss."

"I'm somehow worried, dear sister." Resian's voice dropped a little with apprehension. "What do you think will happen to us if the shop father intends to open does not become as successful as he hopes?"

"Resian-e-yeiyo, I don't know any better than you! Father thinks the shop will be a success. I overheard him tell one of his friends that he was going to stock agricultural inputs such as fertilizer, seeds, animal drugs

and chemicals. Nasila is an agricultural area and business is bound to do well. Let us have faith in him and hope for the best."

"I don't want to work at the shop," Resian declared, her pretty face hardening and her voice sounding petulant. "I want to come back to Nakuru and join Egerton University. I want to take a course in Veterinary Science and become a veterinary doctor. I want to read everything that there is to be read and put on the graduation regalia at the end of four years. Yes, I like to be called Dr. Resian Kaelo. You aren't laughing, are you? I mean it."

"I'm not laughing, little sister," Taiyo said fervently, "you know too well that it is also my ardent ambition to join the university. How nice it would be if father were to allow the two of us to join. I would love it!" "It would be wonderful," Resian said excitedly, the elation evident in her voice. "You will then persuade father to allow us to come back to Nakuru and join the university, won't you, Taiyo-e-yeiyo?"

"I can't promise that with certainty," Taiyo said and tore her look away from her sister's face. "You know the stubborn nature of father." She looked down into the courtyard where their father was still busy moving from one lorry to the other, making sure that their furniture was loaded as fittingly as possible so that it did not break on the way. When she heard him yell at one of the workers, a cold knot of anger and resentment tightened in the pit of her stomach, a flash of almost physical pain. She wondered what made her sister think she would be able to persuade their father to allow them come back to Nakuru and join the university if that was not his



intention. Once more, she recalled with bitterness how her father's refusal to allow her to go to Mombasa and participate in the musical extravaganza had nearly damaged the father-daughter relationship that had always been remarkably close.

"Please try to talk to him, won't you, *Taiyo-e-yeiyo?*" Resian pleaded persuasively. "He always listens to you and this time round he will. Just try." "I'll try," Taiyo said doubtfully to close the delicate subject.

Behind them and from the adjacent room, their mother's voice rose, the edge of complaint in it making them take keener interest on what was happening down there at the courtyard. At that very moment, their father craned his neck and looked up, as if to see what they were doing at the window.

"Taiyo, what on the earth are you doing there at the window instead of helping me pack?" their mother asked sharply. And to Resian, "Run downstairs and check what is happening. Are we ever going to leave?"

"They have completed loading the lorries, Yeiyo," Taiyo said nonchalantly. Turning to her sister and nudging her urgently, she added, "Here comes *papa*) quick let's go! We better be found in the company of *Yeiyo* when he comes, otherwise he will spoil our day with his sharp tongue!" They giggled as they rushed out.

The two girls were with their mother gathering suitcases, placing them at the doorway ready to carry them downstairs when their father entered the now empty living room.

"Ready to go?" Kaelo asked, addressing no one in particular. "We must start our journey straightaway if

we are to get to Nasila early enough to offload the trucks and arrange the furniture in our new house."

That short speech poignantly brought reality to them; they were now about to leave Nakuru town for good. Ole Kaelo cleared his throat loudly. His wife, Mama Milanoi, took out a handkerchief from her pocket and blew her nose. The four of them stood there for a moment in a sudden silence, each one of them keeping their thought to themselves. But one thing that was clear to all of them was that the flat that had been their home for so many years, stripped of all furniture, of all personal possessions, all books, pictures and ornaments, now looked bleak and shabby.

"Well," Mama Milanoi's voice wavered a little. "Let's pray that the Good Lord gives us journey mercies." And she prayed.

Then, with a last glance about her, Mama Milanoi got hold of one of the suitcases and led the way out of the flat. Her husband followed and together they preceded their daughters out of that flat. Taiyo was the last to leave. She turned at the doorway, stood for a long moment looking back into the room that she had seen all of her childhood. Then, with tears in her eyes, firmly closed the door and followed the others down the stairs.

Minutes later, when all of them were settled in the fourteen-seater minibus that Ole Kaelo had hired for them, the journey began in earnest. Father and mother sat in the front seat while the girls shared the back seat with the suitcases and other hand luggage. The two lorries snaked ahead of them.

Mama Milanoi settled in her seat and the vehicle sped steadily out of Nakuru town. She gave thought to

the bigger picture of their relocation. When her husband broke the news that he had been retrenched, she was dumbfounded. It was as though a thunderbolt had struck her out of a midday blue sky. Ever since she got married to Ole Kaelo twenty-two years earlier, Agribix Limited had been her husband's employer and the sole source of her family's livelihood. Now that it was closing its door on them, she felt as if providence itself was turning off the valve that supplied the vital air that sustained their lives. But her husband had received the distressing news stoically. He had said it was an inevitability that was always coming. It began its journey the day he was engaged and now, like a baby who must be born at the fullness of time, this had come to pass. He counseled and convinced her that she had nothing to fear for he had prepared for that eventuality. He was of the opinion that they could go back home and start afresh; embrace the life of their community.

Once she was convinced that relocation would enable them begin a new phase of life, she became unflaggingly enthusiastic. She began to see in her mind how a brand new house and a well-stocked shop that her husband promised to set up on the right side of Nasila town, predictably offered glamour and a chance to be associated with the great and the powerful of the land. She saw a chance for her family to share the good fortune enjoyed by those who were already happily settled in the rural town. But above all, she thought, it would be easier to marry off her two girls in the new town than in the melting pot that Nakuru town had become. Yes, two sons-in-law from reputable families in the land could easily catapult them right into the centre

of the affairs of the community. That could be the re-entry point into the community that they had been thinking about, she thought contentedly.

There was, however, a dark spot in the whole affair. Women friends from Nasila who had visited her in the past had asked her very intrusive questions regarding her daughters. At that time she dismissed them as busybodies who enjoyed intrusion into other people's affairs. But it now dawned on her that those could be the mothers of her would be sons-in-law. The words they used to describe the status of her daughters came back to haunt her like demented spirits of a past that was better forgotten; *Intoiye Nemengalana* they had called them contemptuously.

On his part, Parsimei Ole Kaelo sat quietly beside his wife, his mind roaming the distant past in reminiscence. He knew that he had worked his fingers to the bone over the years, preparing for that day when he was no longer going to be employed. He was on his way to opening up his business. Not that he felt any particular excitement or pleasure; he was a man to whom disappointment came more easily and naturally than contentment. And that latter attribute fired his ambition to always strive for the stars. It was characteristic of him that, surrounded by what other men would have considered evidence of a well-earned successful life, he felt nothing but the need to strive even harder to achieve better results.

He had a contentious mind that seemed to question every aspect of his life. Although he was blessed with a shrewd brain and a pugnacious obstinacy that had stood him in good stead in his struggle to rise

through the ranks, from a clerk to the coveted position of Commercial Manager of the Agribix Ltd, he still saw only, the greater successes of others. Even on the family front, he felt cheated by nature, for although it had been his prayer to get at least three boys, he had ended up with two girls. But even more obnoxious was the fact that despite all his achievements, it seemed to him that his younger brother, Simiren, who remained in Nasila, had been more appreciated and was considered the cultural head of the Kaelos by the community. That hurt him. But it did not worry him. Since childhood he had been aware, without self-pity, that no one really liked him. That, too, did not bother him since in his mind, to pursue the easy and worthless admiration of others was a sign of weakness of character.

Nature had not, however, been totally inconsiderate. It rewarded him with a gem in the form of his wife-Jane Milanoi. When he first saw her at a church service at Nasila, he was stunned. She was then hardly eighteen. Her body had now ripened to a sensual womanhood completely at odds with her childlike face. She wore her jet black hair in braids that accentuated her wide eyes. Her breasts were full and heavy, her waist slender, her hips wide and seductively curved. And the dress she wore, a simple red frock, fitted well her tall shapely figure. From the moment he saw her, he had been obsessed. And against all odds and despite all efforts, he was still so obsessed twenty-two years later. His marriage to her had been a great success.

His two daughters occupied separate parts of his heart. Taiyo, his eldest, was his pride. When she was born twenty-years earlier, his heart was enthralled. She

was the proof of his fatherhood. When his wife got pregnant the second time, he prayed for a healthy baby boy who would carry the Kaelo's name to the next generation. But that was not to be. Against his expectation, and to his utter disappointment, nature had given him another baby girl. From the moment she was born, mute and helpless, he detested her. The very sight of her enraged him. Her arrival and her continued stay in her father's home, remained unwelcome and detested. And right from her cradle, baby Resian instinctively detected the absence of love from her father. She grew up sullen, bewildered and resentful. As a result, her nature was darkened by melancholy. Self-doubt made her awkward and very difficult to deal with. And that made him detest her even more.

Even her physical appearance angered her father. Like her sister Taiyo, at eighteen, she had grown almost as tall as her father, but unlike Taiyo who was still skinny and symmetrical in formation, Resian's body had blossomed early. Signs of early womanhood were evident. The earlier he disposed of her, he declared to himself angrily, the better.

A few kilometres to Nasila, one of the lorries developed a mechanical problem and broke down. The other two vehicles stopped behind it, the crew alighted and immediately swung into action. While Ole Kaelo fussed around the vehicles, cursing and muttering expletives under his breath, Mama Milanoi and her daughters alighted and stood beside the vehicle. They huddled stoically together, eyes downcast, saying little. They knew thieves, robbers, rapists, car-jackers and hooligans lurked everywhere and could strike at any

moment. They, therefore, stood waiting with fatalistic resignation for the worst. Taiyo and Resian, both head and shoulder taller than their mother, stood on each side to protect her more from the cold blowing wind than from the fear of the marauding thugs.

"Here comes *Papaai*," Taiyo said with relief. "He is waving at us to get back into the vehicle. I think they have fixed the lorry."

Soon the vehicles roared and within no time they were rolling into the small town of Nasila. Taiyo and Resian strained their eyes in the evening darkness to see the town that was to be their new home. Their arrival came sooner than expected. The gates of their uncle Simiren's homestead where they were received swung open and a crowd of jubilant relatives, who had been waiting to welcome them, surged forward to greet them. When they stepped out of the vehicle, the girls were hugged, kissed and their heads touched by uncles, cousins, aunts and other relatives they had never met. There was so much noise, laughter, singing and dancing, that the girls, who least expected such a reception, were confused. Soon, they were all seated around a bright fire lit in the middle of the homestead, enjoying pieces of roasted meat.

For the thirty years or so that Parsimei Ole Kaelo was away in Nakuru, his younger brother Simiren acted as the head of the Kaelo family. He ably represented the family in the Ilmolelian clan to which they belonged. When there were *intalengo* to be performed, such as the initiation of girls, the circumcision of boys or betrothal ceremonies, he was always there representing his elder brother and his clan. And he was a strict adherent to his

people's customs and traditions, for which reason he was respected and appreciated by the elders. There had never been any argument or rivalry between him and his brother. Ever since they were young, and as they grew up, Simiren had always accepted his position to be subordinate to his elder brother. The fact that he had four wives and sixteen children while his brother had only one and two children, did not make any difference. Parsimei Ole Kaelo was still the *olmorijoi* and he still humbled himself before him.

During Parsimei Ole Kaelo's absence, Simiren ran all kinds of errands for him. Many times he sent him money to purchase livestock alongside his own. He drove them to Dagoretti cattle market where he sold them at a profit and brought back the money to him. Seeing the rate at which his money multiplied made Parsimei Ole Kaelo appreciate and respect his younger brother's experience as an *olkunchai*. When Parsimei Ole Kaelo put up two buildings in Nasila - a shop and residential house - his brother participated fully in the construction.

As Simiren and the clan elders sat around the fire, entertaining his elder brother, he thought quietly over how things might change. And as chunks of meat went round, he furtively looked at his brother as he selected a piece from the tray and wondered what was going through his mind. He hoped that Parsimei would appreciate that the weighty burden of matters pertaining to the Kaelo family would henceforth rest squarely on his able and mature shoulders. He, however, envisaged some problems. He had informed Ole Kaelo on many occasions, in the past, that there were murmurs in the



clan about him. Elders had termed reckless his decision to remain married to only one wife, who had only borne him two daughters. They had likened him to a mono-eyed giant who stood on legs of straw. Parsimei had got angry and called the clan elders megalomaniacs who were still trapped in archaic traditions that were better buried and forgotten. Simiren did not argue with him then nor would he do so now. He would rather have matters take their own course.

There was, however, a more sensitive matter that had not been broached; it had to do with his daughters. He had hardly given thought to their age earlier, but when he saw them that evening he knew they should have left home long ago. It would take not long before his brother earned himself the derogatory name of the father of *intoiye nemengalana*.

## CHAPTER TWO

Taiyo and Resian were woken up by a lively chatter of birds in the trees surrounding the house and by the intermittent crowing of roosters. What a contrast to what they were used to in Nakuru! They were always woken up by a rowdy clatter that assailed their ears at dawn: what with matatu drivers hooting and revving their engines noisily, touts shouting themselves hoarse while incessantly banging the body-works of their vehicles. For the first time in their lives, they experienced a rare atmosphere of tranquility and serenity they had never known to exist.

Taiyo lazily got out of bed and sleepily dragged herself to the window. When she opened the shutter, bright morning sunlight suddenly flooded the room. A cool fresh breeze swept in and caressed her face soothingly. From a distant, she could hear a bustle of activity within the homestead. She could also hear the mooing of cattle and bleating of sheep not far from the homestead. But what captivated her most was the cool natural environment that was created by giant trees that grew between the houses.

Wondering what could have entranced her sister so much that she kept gazing unblinkingly at a spot outside the house, Resian too stealthily left her bed and joined Taiyo at the window. Standing behind her sister, Resian noticed features at their uncle's homestead that she had not seen the previous night when they arrived. Apart from that house in which they had spent the night, three main houses stood within a well-tended and evenly-trimmed kei-apple perimeter hedge. She guessed

that the four houses belonged to their four aunts who, they were informed the previous night, were the wives of their uncle. Between the houses stood smaller buildings that were overshadowed by massive yellow-trunked acacia trees. Interspersed were olive-green *iloirienito* trees whose fragrant foliage filled the air with their aromatic scent. Flights of birds flashed between the trees and the air was alive with their constant motion and cheerful calls.

"Hope our home will look like this," said Resian with enthusiasm.

"It's so calm and peaceful here. It's the kind of home one would look forward to come back to at the end of the college semester."

"Children," a woman's voice called from an adjacent room. "Come out and have your tea."

They quickly dressed up and within no time, they were out of the house and one of their aunts was leading them to the next house to join the rest of the family for morning tea.

The three crossed the courtyard talking happily, the girls walking closely behind their aunt. Like the house they had slept in, the next two houses they walked past were built of heavy cedar slabs, had similar wooden shutters for windows and were roofed with green painted corrugated iron sheets. Standing beside each house, on raised platforms made of strong cedar beams were large, black plastic water tanks that collected rain water from the roofs. Chicken clucked and scratched in the cool shade underneath. Clusters of bushes of *olobaai* with their shinny dark-green leaves and tiny yellow flowers scattered the compound. *Ilkilenya* climbers grew around

the beams that supported the water tanks and climbed over the walls of the houses, making them look cool and comfortable.

The last house on the row was next to the main gate through which they had entered the homestead the previous night. It was different from the previous three. It was larger and was built of stone and had glass windows and like the others, its corrugated iron-sheet roof was painted green. The front door was ajar and standing smilingly next to it was a stout woman of forty-five or so who greeted the girls affectionately. She eyed them curiously as they responded to the greetings. She introduced herself as *Yeiyoobotorr* which meant she was their senior-most aunt and the eldest wife of their uncle.

They were led to a spacious living room whose large open glass windows faced the east allowing in bright morning sunlight. The light shone on the young faces whose wide eyes stared unashamedly at the two young women who *Yeiyoobotorr* was introducing as their sisters. The sixteen or so children aged between three and sixteen were perched on benches, stools and chairs around the room, each holding a steaming enamel tea mug on one hand and a slice of bread on the other. Their mothers were there too and so was Mama Milanoi who sat placidly admiring the composure of her own daughters. It was only after the children were reassured that their new sisters were not visitors and that they would be seeing them often, that calm returned and they resumed taking their tea and bread. Room was created at the table and Taiyo and Resian sat with their cousins.

Seeing that they had the whole morning to themselves after breakfast, Taiyo and Resian told their mother they wanted to take a walk around the neighborhood. She allowed them but cautioned care and wariness of strangers who might take advantage of their unfamiliarity. The girls looked at one another and giggled. They dismissed their mother's misplaced fears as born of the misconception by the old generation that girls were weaklings, incapable of deciding what was right.

Their mother watched them as they walked leisurely down the path out of their uncle's homestead. For reasons she did not understand, a pang of a strange premonition twisted her nerves unpleasantly. A creepy feeling kept on gnawing at her conscience regarding her daughters' status of being *intoiye nemengalana*, in the midst of a community that cherished girl-child circumcision. She, however, dismissed the feeling and relegated it to the back of her mind.

"What do you make of our uncle Simiren's home?" Resian asked her sister quietly as they walked down the path.

"Honestly, I don't think all is well. Beneath the veneer of apparent happiness, I detected some apprehension, a subtle rivalry of some sort, between the four houses." "What a terrible person you are, my dear sister!" Taiyo rebuked her sister mildly. "You are not worth being a guest in anyone's home. How dare you make such judgment? Their life seems to suit them perfectly."

"Easy, easy, big sister," said Resian teasingly.

Don't be so harsh on me. All I have done is to make an observation. Am I not entitled to that?"

"Of course," Taiyo agreed and flicked an affectionate smile at her sister. "But do you know that the rivalry you detected could simply be a figment of your own fertile imagination?"

"That could be true," Resian added and smiled pleasantly. "But can you honestly claim, if you were one of the sixteen little fellows taking tea from enamel mugs in that crowded room this morning, to be content?" "Perhaps I would be happy," she answered thoughtfully. "You know happiness is relative. One could be happy in a family of twenty and another may fail to find happiness in a family where he or she is an only child."

"Did you notice that two of our aunts are expectant?" Resian asked mischievously, slanting a look at her sister. "At that rate ... "

"Come off it!" Taiyo said sternly. "There are better things to discuss. Parents have the right to have as many children as they desire. You will have that right yourself when your turn comes."

"Who? Not me," Resian said vehemently "I don't want to be a parent. At least not in the foreseeable future. I want to study. When I'll have obtained my degree, other peripheral matters such as a husband, children and such may be considered."

They were walking back to the homestead talking animatedly when they were accosted by a tall heavysset young man with a thick dark beard and moustache. He wore a pair of faded jeans and a dirty blue shirt. On his face was a wide impudent grin. Taiyo glanced at the young man and looked away. She moved closer to

Resian and nudged her to change direction. But the man walked directly to Taiyo. On seeing the man approaching, a heavy knobkerry in his hand, Resian almost fainted.

"Please do not harm us," she pleaded. "We do not have any money with us."

"Who told you I want any money?" the man jeered as he strode menacingly towards them. "Are you not the *intoiye nemengalana* from Nakuru town?" he asked laughing contemptuously. "I want to have a good look at you and know what kind of stuff you are made of!" He roughly grabbed Taiyo's arm.

"Leave my sister alone!" Resian hissed indignantly lifting her eyes and glaring into his. "Let go her arm at once!"

"Let go of my hand," Taiyo demanded, trembling with anger. "We are not the kind of women you have in mind!"

"What women!" the man retorted acidly. "Soon, you will be able to differentiate decent women from *intoiye nemengalana*."

Taiyo tried to wrestle her arm from the man's grip without success. But suddenly, he seemed to change his mind. With a sour smile, he spat and glared at the girls. Then, releasing Taiyo's hand, he told them: "You have not seen the last of me. Soon you will come to know that there is no place in our society for women of your ilk." He turned and disappeared down the road as suddenly as he had appeared.

The two girls sighed heavily and shook their heads as they watched him walk away. Although they had put up brave faces, they were terribly shaken.

"Thank God his intention was not to rape us," Resian said tears streaming down her face. "We would have been helpless in the hands of such a brute."

Taiyo bit her lower lip struggling to maintain control. "His intention could have been worse than rape," she said, tears of anger and indignation welling up in her eyes.

They quickened their steps to their uncle's home. True, the incident had taken the sparkle from the day that had begun so joyfully, but they reasoned that it could have been worse.

The girls debated as to whether to inform their parents of the ordeal. They knew their mother would understand and empathise with them. But judging from past experience, their father would be less supportive. He would blame them for having dared venture into an unknown territory without his approval. Finally, they decided to keep the incident to themselves.

When he finished supervising the off-loading of the lorries and arranging of furniture and other personal effects in his new house, Ole Kaelo set out to meet his mentor Soin ole Supeyo. He was a much older man, possibly sixty-five, a member of the Ilmolelian clan and a respected elder of Ilnyangusi age-set. He was known to be shrewd, scrupulous and honest, attributes that saw him rise from an ordinary *olkunchai* who drove his three or four heads of cattle for hundreds of kilometres to the cattle market at Dagoretti, to the now immensely rich man that he was. He was reputed to own the largest ranch in Nasila and his beef herd and sheep were said to be in tens of thousands. His business empire comprised a fleet of buses, lorries and shops, beside numerous



business premises and residential houses that he rented out.

As he drove his pick-up towards Ole Supeyo's farm, Ole Kaelo gave thought to the old man. When he was in primary school, Ole Supeyo was already a famous cattle trader. He would buy cattle from Nasila and drive them all the way to Dagoretti market where he would sell them and come back laden.

In those days, money was still a new concept to many up-coming illiterate traders. He would find it difficult to add up the notes and was forced to arrive at an aggregate of what he actually owned. Ole Supeyo had to fetch Ole Kaelo and together they would walk deep into the forest where they would find a safe place. He would then remove one of the blankets that he wore and spread it on the grass, take out his pouch and from it fish out a large bundle of notes and coins. He would ask his friend to count the money, while he stood tense, waiting, and would only relax when Ole Kaelo told him the actual amount and it tallied with the figure he had in mind.

They carried out that exercise at least twice a month and he came to trust and depend on Ole Kaelo. The two became close and their friendship developed even as Ole Supeyo became a very wealthy businessman and farmer. Ole Kaelo respected him and considered him his mentor.

Although Ole Supeyo did not attend school, Ole Kaelo thought he was one of those intelligent old men who were able to embrace modern culture, balance it appropriately, and make it run parallel to the old Nasila culture. He had six wives and about thirty children. He had sent all his sons to school and two of them had

reached university level. All his daughters were circumcised and married off to prominent elders in Nasila.

Ole Kaelo had witnessed Ole Supeyo's incense only on one occasion. A certain woman known as *Minikene* Nkoitoi, the *Emakererei*, a manager at a certain Sheep Ranch called Intare-Naaju, and a known crusader against girl circumcision, had come to persuade him not to circumcise his daughters. But Ole Supeyo would hear none of it. When the crusader insisted on having her way, he got angry and forcefully ejected her out of his homestead, threatening to clobber her.

Later, he told Ole Kaelo, the woman, whom he referred to as a wasp, was a great threat to the Maa culture. Female circumcision, he said, was not only an honoured rite of passage that had been in existence from time immemorial, but an important practice that tamed an otherwise wild gender. Like cattle that required to be dehorned, to reduce accidental injuries to each other, a certain measure of docility was also necessary to keep more than one wife in one homestead. And Ole Kaelo agreed with him, recalling the adage that: two women in one homestead were two potent pots of poison.

Ole Supeyo's homesteads, sheep pens and cattle enclosures were at the centre of an expansive farm that extended for many kilometres in all directions. Ole Kaelo first glimpsed at the glimmer of the corrugated iron sheet rooftops from the top of a low hill some ten kilometres away. The *manyattas* that long ago used to dot the area among scrubby trees and bush had given way to modern sprawling buildings. The trees had been cut down and the bush cleared so that in one direction,

the land was now an expansive plain of thick rich grass that stretched as far as the eye could see, while towards the other direction, thousands of acres of wheat and barley lay.

Ole Kaelo arrived at the homestead and parked his pick-up outside the gate. Looking at the modern homestead, he appreciated how far his friend had travelled from being a simple cattle trader, to the wealthy man who owned that massive homestead accommodating eight large houses. The first wife's house was the largest and was built amongst tall *Iloiraga* trees.

He walked towards the gate thinking of the man he continually drew his inspiration from. He had therefore considered it opportune to make his home the first port of call before he put his hand to the plough.

Ole Supeyo came out of the house to welcome his friend. He had only just woken from his siesta and his eyes were still smarting from sleep. As he walked down the steps in front of the house, he lifted a corner of his shirt and scratched his belly while his other hand stroked the stubble on his chin.

"Come in, my brother!" Supeyo said happily, "Welcome! Welcome! Welcome! Come right inside." They shook hands warmly and Ole Kaelo was led into the spacious living room.

As they talked casually over a cup of tea, Supeyo glanced furtively at his friend, his black eyes gleaming in the afternoon sunshine. He certainly liked him, he told himself quietly, and he would have liked him to succeed in the business he had set himself to do. He, however, considered Ole Kaelo a bore and sometimes a pompous one although he did not doubt his intelligence. Little did

he know that his friend was much more advanced when it came to the murky business of the underworld.

"I hope all is well with your business arrangements," Supeyo commented nonchalantly.

"Everything is moving on smoothly," said Ole Kaelo contentedly. "I hope to open the doors of the shop at the onset of the rains."

"Good," said Supeyo cheerfully. "You will soon find out that, unlike in Agribix where somebody else provides the finances, another does the books, yet another runs up and down making sales, you will have to carry all those tasks single-handedly. And sales will be the most challenging."

Ole Kaelo's pride was wounded. How could the old fellow think he was so naive as not to know how to organise his sales? Perhaps, he thought sourly, his clansmate had not known that in his earlier years in Agribix, he had been sent out to open sales depots in remote places which he quickly developed into expanding profitable modern branches. Maybe it was time he showed the ageing businessman that younger bulls were raring to go and the old ones would better start skirting the pastures. He threw caution to the wind.

"The sales are already taken care of," Ole Kaelo said pompously. "Sales of about three hundred thousand bags of fertilizer, half a million bags of seeds plus insecticides, fungicides and herbicides are as good as bagged and secured. You see that?"

"My goodness," Supeyo exclaimed. "How did you manage such a feat?"

"I'm about to sign a four years' contract to supply all government institutions in Nasila with agricultural inputs," Kaelo said confidently.

Once he had spoken those words, Ole Kaelo felt guilty. Ever since he began negotiating for the supply of the inputs, he had told no one of the deal. It was a secret that he kept close to his heart. It had already cost him a fortune but if the deal went through, he thought apprehensively, it would make all the difference. He now felt rueful. It was as though by speaking about it, he had broken the spell that would have brought the good fortune. He grew anxious, leaned back on his seat, crossed his legs, trying to firmly suppress his own distaste for corruption that was entrenched in those contract giving offices. He had long realised that the choice was between remaining a nobody, self-righteously and accepting, sensibly, that the man with the meat was also the same man with the knife. Whoever wanted to eat meat, must of necessity dance to the music of the man who held the two.

"My brother Ole Kaelo," Supeyo called amidst malicious laughter that had a touch of friendly mockery. "Tell me, who have you been corrupting?"

"Nobody really," Ole Kaelo answered angrily, his teeth set on edge. "I only made contact with ... " he hesitated, then gaining his composure continued, "I made contact with a man called Oloisudori. I met the man in Nakuru ... "

"Do you know Oloisudori?" interrupted Supeyo sharply.

"Do you really know what you have gotten yourself into? *Taba!*" He leaned forward, elbows on the

table, his eyes growing into sudden sharp needle-points of interest. He remained so for a moment, then sunk back into his chair, smiling mirthlessly. "My dear brother, here in Nasila, everyone knows anyone who is corrupt. And Oloisudori is probably the most corrupt of them all. What a head start! I'll be glad to share some of those contracts should you run out of supplies. They are quite a bite, I dare say!"

The mockery did not escape Ole Kaelo. But to hear the man he had all along considered to be his mentor pour cold water on what he regarded as his grand entry into big business was not only frightening but disconcerting. He wondered whether his friend, was not being hypocritical. He could be one of those selfish people who, after crossing a river, would destroy the bridge so that others did not use it. He lifted his eyes to look at his friend and shifted in his seat uneasily.

"In your opinion," he said and hesitated quite embarrassed. Then he continued, "do you think Oloisudori will deliver what he promised?" Supeyo shrugged his shoulders. "My brother, you are not naive nor are you new in business," he said candidly. "Oloisudori is in business and wants to continue being in business. If you have fulfilled your part, he will do his, especially if it suits him."

"So, he is a man of integrity?" asked Ole Kaelo, a flicker of hope rising in his heart.

"A man of integrity indeed," Supeyo said, a scornful smile twisting his lips. "Don't trust him any further than you would a hyena in your homestead." Then lowering his voice as if he was letting him into a guarded secret, he whispered mischievously. "And my

friend, keep the fellow away from your daughters. He has a reputation that would rival that of a randy he-goat!" With that advice, Ole Kaelo left his friend. Though feeling discomfited, he was nonetheless the wiser, or so he thought.

In the afternoon, the Kaelo family left Simireri's homestead to be driven the one kilometre distance to their new home. They rode almost in silence, each wrapped in thoughts they did not care to share with others. Mama Milanoi, dazzled by dreams of eventual fulfillment failed to notice that her husband's silence was ominous. She even forgot the premonition that had earlier gnawed her conscience. Taiyo had not recovered fully from the traumatic experience they had gone through. The threatening hostility the evil young man displayed had not dissipated and that the sense of foreboding from the threat was still hanging in the air like the sword of Damocles. Her arm, which the man had roughed up, still felt unclean. She could still feel the touch of his heavy callous hand. She drew in a deep, trembling breath and released it in a sigh as she silently sat at the back of the pick-up with her sister. Resian also sat there silently.

At last they were home and before them was the solid, stone-built red-tiled roofed house that was going to be their home. It was built on a hill that allowed a command of a breathtakingly beautiful scene.

While his wife and daughters jumped out of the pick-up excitedly and scrambled to the gate of their new house jubilantly, Parsimei Ole Kaelo remained behind for a few minutes. Ole Supeyo's words still nettled him. Truly, he had known Oloisudori to be a notorious

criminal, but was not everybody doing business with him? Was he really that bad? He wondered. Or was it the usual business rivalry and envy? Try as he did to justify his business deal with Oloisudori, something inside him told him it was not right. He thought an old man of Ole Supeyo's seniority did not use the word *Taba* lightly.



### CHAPTER THREE

When their father pointed out their house amongst other red tiled ones on top of a hill, the girls could hardly believe their eyes. That imposing huge building enclosed in a stonewalled perimeter fence, could not be their home! They nudged one another excitedly as they giggled and threw furtive glances at their father. The oppressive gloom that had weighed upon their hearts as they drove down the road, suddenly lifted and dissipated. An atmosphere of excitement and anticipation pervaded their hearts. Their faces were radiant. Their feet quickened as they walked the remaining distance with bated breath.

Mama Milanoi was also happy. Although she had not seen the house before then, she knew it was tastefully built. She had always trusted her husband to do the best for the family. There was no reason, therefore, for her to have doubted him. She married him twenty-two years ago, not only to meet the expectations of the Nasila people, but also to get someone to look after her and her children.

And true to her expectation, Ole Kaelo had always been responsible. Even as she sat happily beside him that sunny afternoon, she let her mind travel fancifully into her past. She recalled with amusement the pride of her father and mother when the parents of one Parsimei Ole Kaelo, accompanied by other elders came to their home to engage her. Her parents were all along determined to find a well-to-do son-in-law, preferably from a well known family. When the suitor happened to be a young man reputed to be an up-coming businessman, her parents were satisfied that their

daughter would not only be in safe hands, but that their grandchildren would have a dependable protector. After what appeared to her to be protracted negotiations, the parties agreed and she was betrothed.

She accepted him without any resistance. Tradition did not allow her to offer any and as expected of her, she did not resist. So at eighteen, after undergoing the mandatory initiation rituals, she had married Parsimei Ole Kaelo who was then twenty-four years old. And although over the years he had scolded and bullied her, like a half-witted child, she knew he was a good man, a great provider, a foresighted planner and a man with a will to succeed in whatever he put his mind on. She also knew that he loved her genuinely. For even after all those years of marriage he still pampered her. She loved him too and had a childlike dependence on him. She, however, knew that she had failed miserably by not giving him the sons that he had so much looked forward to. But she also knew it was still not too late. God could still favour her with a son or two. And now that she had gone back to the home of the gods of motherhood, she was going to join the rest of Nasila women in their ancestral prayer, song and praise- *Enkai Aomon Entomono* - a prayer exhorting God to open women's wombs.

She turned and looked at her daughters. They were full of animation as they walked hurriedly down the road that led to the gate. That made her happy. She was even happier to see Resian who was often a pessimist, looking exuberant that afternoon. She hoped they would always be that happy. But she knew things had not been easy for them. At that delicate stage of their

lives, she knew relocation to an extremely harsh environment devoid of their friends and all that they had known throughout their lives was not only trying, but cruel. But she feared even a worse looming scenario. Poor innocent things! How she wished she could shield and protect them. But could she? She knew Nasila people were extremely intolerant of those who ignored their cherished cultural sensibilities. And the case of her daughters was no exception.

Mama Milanoi was so engrossed in her thoughts that she hardly noticed that they had arrived at the gate of their new home. Her husband's voice jolted her back to reality.

"Lanoo-ai-nayorr," the endearing diminutive that he only used in the most intimate of circumstances, stopped her in her tracks. She straightened up and her eyes widened. "This is the home that I have always dreamed I would one day build for you and my beloved daughters," he said emotionally and dramatically dipped his hand into his coat-pocket removing a key. For a brief moment, the air around them was expectantly taut. The girls stood breathless, staring fixedly at the gate.

The whole episode seemed magical. And like a magician, Ole Kaelo stood there beaming ecstatically, his hands ready to unveil the object of his magic. He inserted the key into the keyhole, turned it and as it clicked open, he swung the gate open to reveal a home that was so breathtakingly beautiful that they could have only imagined it in a fantastic dream. They were stunned.

"Father of all creation!" Mama Milanoi exclaimed loudly. "This is but a dream."

"It is magnificent!" enthused Taiyo in an ecstasy of delight, "*Enkai supat.*"

"I have not seen anything like it!" completed Resian, enthralled, "*Eitu aikata ado! ...*"

The air of excitement that danced about the Kaelo family was so exhilarating. And for a long moment none of them moved. Their eyes were glued to the exquisite house before them.

Ole Kaelo ushered them into the sprawling homestead with its lush well-tended lawn. Here and there were squat robust *ilopon* trees. Clusters of *oleleshua*, *osinoni* and *olkirpanyany* bushes dotted the compound, while beyond the house, hanging on the stone perimeter wall, was a blaze of bougainvillea climbers in red, cream and purple.

When they got to the front of the house, they could hardly believe their eyes! Truly, their new house was a dream come true. Resian looked about her with fascinated eyes while Taiyo, itching to enter and see for herself, took the lead and proceeded to mount the graceful sweep of steps, before reaching the front door. And when their father opened the door, they were breathless.

They filed through into a spacious hallway that led to a large living room lavishly furnished with familiar furniture. The girls ran from room to room curiously trying to find their orientation. Surprisingly, the house looked familiar. What they did not know was that all the rooms were a replica of their former house in Nakuru. It was not easy to distinguish it from the Nakuru flat.

Back in the living room, Taiyo, Resian and their mother began to speak at once. They spoke of its size, convenience and the furniture fitting.

After a hurriedly prepared dinner, the girls retired to their bedroom to arrange and tidy it up. Cartons of their clothes, bedding, books and other personal effects were still piled up on their unmade bed. Curtains were yet to be hung as were their pictures and decorations. Taiyo removed her cardigan and immediately swung into action. She loosened the ropes that tied cartons, emptied their contents onto the floor and sorted them. After some time, the large room that held their big bed was in shambles. Shoes lay strewn all over, books were stacked in heaps on the floor and clothes and bedding were scattered on the bed. Exhausted, she straightened up and stood, hands on her hips, eyeing in growing exasperation her sister who sat on a chair at one corner of the room reading a book.

"Surely, Resian," she complained to her sharply. "Is this the time to read a book with all this mess around us?"

"Do your bit now and I will do mine tomorrow," Resian replied with a nonchalant carelessness. "I insist that you get up right now and get to work" Taiyo raised her voice. "We need to arrange this room before we get to bed."

Resian grunted. She reluctantly laid the book down and went to work.

They reviewed the events of the last two days as they tried to bring order to the room.

"There is such a contrast between Nakuru and this place," said Taiyo quietly. "It is so quiet and tranquil here."

"I don't know, but I feel an oppressive silence," Resian said defiantly. "A little noise is not all that bad." "Don't befuddle me with your weird kind of reasoning," said Taiyo getting impatient. "Do you prefer the Nakuru bus stage to this serene atmosphere?"

"No, not at all." Resian said seriously. "I would rather live in the most noisy place on earth, than live anywhere near a vagabond who would accost me in the most quiet and serene atmosphere with the intention of mutilating my sexuality!"

"Of course I also don't care whether I am counted among *intoiye nemengalana*," an embarrassed Taiyo said as she began to fold clothes, not looking at her sister. "What I know is that my body belongs to me. I belong to myself." She picked a pillow, tossed it onto the bed, plumbed it up and looking around said fiercely, "only when I am dead would anybody mutilate my body."

"Don't you think they can force us to undergo the ritual?" Resian asked fearfully. "What do you think will happen to us if *Papaai* is forced by his clansmen to embrace the archaic culture that would require us to get the cut?"

"Resian-e-yeiyo, I hope nothing of that sort happens, for if it does ... " she shrugged her shoulders and pulled an expressive face. "I don't know what would happen to us."

"That's why it's imperative that you persuade *Papaai* to allow us go back to Nakuru and enroll at the university," said Resian vehemently as she threw herself

onto the bed, her arms behind her head. "We must beat them to it. We must convince him to let us go before they prevail upon him to embrace outdated and archaic traditions."

"I'll do that soonest, dear sister," said Taiyo thoughtfully. "I'll try to persuade him to see our way."

"How soon is soonest?" Resian cried out resignedly and added petulantly, "I would never want to be confronted again by a deranged vagabond in this wild and frightening jungle that *Papaai* has thrown us into."

"Hush little sister, please don't cry," Taiyo cooed soothingly as if singing a lullaby to a crying baby. "Your big sister will make sure that no harm comes your way and that you get what you yearn for. Just wait and see."

Taiyo stood by the bed for a while watching her sister who lay forlorn, staring through the window into the brightly moonlit sky outside. Then she sat on the bed beside her and reassuringly touched Resian's cheek gently with the back of her hand. Ever since they were young, attending nursery school, she had been fiercely devoted to her sister. When they went to primary school, Resian clung to her for protection from bigger girls who wanted to bully her. And in their growing years, even at secondary school, Taiyo always sensed her sister's yearning.

She had made it her duty to mop her younger sister's tears, sooth her anger and gently reassure her when she was badly shaken; as often happened after the frequent tongue lashing from their father. For reasons she did not understand, she had always found their father strangely and harshly impatient towards Resian. She was sure it was that inexplicable attitude of her father

towards Resian that had contributed to her tempestuous disposition. Even stranger was their mother's failure to come to Resian's defense. It was as if her motherly instincts could not extend her protective wings to cover Resian.

And so, in the absence of their mother's protection and in the face of their father's constant provocation and intimidation, Resian's dependence on Taiyo strengthened. And Taiyo would have been irked by her sister's ever present nagging complaints had she not been so deeply aware of her never ending unhappiness.

Although Resian had a lot to complain and grumble about life in their new environment, Taiyo found it tolerable. For instance, she gladly discovered that mornings at their new home began with a lively chatter of birds in the trees surrounding their house. That gave the home an atmosphere of tranquility and peace. However, one of the unpleasant aspects that the girls had to live with was the constant violation of their privacy. In Nasila, they soon discovered, the home belonged to all clan members. It was not an unusual thing to get up in the morning to find the living room full of men and women who came that early, not for any tangible business, but simply to share a sumptuous breakfast with their kith and kin. Taiyo and Resian were soon to get used to hearing an urgent knock at the door very early in the morning.

On opening, they would invariably be met by a grinning group of men and women who would unashamedly ask them what they were doing in bed that late in the morning. They would proceed to take seats in



the living room and order them to serve them with breakfast.

When they got used to what they first considered to be negative aspects of Nasila culture, Taiyo and Resian adjusted accordingly and soon they began to live harmoniously with the people. Their father was out of the homestead most of the time working at the shop and organising other business matters. His absence also meant the absence of his irksome and corrosive remarks that always heightened tension in the house. In his absence, the house was a continuous joy with comfort and conveniences, and the girls found it a pleasure to keep it clean and well arranged.

Mingling with the women folk, the girls learnt a great deal about the hilarious, the absurd and the weird aspects of Nasila culture. They also met a variety of women. Although most of the women who visited the Parsimei's home did so for entertainment purposes, others visited with definite purposes. A great number of them came to survey and get to know the girls well, so that they could have sufficient information on which to decide whether they were marriageable, and commendable to their husbands to be married as their *inkainito*. Others came looking for potential wives for their sons while *enkaitoyoni* and *enkamuratani* came to make acquaintance with potential clients.

So when their father announced one evening that he was planning a homecoming ceremony, the girls and especially Taiyo no longer felt like strangers.

## CHAPTER FOUR

Parsimei Ole Kaelo planned his homecoming ceremony meticulously. He had wanted the occasion to be remarkably memorable, preferably taking the form of the traditional *enkang-o-ntalengo*. He, however, knew that having been away from Nasila for many years, he had lost touch with the cultural sensibilities of the people.

To re-establish the severed links, he enlisted the help of his brother Simiren and several senior elders of the community who were the custodians of his people's culture. He was prepared to get down to the bedrock and find out at which point he lost the way. He had known that *odomongi* and *orok-kiteng*, the legendary twin homesteads of the founder that begot the five clans of Nasila: Ilmolelian, Ilmakesen, Ilukumae, Ilaiser and Iltarrosero, were the cradle of the Nasila people.

He not only desired to reunite with Nasila people but also needed their blessings. He had, therefore, dispatched people to all corners of Nasila to invite representatives of all the five clans to the grand party, which was going to be his re-entry point into the cultural life of his people.

When he gave thought to the clans, Ole Kaelo could not help but laugh silently when he recalled the stereotyped anecdotes that used to be told when he was young. They were made up by rival groups with the intention of lowering the esteem of their adversaries. He recalled with amusement that his own clan of Ilmolelian was said to be made up of ludicrously generous men who would slaughter a bull and foolishly share out all the

meat to others leaving themselves without any. They would then happily and ridiculously raise up their arms to show to all and sundry that they had not hidden any meat under their armpits. But for the Ilmakesen clan, it was exactly the opposite. The clansmen were said to be so miserly stingy that they would deny a dog the afterbirth of a she-goat. It was said that they would opt to sleep hungry rather than share food they had in the house with a sojourner who dropped in unannounced. Interestingly, Ole Kaelo was a member of the supposedly generous Ilmolelian clan, and his wife Milanoi was the daughter of the close-fisted Ilmakesen clan.

When the party was finally thrown, it was nothing short of ostentatious. And true to the Ilmolelian spirit and tradition, Ole Kaelo held nothing back. He slaughtered a fattened ox, six rams and four he-goats. In the living room stood four long tables spread with the most astounding array of food Nasila had ever seen. There were large trays laden with huge chunks of boiled meat whose tantalizing aroma filled the room. Lamb chops grilled to a golden brown colour glistened appetisingly on chop-boards. Succulent pieces of pink-roasted liver lay arranged on leaves of *oloirepirepi* weed to preserve moisture and taste. Then there were other choice pieces of meat on skewers and others wrapped up in sacred *oloirien* leaves that were the preserve of the elders who were to bless the home of *intalengo*. It was only after such blessings that Nasila would receive back their son who had gone out to hunt for fortunes and returned safely. The elders would also bless the wife, children and property that he brought back and which

were all henceforth going to be the wealth of the Ilmolelian clan.

That day had began early for Ole Kaelo. He had left his bed at cock crow, the time that was known in Nasila as *tolakira-lole-Kasaale*. He was to see to it that every detail about the impending homecoming ceremony was taken care of without exception and absolutely nothing was to be left to chance. There was little for him to do that morning though, for all preparations and arrangements had earlier been made, systems had been set, and all that was left to be done was to implement what had been agreed upon.

Days earlier, with the help of his brother Simiren and his wives, he had gathered a retinue of young men and women from his Ilmolelian clan and charged them with the responsibility of organising the activities and chores of the ceremonial day. And true to their calling, the young men and women immediately swung into a variety of activities with zest. Those who belonged to the sub-clan of Iloorasha-kineji, to which Ole Kaelo also belonged, felt that the responsibility to have the occasion succeed rested on their shoulders. Led by a young local primary school music teacher called Joseph Parmuat, they took charge of the entire ceremony. Members of the other sub-clan of *lelema* graciously accepted the leadership of Joseph Parmuat and their other cousins and all worked harmoniously and tirelessly to bring about the success that was already evident that morning.

From the verandah of his house, Ole Kaelo surveyed with utter satisfaction all that was happening in his homestead. He was most grateful and felt humbled by the fact that, in that ancestral land to which he had

finally returned and to which he belonged (body and soul); honour, brotherhood and selflessness were still virtues. In Nakuru, only the promise of monetary payment would have induced such a large number of young men and women to turn up. With trembling lips and tears welling in his eyes, he swore under his breath that never again in his life, would he ever abandon the culture of his people or live outside his clan; Ilmolelian. Its twin sub-clans of Iloorasha-kineji and lelema, would always be like two chambers of his heart that incessantly pumped the blood that sustained him. Regaining his composure, he walked back into the house.

Mama Milanoi was at the tables ensuring that the trays that came out of the kitchen laden with meat delicacies, were sorted out and arranged appropriately. Taiyo was busy slicing chunks of oxtongue into manageable pieces, a job she did with dexterous fingers. When their father opened the door to let himself into the living room, Resian was busy transferring glasses from the sideboard onto a nearby table. The moment she saw him enter, her fingers became clumsy and she nearly dropped a glass.

"Would you ever do anything right, child?" her father reprimanded her severely. "I hope you have not broken any glasses this morning."

"I am terribly sorry, *Papaai*," Resian said remorsefully, her eyes downcast, "but I have not broken any." But sensing that her father's eyes were still upon her, she became more nervous. Just then, her braided hair fell free of their pins and over her face. She tried to tuck a strand behind her ear, but in the process lost the grip of the two glasses dropping them on the floor. Her

father winced, grimaced and struggled to control his temper. This that was not a day to get angry. But all the same, he wondered where in the world they fetched that awkward, overblown, stupid child. Her gracelessness appalled him. And the very look in her eyes, half- fearful, half-defiant and wholly troubled, was always enough to raise his temper to the highest pitch. He clicked his tongue irritably and quickly left the room.

At noon, Ole Kaelo's spacious homestead was nearly full to capacity. There was pomp all over and a carnival atmosphere resonant with song and dance hung in the air. A bevy of beautiful, young women stepped forward, their necks bedecked with layer after layer of exquisite multicoloured bead ornaments. The bright-coloured *lesos* they wore over their shoulders fluttered in the windy afternoon air as they moved sedately, heads poised, chests heaving forwards and backwards, knees bobbing, voices raised melodiously, as they glided smoothly into an exciting traditional dance.

Two young men out of a group of about twenty began to sing in their light melodic voices. The rest joined in, their deep guttural voices mingling with those of the young women. The moment the voices mingled and fused, the dance changed subtly. The men's group broke into two, each with a light, springy jump. They skipped away as they skirted the compound, and joined again into one group amidst shrieks of excitement. The young women repeated their dance. Their light steps sedate, their backs and shoulders held straight and their heads haughty and graceful. And as they sang, the young men leapt to the centre. They jumped high into the air each one of them vying to outdo the other.

Taiyo and Resian who had joined the throng of spectators were ecstatic. Their eyes were glued to the handsome, arrogant athletic figures of the *morans*. One particular young man caught Taiyo's eye. He was lithe, tall and dark-haired in red *shukas*, who leapt higher with more grace than the rest. She involuntarily gasped, her gaze still riveted upon his handsome face.

"Look at that young man," Taiyo told her sister, excitedly pointing at him. "Isn't he handsome?"

Resian followed her sister's gaze. "Yes, he is," she said trying to scrutinize his face from that distance. "He is undoubtedly good-looking."

Even as they gazed at the young man, he broke out of the group and walked out of the gate. Moments later he came back leading a group of uniformed school children, boys and girls who he quickly arranged into four short lines, one following the other. Soon the air was resonant with their vibrant voices as they sang an exciting heart-lifting song, whose words had been carefully selected to commemorate Ole Kaelo's return.

*Teninining iltualan loo nkishu ang*, - If you listen to the tinkling bells of our cattle,

*Niyolou tenaa naapuo linka ashu nar ukunye ang.*  
- You will know whether the cattle are going out to pastures, or on their way back home.

*Tenaa napuo linka, shomo taanyu tenaituyupaki* -  
If they are on their way to the pastures, wait for them, at the hills of Naituyupaki

*Tenaa narukunye ang, taanyu te kishomi Ole Kaelo.* - If they are streaming back home, wait for them at the homestead of Ole Kaelo.

*Oiye kuldo murran lolmolelian*, - You young men of Ilmolelian,

*Enchom entanangare oltungani linyi olotu ang* - Go out and meet your returning hero.

*Entoboinu inkishu enyenak metijinga kishomi* - Direct his cattle to enter his homestead,

*Eniningo iltualan loonkishu Ole Kaelo* - Listen to the tinkling bells of the cattle of Ole Kaelo.

*Eterewa apa ole Kaelo inkishu enyenak linka*, - Ole Kaelo took his cattle out to the pastures,

*Nenyaaka areu pookin ang elulunga* - And brought them back home

*Tenininig iltualan loonkishu enyenal*; - without losing any.

*Niyolou ego iltualan lookishu narukufnye ang* - If you listen to the tinkling bells of his cattle, You will know it is the sound of cattle coming back home

Then the children broke into a quick exciting dance. The boys formed a semicircle while the girls formed a line. They wove into an intricate pattern, hands touching and dropping, their eyes demurely downcast. The boys chanted and sang a refrain while the girls moved with a grace that brought instant applaud from all those present, their tiny steps gliding smoothly like ducks upon water.

Then the boys changed their dance style. They leapt, one by one, into the centre of the circle they had formed and amidst shrieks and chants, jumped high in the air, while whirling, spinning and clicking their heels. The girls responded by singing a melodious praise song. As they sang, they gyrated their hips creating a certain



rippling movement of their abdomens that was seductive and pleasant to watch.

From the children's performance, it was evident that the cherished Nasila traditional dance would stand the test of time. Those in the compound came closer to watch. Several began to clap in time to the music as the tempo of the girls' gyration speeded up.

Taiyo was stupefied. She clapped until her hands hurt. And all along she was lost in thought. The sight of those young school children singing and dancing so joyfully brought back the memories of her high school days. Her heart warmed up when she recalled the numerous occasions when she excelled in music festivals and was awarded and garlanded. Broadcasting stations recognised her talent and encouraged her to take music as a career. She had taken for granted that her parents who on several occasions applauded her when she won trophies on account of her performance, would not have any objection if she pursued the desire of her heart as her future career. An EM Radio Station that had for a long time followed her music development keenly, offered her a chance to discover and explore the worth of her talent by sponsoring her to attend a music extravaganza in Mombasa. Thereafter, she was to attend a short course after which her abilities were to be gauged.

When she broke the news, which she thought would delight her parents, her father was furious. He curtly refused to grant her permission and angrily disallowed any further discussion on the matter, effectively crushing any hopes she may have developed of making music her career. He stated categorically that no daughter of Ole Kaelo would so demean herself and

her family as to perform in public in exchange of monetary gain. It was one thing to perform in a school festival, he reasoned, but to perform to a public gallery was one short step to harlotry. No amount of persuasion would change her father's mind.

She knew without any doubt in her heart that she still loved music. It was in her blood. How she wished she would meet that young man who coached those young children to sing and perform so well.

It was not until three in the afternoon that the carnival mood that had been getting merrier by the hour, exploded into a frenzied celebration. The exultant crowd in the homestead broke into an exciting rhythm of song and dance. Taiyo and Resian, who by then had retreated into the shadow of a spreading *oloponi* tree, from where they watched the colourful movement of the throng of dancers, could not resist the urge to join them. They quickly stepped into the crowd and began to dance. And so did their mother who, tugging their aunt, *Yeiyoobotorr* also joined other dancers who were already heaving their chests forward and backward as they chanted the refrain. Before long, they spotted their three other aunts who too were amongst the crowd of dancers. Uncle Simiren was there too, dancing, his bald head shining like a piece of iron sheet in the afternoon sun. Then they saw their father.

"Look at *Papaai!*, said Taiyo giggling as she pointed out their father amidst a group of dancing elders.

"He doesn't seem to know how to dance," commented Resian jokingly and then added mischievously. "He should ask uncle Simiren to coach him."

They laughed heartily hiding their faces behind other dancers so that they did not come face to face with him lest they embarrassed him.

Just then, a shadowy figure appeared and swiftly walked past them. They simultaneously looked up and saw a man stare piercingly at them. He sneered at them contemptuously then quickly walked past the dancers and disappeared out of the gate. But that was not before they positively recognised him as the young man who accosted them on their first day in Nasila. They were shocked and suddenly, all the happiness and serenity that had pervaded their hearts dissipated. They now felt angry, terrified and isolated even when they were in the midst of the happy throng of revelers that was oblivious of what had befallen them.

It was at five o'clock when Simiren charmingly invited all those present to savour his brother's lavish hospitality. The elders and their wives were ushered into Ole Kaelo's spacious living room while the young men, young women and the children mingled happily in the lush, sprawling well-tended lawn.

Soon, the ever dutiful daughters of Ilmolelian moved to and fro among the chattering throng with trays heavily laden with pieces of meat that the revellers ate ravenously to their fill. When beverages had been distributed all round and everyone had had their share, the young people departed having acknowledged that a true descendant of Ilmolelian had finally arrived and taken his rightful position in the clan.

At seven o'clock in the evening after the lights had been put on, and the traditional *esuguroi* drink had been served in generous measures, tongues loosened and

hearts gladdened. Soon after, the party gathered momentum and voices rose. Within no time, one could hardly be heard over the hubbub of talk and laughter. And as the pleasurable and lively celebration progressed, voices became animated; hands and arms gesticulated vigorously while heads turned more often. Eyes searched out acquaintances within the throng of revelers.

And it was all pomp and gaiety as ivory adorned and bejeweled fingers fluttered; bare shoulders gleamed in the light; multi-coloured bead ornaments glittered upon elaborately bedecked necks; pendulous *ilmiintoni* of all colours dangled loosely down extended ear-lobes; and the bright colours of *lesos*, *kangas*, red *shukas* and multicolored blankets, all turned the Ole Kaelo living room into a kaleidoscope of shifting light and colour.

That evening, Mama Milanoi, the perfect hostess, was a woman with glamour. She was resplendently dressed in purple silk and moved happily from one group to the other talking cheerfully: her laughter ringing out pleasantly. That was her home and that was her evening. She had to make sure that no one present in that living room would leave with any shred of doubt in his or her heart as to who was the *enopeny enkang* of the Ole Kaelo homestead.

Taiyo was watching with amusement as her mother moved from one group of revellers to another when suddenly her eye caught sight of a tall man who was advancing across the room towards her direction. She recognised him and her heart missed a beat. Momentarily, his bright eyes met hers. They were perfectly set on a young and handsome face that was above an equally impressive attire of red *shukas*.

Across the room, maternal instincts directed Mama Milanoi to look at the direction of her daughter, Taiyo, in time to see two events happening simultaneously: a handsome young man striding towards her daughter and her husband sending a seemingly corrosive glance in the direction of his daughter.

One can never tell with Ole Kaelo, Mama Milanoi thought aloud. He can be the most dreadful spoilsport.

Ole Kaelo, however, did not interfere and Mama Milanoi watched from across the room, smiling a little, as the two young people met. How lovely Taiyo looked that night! She thought she was her very image when she was at her age. She watched the two as they exchanged greetings and their smiles as their eyes met. Then he seemed to ask her a question and she, with downcast eyes, gave him a demure smile. For a moment, Mama Milanoi stood there allowing a ridiculous small blade of envy cut through her heart. She let her heart wander and wondered what might have happened had she met a handsome young man such as the one her daughter was speaking with, fallen in love and got married. If she had had such an opportunity, what might her life have been? Maybe she would not have been joined at the hip with a bully like ....

"Do you know that young man your daughter is talking to?" It was her brother-in-law Simiren standing beside her. "She needs to be informed immediately."

"Is he a bad boy?" Mama Milanoi asked urgently fearing for her daughter.

"Far from it," Simiren answered reassuringly. "In fact he is one of the finest and dependable young men that we have in Nasila."

"What's Taiyo to be informed about him, then?" Mama Milanoi asked, puzzled. "Or is he married and has a vicious wife?"

"You are wrong again," Simiren said smiling broadly. "It is simply this, the young man whose name is Joseph Parmuat is a brother to your daughter. Parmuat, his father is of the clan of Ilmolelian of Iloorasha-kineji sub-clan, like ourselves. It is, therefore, not only a great abomination if we were to allow their ignorance to desecrate Nasila cultural values, but their illicit contact would be a taboo that is bound to have untold consequences on us all."

From the corner where she stood watching the noisy events in the living room, Resian saw the meeting of her sister and the lithe young man who she had earlier in the day said was handsome. For some strange reason, she felt alarmed. Was it jealousy consuming her? But why should she be jealous of her sister? No it was not jealousy. It was fear. It was the fear of losing Taiyo. Taiyo was hers. She was her only sister, her only friend and her only ally. She could not dare lose her or share her love with anybody. Never! When she gave thought to the possibility, her young heart nearly stopped beating. For a brief, almost frightening moment, she allowed the negative emotions take the better of her. She swore - *inkilani-e-papaai* - she would hate anyone, who came between her and her sister.

Taiyo saw her sister come and she thought how timely her arrival was, for she had wanted to share that

moment of joy and ecstasy with someone close to her. She smiled dazzlingly as she introduced the two to each other. Resian was rewarded by a twinkle in the young man's eyes as he shook her delicate soft hand. There followed a brief, slightly awkward silence. Around them, the talk and the laughter of the revellers rose and fell like the sound of waves beating upon flooded river banks. Before they had time to say another word, uncle Simiren and their mother stood beside them. It chagrined Taiyo greatly to be told of her clan's relations with the young man she had just met.

Then the time finally came. It was the time to formally receive Parsimei Ole Kaelo and his family back into the Ilmolelian fold and into the larger family of the Nasila people and offer blessings for his family's well being.

To conduct the sacred ceremony was an old man who had been sitting in the company of other two old men at a corner of the living room. He was sagging with age and his face was splodged with a maze of wrinkles. His lips had collapsed on his toothless gums while his scalp showed patches of white skin through his thin grey hair.

Earlier in the evening Taiyo had looked at the old man with a piteous face as he sat with his elbows on the table, holding a joint of mutton in both hands and, trying to gnaw on it. Seeing how much he struggled, obviously with very little success, she had sympathised with him. She had gone into the kitchen fetched a plateful of rice, peas, beans and potatoes and handed it to him. The old

man received the food with gratitude, while the other two elders eyed him with envy.

"Thank you very much, my dear child," the old man had said and then asked curiously. "May I know whose daughter you are, my child?"

"I am Ole Kaelo's daughter," answered Taiyo impatiently not wanting to prolong the discussion with the decrepit old man.

Later, Taiyo was surprised to see that the seemingly helpless and toothless old man, was one of the most revered elders in the community. She saw him get up from where he sat with the other two old men, and leaning heavily on his walking stick, moved to the centre of the living room. His pace was dignified as he walked with his chin up and his mouth set in a hard straight line. That was the time that Taiyo observed his heavily wrinkled face. There was a haughty set to his features. For a moment, Taiyo felt as if he had fastened his eyes on her and that his gaze was like a physically oppressive force upon her. She suddenly felt much in awe of him.

When he began to speak, his voice boomed and its resonance filled the crowded room. He introduced himself as old Ole Musanka, a member of the Ilmakesen clan and of Ilterito age-set. He said Nasila was a Maa house and anybody born of Maa, was entitled to its shelter. Maa culture was the blood and marrow that gave sustenance to the body. And the body was the collective masses of Maa. Ole Kaelo, he said, was a tiny strand of hair that had been blown away from its owner's head by a gust of wind. The same wind that had blown it away had blown the strand back onto its owner's head. He said the head could not refuse to receive back the returning



strand. But the onus was upon the strand to attach and coil itself back onto the rest of the hair on the head and blend with it. If it did not, he warned, it would drop and get trampled upon the ground. He advised Ole Kaelo to re-assimilate himself into his people's culture.

"Those of us who have been listening to the sound of our cattle bells," he said quoting the children's song, "know that the Ole Kaelo's cattle are home-bound. They were bound to come, for the founder said when a rat begins to smell, it returns to its mother's home."

"And home is never far from one who is still alive," one of the elders interjected.

"And speaking of home," Ole Musanka said candidly, "Ole Kaelo must be told, home is not this house however magnificent it may be. Home is Maa, home is Nasila, home is family and home is the children. Kill one of the four pillars, and there is no home to speak about. Sever yourself from the culture of your people and you effectively become *olkirikoi*, a man of no fixed abode, your elegant house notwithstanding. Where are the women of Maa? Embrace the wife and children of Ole Kaelo and bring them back into the Nasila fold. Where are the elders of Ilmolelian? There is your man. Cut him loose from the snares of alien cultures. I am through."

Then he had a parting shot for Taiyo and Resian. "Do not listen to crusaders of an alien culture that is being perpetrated by a certain Entangoroi called *Emakererei*. The wasp advocates that we maintain *intoiye nemengalana* amongst our daughters. *Taba!* May she go down with the setting sun!"

After that voluble curse, the old man blessed the Ole Kaelos. He had a special blessing for the daughter of Ole Kaelo who served him with a special dish that evening. He prophesied that she will be a mother of the next leader of Nasila and Maa.

When Parsimei Ole Kaelo later learnt that the daughter mentioned by the seer was Taiyo, he was elated. But Mama Milanoi was troubled. What she feared for her daughters was turning to be real Taiyo and Resian also felt troubled. They felt squeamish as they stood there, their downcast eyes riveted upon the floor, fear and hopelessness tormenting their young hearts. But who was that person, they wondered, who was referred to as a 'wasp' and who evoked so much virulent hatred amongst the people of Nasila?

## CHAPTER FIVE

Confusion reigned supreme in the forlorn hearts of the two daughters of Ole Kaelo, immediately after the homecoming ceremony. Feelings of anger, panic, helplessness and hopelessness alternated in their minds.

Taiyo was the first to be overcome by lethargic feelings. She sluggishly left the now nearly empty living room for their bedroom. Resian remained behind for a moment helping their mother and other women gather and move utensils to the kitchen and tidy the room.

When she finally got to the bedroom, Resian found it half-lit and quiet. Only one lamp that Taiyo had left for her, still burned. Preparing for bed, she blundered about the darkened bedroom muttering to herself, her movements angrily sharp. Taiyo tensed a little as her sister slid into the bed beside her.

"Taiyo-e-yeiyo," she called huskily, as soon as she settled in bed, a thread of miserable anger discernible in her voice. "Taiyo-e-yeiyo, *doi*."

Taiyo did not answer and kept her breathing normal, feigning sleep. She wondered what her sister's grouse could be at that time, for she always had a grouse about something; if it was not mistreatment by their father, it was her failure to talk to their father to allow them go back to Nakuru to join the Egerton University. But she had no qualms that night about soothing her sister's sour mood.

It was true that she had promised to approach their father about their possibility of attending university, but it was equally true that an appropriate opportunity had not availed itself. She knew the importance her sister

attached to the subject and did not want, therefore, to rush it. She was aware too that, that afternoon, her attention had been drawn away from the narrow confines of her sister's troubles. Yes, even if it was for a brief moment, when she stood with Joseph Parmuat in their living room, she had felt justifiably separated from her sister. But was that natural? After all, they were not children any more, and very soon they would physically be separated. Each would have to fend for herself. Furthermore, that afternoon, when she listened to the children sing and watched them dance. When she later had an opportunity to talk to Joseph Parmuat about music, she became aware of a restlessness that she would have considered totally alien to her nature. It was as if she stood on the threshold of an unknown room, or on a mountain top, excitedly waiting for the sun to rise at dawn to reveal a breathtakingly beautiful scenery which she had not seen before.

Later that night, lying with her back to her sister, Taiyo allowed her mind to float fleetingly. Like a swift, light cherub, it glided into all directions opening, probing, and analysing recent events in their lives that had been most tormenting. Lying on her back beside her sister, Resian felt Taiyo's warmth and heard her steady breathing, as she stared grimly into the darkness, feeling unhappy, afraid and utterly alone. She too was troubled.

It was a long night for the two girls. The chirp of the insects, the croaking of the frogs and the mournful calls of the night birds, echoed through the dark house as they lay on their bed, each one of them awake but deep in thought.

"Away with the barbaric culture," cried Taiyo bitterly, "Away with the archaic way of life."

She wept until she had no more tears in her eyes, then she sobbed dryly. Was there no guarantee of justice in life? How could she come across the man who she thought would have filled the void in her heart so fittingly and instantly lose him to the ancient doubtful ancestral links? She was angry with everybody in Nasila, but more so with her uncle Simiren who she infuriatingly blamed for ruining her relationship with Joseph Parmuat.

The mere mention of Joseph Parmuat's name evoked delightful feelings that warmly excited her heart. She wondered whether he too could be sleepless at that very hour thinking of her. Did he know before that they were of the same clan and, therefore, forbidden to have any heterosexual links whatsoever? She thought the gross unfairness of the outdated culture was definitely a searing torment to her and to all others who were of progressive minds.

But not all was lost though, she reasoned, a flicker of hope lighting up her sorrowful heart. Within the few minutes they had stood there in the living room, Joseph Parmuat had made two promises: to visit her in their home the following day and if her parents agreed, he would coach her in the traditional music and dance she was so much interested in. And her mother who was then present had said, to her delight, that the young man was welcome to visit them the following day. But for the other request about coaching, her mother had categorically refused to be drawn into it, saying that it was Taiyo's father's territory.

Should Joseph Parmuat fulfill those two promises, she would be utterly satisfied. But all depended on her father.

Resian's situation grew worse. The moment she got beneath the blankets, tears began to run freely. Whether their cause lay in the inescapable loneliness that seemed to stalk her like a lost young leopard, or in the intolerable confusion caused by the ever present insecurity, she could not tell. All she knew was that her world was spinning. Even her bed seemed to be moving.

The pain in her heart was like the bruising aftermath of a blow. She closed her eyes, took a deep breath, then she exhaled slowly, forcing herself to face the shattering situation that threatened to destroy the world she had known until then. The threat of circumcision was becoming real. Old Ole Musanka had said they should undergo the rite.

She shuddered when she recalled the day the *enkamuratani* visited their house in the company of other village women. She was a thin old woman of about sixty years and of average height whose back and shoulders still stood straight. Unlike the other women who were dressed in traditional *shukas*, she wore a tee shirt that was much too large for her frame, and a heavy, shapeless skirt-like garment. Her gnarled, calloused feet were bare. When Taiyo, burning with curiosity, had asked her to show them her tools of trade, she had sprung up with the agility of a young woman and dashed swiftly to where she had left her bag on the table. After rummaging about among her things, she had fished out a dirty oilskin that she held aloft while she triumphantly, like one who had won a match, grinned and stared at them.

The most startling thing about her, was her eyes. They were clear, bright and inquisitive. They were, obviously, windows of an exceedingly alert mind. What sent shivers right deep into the pit of Resian's stomach, creating a permanent traumatic image in her mind, was the *olmurunya*. That was a bladelike tool shaped like a smoothing plane blade, that she unwrapped out of the oilskin. The *enkamuratani* brandished it aloft with her gnarled, withered claw-like hand. She demonstrated to them the dexterity of her fingers and showed the way she went about her profession of transforming young girls into young women through the cut of *olmurunya*.

Resian did not find it funny. When she thought of the barbaric operation, she felt scared and inched closer to Taiyo who lay there beside her. She thought of the aggressive young man who grinned impudently at them and kept reminding them that they were *intoiye nemengalana*. Would he one day grab them and drag them to *enkamuratani* and let her *olmurunya* transform them into decent women of Nasila? God forbid!

She declared that those withered claw-like hands would only touch her over her dead body! But the only escape route available to them was via her sister who lay there sleeping and breathing quietly. Yet, she had failed her. She was angry with Taiyo for she had trusted her to persuade their father to allow them return to Nakuru and enroll at the Egerton University, but she had not even tried. Nor had she seemed to listen to her fears on the possibility of being abducted and sent to *enkamuratani*.

She would press her sister even more. And with that promise, dawn came, and she rubbed her irritated

swollen red eyes, as the sunlight flooded in and lit all the dark and hidden corners of their bedroom. She stirred and struggled out of bed, grimly set about to begin another day.

Taiyo also stirred. She did not uncover her head, though. She was glad to have a few more minutes under the blankets to collect her thoughts and feelings before facing another day. For after an all but sleepless night in the dark hours, her emotions had alternated alarmingly between an overwhelming and indisputable reckless elation when she thought of Joseph Parmuat and anger, panic and bitterness borne of the disturbing recent events.

It was morning also in the master bedroom and Parsimei was waking up. He lazily turned in his bed, opened his eyes, and yawned: a mighty master's yawn. For a moment, he listened to the birds that chirruped away in the trees that surrounded his house and his heart gladdened. He sent a furtive glance at his wife who was still asleep beside him and smiled at her childlike face as she lay there peacefully. Oh, did he not have a wife there! He was elated. The previous day, she had played her role of hostess admirably. And that had pleased him greatly. He nudged her lightly and she turned and opened her eyes.

"Are you awake, Lanoo-ai?" he called her affectionately. "It's wake-up time, my dear."

"Already?" she asked and yawned sleepily. "That was the shortest night I have known in my life."

"It was because we were all very tired," he said listlessly. "Hosting that ceremony greatly sapped our energy."



"And what an exhausting day!" Mama Milanoi exclaimed yawning and stretching. "I am glad it is now behind us."

"You know, as much as I do, the demands of the culture we have now been ushered into," he said.

Mama Milanoi's mind became alert. Her eyes focused. She opened them wide and paid attention to what her husband was saying. She knew his words could completely change their lives and the lives of their two daughters.

In all those years they had lived in Nakuru and as they raised the girls to maturity, she had known that her husband was not a strict adherent of the Nasila traditions. He had insisted upon the outward observance of those traditions that he considered to be the hallmark of decency. But as he had said, she knew as much as he did the demands of the culture into which they had plunged themselves.

Born and brought up in that culture, she knew the extent of its tentacles. She was aware that as a family, they were already in breach of the tradition for keeping at home their grown up girls as *intoiye nemengalana* instead of transforming them from little girls into young women. That was what happened to her and that was what culture had expected her to do; to prepare her daughters, physically and mentally, to face the challenges of responsible womanhood and motherhood. But there was a dilemma: force the girls to undergo the rituals and lose their faith, love and confidence, or refuse to yield to the tradition and become a pariah in the Ilmolelian clan and Nasila society. It was like the legendary unenviable dilemma that faced a man called

Ole Nkipida who was chased into a deserted hut by a lion, just to be confronted by a hungry python at the door.

"Yes, I know how much is demanded of us, my husband," she said demurely, "but we have to think of the interest of our family first."

"What do you mean?" he asked, suddenly sitting up. "I hope you don't imply that our culture comes second. Do you?"

"Not really, my husband," she said ruefully, beating a hasty retreat. "Our culture is everything and it rules our lives."

"Good," he said authoritatively. "Now listen, you must immediately start counseling the girls to understand their roles as potential wives of the men of Nasila. Prepare them to appreciate and accept their future responsibilities as mothers and home builders."

"I'll do that, my husband," she said quietly.

"One other thing," he said evenly. "I'll ask Simiren to request that young teacher called Parmuat, who is of our clan and therefore a brother to the girls, to find time to teach them a few home truths. After that we shall call *enkamuratani* to play her part before we give them away."

Those were the words, whose utterance she so dreaded. And once uttered, she knew, the words instantly became an inviolable edict. Now that he had spoken, the pain was already harrowing and the torment in her heart unbearable. She was torn between her love for her daughters and her dutiful role of a faithful and obedient wife of Ole Kaelo. But in her culture there was no room for dissent, especially if the subject was in conformity

with the culture. Who would side with her if she were to oppose the cultural rituals?

Her only ally would be the woman the elders of Nasila contemptuously called *entangoroi* or the wasp. Those who honoured her called her *Emakererei*, for she was said to have attended Makerere University in Uganda, where she obtained her degree in Veterinary Science. Mama Milanoi knew her well. Her actual names were Minik ene Nkoitoi. Outside Nasila, she was respected and honoured. At thirty, she was already managing an expansive government sheep ranch reputed to hold hundreds of thousands of sheep, about one hundred kilometers away from Nasila. Under her were hundreds of employees who worked at the ranch.

In Nasila, however, she was regarded as the devil incarnate. She was hated and reviled for criticizing and campaigning vigorously against the traditions that she said abused the rights of the girl child namely girls' circumcision and early marriages. And that had put her in direct collision with the people of Nasila. If she aligned herself with a person who Nasila regarded as having such an obnoxious reputation, where would her marriage stand?

As she lay beside her husband, she gave thought to what they stood for as a family. What did they believe in? Were they traditionalists or were they modernists? In embracing the retrogressive cultural values, were they now progressing or regressing? Although Ole Kaelo had always been arrogant and impolite in his own way, she had discovered right from the time he married her that he had his own unique chivalrous qualities that neutralized his hubris.

However, ever since they returned to Nasila, a new Ole Kaelo was emerging. He was becoming a Nasilian very fast. And in the Nasilian society, women had no say. It was a patriarchal society where the *Emakererei* and her ilk were fighting to find relevance with little success. But what about herself, what was her position? Did she not support female genital mutilation that was prevalent among her people in Nasila? When she was a girl, girls' circumcision was relevant and cherished it. It was a rite of passage. In her days, there was hardly a girl who got pregnant before marriage. At the same time no girl got married before circumcision. And woe unto her who got pregnant before getting circumcised! She was derogatorily referred to as *entaapai*, and she and her family were always held in derision. She was often circumcised at the time of giving birth and married off to the oldest man in the village. Perhaps that was a deterrent to keep girls chaste in mind and body, she thought to herself.

She wondered what her daughters knew about F.G.M. She had never discussed the subject with them and she blamed herself for her failure to do so. But to be fair to herself she reasoned that before the retrenchment of her husband which caused their return to Nasila, F.G.M was a non-issue in her family. She had regarded the practice as an archaic rite that had been discarded and forgotten. But there it was now, rearing its ugly head and threatening to wreak havoc in the young innocent lives of her daughters.

She would have to broach the subject somehow and get to know what the girls had learned from their peers and other sources. One thing she was aware of was

that her daughters did not expect their parents to lead them back through a dark alley, to a retrogressive world of excruciating pain and turmoil. The last thing she would have wished on her daughters was mental torture. Although she knew how difficult it was to change her husband's mind, the least she could do for them was to prepare a soft landing against what appeared to be an inevitable eventuality.

When they finally got up and went to the living room, Mama Milanoi and her husband found a clean, tidy and well arranged room, far from its appearance the night before. Heavy velvet curtains fluttered lazily in the still fresh air of the morning. Taiyo was busy ferrying breakfast from the kitchen to the table, while Resian, fragile and pretty in her velvet and lace morning gown, slumped in an armchair, her nose as always buried in a book; reading.

"Look at that daughter of yours," Ole Kaelo told his wife irritably. "While Taiyo works herself to the bone, she lazes about like an over-fed lizard in the hot afternoon sun."

"Resian-ai," her mother called fondly. "Would you please ... "

"Would you sit up straight like a respectable girl," her father cut in sharply. "Look at the way you slouch and slump in that chair like a good for nothing lout! I'll not be surprised if you soon become a hunchback!"

"Do sit up straight child," her mother added, with a sudden sharp petulance. "Don't get your father angry early in the morning."

Resian scowled her displeasure for being berated but nevertheless closed her book and scurried back to their bedroom.

Later in the day, Ole Kaelo took his wife and daughters to Nasila stores, to show them their brand new business. They were impressed and instantly liked it. The shop had opened for business two days earlier and it was already full of customers.

It was splendid, large and well stocked. The decor was discreetly and fashionably done while taking into consideration the kind of customers that were expected. The mahogany and brass counters and display cases gleamed. The display boards on the walls carried all kinds of tools, accessories and fittings. The tiled floor was polished to a shiny sheen while beveled and etched glass and mirrors nailed on strategic pillars and walls reflected every image and glint of light with sparkling clarity. On a large float in the middle of the shop, a range of dairy equipment was exhibited with masterly craftsmanship; their superior quality complementing perfectly the surroundings that had been created to display them. There were milk pails, milk cans, buckets, and cream separators. Beside them were animal feeds and licks of all brands. Also displayed were herbicides, insecticides, acaricides and fungicides.

Resian, eyeing the splendor with a rather jaundiced eye, nudged her sister and whispered, "All these must have cost *Papaai* a fortune. Need he have done all this? I hope when you finally come round to asking him to send us to the university, he will not say he has spent all his money on this business premises and the stock."

"Surely, Resian, can't you see?" Taiyo whispered back exasperated. "It is important that the shop displays a certain measure of opulence. The customers that *Papaai* wants to attract would not want to shop in a place that resembles a junkyard. Do you remember the shop that *Papaai* took us to in Nakuru when he bought us those dresses and shoes? You loved the grandeur and splendor of the place, did you not? It made you feel special. Well, that is what *Papaai* is trying to create here. Should he say he has spent all his money here, I will understand. And I dare say, it is well spent!"

Resian looked around her. Satisfying customers, or creating a suitable ambience to attract future profits were, to her, much less important than her burning ambition to go to the university. She cast her eyes to the ceiling and then turned and once more looked around her and said nonchalantly. "Well, if you say so, big sister."

In one of the stores, they came across, a tall muscular man of about forty-five, bald-headed and amiable, who Ole Kaelo introduced as the manager. His name was Maison. Ole Kaelo left them in his hands and disappeared into yet another store. Maison, conducted them around, introducing them, with unconcealed pride and pleasure to his staff, who reverently bowed on learning that, that was the family of Ole Kaelo.

At last, Maison led them into a neat office where a young, beautiful secretary ushered them into a small, comfortable office. One wall was book-lined and another entirely taken up by a large metal filing cabinet, its drawers precisely labelled and lettered. The papers on the large oval desk were tidily stacked, as were the magazines on a nearby table upon which stood a framed

family colour photograph; taken when the girls were still young. Everything was neat and well-ordered. Without much explanation the girls knew it was their father's office.

It was while they were in Ole Kaelo's comfortable office that Mama Milanoi revealed their father's consent to Taiyo's request to be coached by Joseph Parmuat. Taiyo was enthralled.

That evening when they got home, Joseph Parmuat visited them. The moment he appeared at their door, the three Ole Kaelo women instantly liked him: his broad smile, his hearty chuckle, his uproarious rich pearls of laughter and his unbridled sense of humor were some of his most endearing qualities.

When Joseph Parmuat entered their house, she stood back and watched as he was immediately drawn into the small intimate circle of their mother's attention. The girls had always known that their mother had an adroitness that made any man who approached her a part of that charming world of hers. Seeing how their mother monopolized him Taiyo could not, for a moment, suppress a surge of envy. Of course she knew the envy was misplaced, for only recently, since the advent of her own womanhood, had she begun to understand her mother and herself. And even Resian, the ever gloomy pessimist of the Kaelo family, was laughing and talking excitedly beside their mother, looking up teasingly into the face of their newly acquired brother. It seemed as if the three Ole Kaelo women had hatched a female conspiracy, of which Joseph Parmuat seemed to be enjoying tremendously, as any man would.



They were about to settle in their seats when they heard a knock. A man they had not seen before entered and greeted them confidently. Without waiting to be invited, he proceeded to find a seat. But that was not queer for it was in line with the Nasilian hospitality where every house was open to all sojourners. The girls looked askance at the man they considered an intruder. He was a quiet, well-built man of thirty or so. He wore a brown pair of trousers and a blue shirt that was not particularly neat. Taiyo thought there was something impersonal about his offhand attitude.

Until he told them what he wanted, or what he was up to, Mama Milanoi and her daughters had to contend with accommodating two incompatible guests in their living room.

## CHAPTER SIX

Whether it was by coincidence or by prior arrangement, the girls could not tell. But as soon as they had finished serving supper to Joseph Parmuat and the stranger, their father came into the house through the back door. He greeted the two men with little enthusiasm and proceeded to the living room. As was their habit, when their father came into the living room, the girls quickly gathered the dishes, tidied the table and instantly disappeared into the kitchen.

No sooner had they gone into the kitchen than their mother summoned them; their father wanted to speak to them. The girls immediately looked up at their mother enquiringly, apprehensive of the rare summon. Their father usually preferred talking to them through their mother. With trepidation, they trooped back to the living room, steeling themselves to hear whatever he had to say.

The father sat in his armchair facing the fireplace while their mother sat at the end of the sofa. The girls went to sit next to their mother. Joseph Parmuat sat in an armchair not very far from their father and the stranger had not left the dining table where he sat alone.

When he began to speak, their father did not address them directly. Instead he addressed Joseph Parmuat. The girls knew their father well. He liked to address issues and expound on them in order to impress points upon his audience. And he was always impressive when he made his speeches. When they lived in Nakuru, he often took them to official functions or special

occasions, and they loved to listen to his pompous speeches.

So after meandering and digressing, in the process telling Parmuat of the difficulties he encountered going to school and how he began to plan for his own future very early in his life, he finally came to the point.

"These children may not know," he said suddenly turning his attention to his daughters. "They may not know and I want to tell them now, that you are their brother. You are no lesser a brother to them than their own mother's son would have been. You are my son as much as their mother's son would have been my son. Perhaps their mother has already told them, and if she has not, she will tell them tonight that Parmuat's family and Kaelo's family are one. We are all of Ilmolelian clan, of Iloorasha-kineji sub-clan."

He told Joseph Parmuat that he had brought up his daughters well. They were well behaved and that he was proud of them. However, having been away from Nasila all their lives, they had missed out on the basic cultural values that harmonised the lives of Nasila people.

In addition to what they learnt at school or in addition to what they were yet to learn through books, he stressed, it was imperative that they learned habits, traditions and their culture that would make their parents and the Nasila people proud of them. He added that, although he considered the girls intelligent, there was need for them to develop into responsible mature women of the future. That was necessary, he said emphatically, because there was nothing better that parents looked forward to, than to see their children settle in their own homes. He had hastened to add that although, at their

age they might consider what he was saying as ridiculously irrelevant, he knew by experience that there was nothing better than beginning to plan for one's future early. He warned the girls that they might find a few cultural demands obnoxious but they would have to be stoic and accept them with the understanding that it was those not-too-pleasant traditions that nurtured and bound their people together. "And those families that had refused to rejoin their people," he added thoughtfully, "had been blasted into smithereens by alien cultures."

"It should never happen to us," he concluded dramatically.

When their mother spoke to them later, emphasising what their father had told them, they wore blank faces and deliberately concealed their reaction. She therefore, did not realise that they held extremely divergent views.

That was the most exciting news that Taiyo had received ever since they came to Nasila. She was exultant. Although their father never for once mentioned that Joseph Parmuat was to coach her in traditional music and dance, the fact that he had allowed them to interact with him filled her heart with joy. She could hardly hide her elation. Even the repeated assertion that Joseph Parmuat was their brother by virtue of their cultural links, failed to daunt her spirit. Was she simply infatuated with him? If she was, she hoped the feeling would soon simmer down. What pleased her most, however, was that she now had a confidant whom she could ask some of those embarrassing questions that she could not dare ask her mother or anybody else.

It was, however, different for Resian. Deep right into her heart she was seething with ire. It irked her terribly to have had to listen to their father as he prepared them for a journey that she thought was to lead them back to the stone-age era. She scornfully dismissed the cultural coaching that Joseph Parmuat was to undertake as worthless. She likened the whole saga to a grown-up person whose mind degenerated into an idiot and had to content with playing with mud. It was utter foolishness!

"It may not be as bad as you imagine, little sister," Taiyo said, trying to mollify her angry sister, "maybe by the time brother Parmuat is through with us, we shall be the wiser."

"Wiser indeed!" jeered Resian, "Yes, by the time he shall be through with us, we shall have been taught a great lesson in stoicism. We won't blink or wince even as *enkamuratani* mutilates our sexuality into smithereens!"

After they got to their bedroom, Taiyo poured tea from a flask that she carried from the kitchen, into two cups. She handed one to Resian who took it without raising her eyes. Taiyo was already aware of the tension between them. In all their lives, only twice had they had a serious quarrel. On each of those occasions, Taiyo recalled, the hurt had been exacerbated by the breaking of a bond that had always been so firm as to be unquestioned. But the two had a resilient character and no sooner had they quarreled than they were reconciled. The problem that time round was that they did not see things in the same light. Whereas she was also happy that they now had Joseph Parmuat as a brother who they would interact with and discuss some of the perplexing

questions that bedevilled them, Resian suspected that Taiyo would use her newly acquired acquaintance with him to marginalize her. And she was not ready to be abandoned by her sister.

Resian lay, much later in the night, fully clothed except for shoes and a jacket, listening to her sister's slight and delicate snores next to her underneath the blankets. She turned and took her by the shoulder and rocked her slightly.

"Taiyo-e-yeiyo, are you asleep?"

She heard Taiyo move and turn to face her. Then she dimly saw her as she lifted herself upon her elbow to level herself with her. And on her part, Resian leaned forward, speaking very softly. "I'm disturbed," she said. "I'm beginning to think it is disadvantageous being a woman in this society.

"For heaven's sake, Resian," exclaimed Taiyo, making a small sound, affectionate and exasperate. "Is it worth staying awake the whole night thinking of such mundane things?"

"Call them mundane," Resian pursued relentlessly. "But I keep wondering what would have happened had we been sons. Do you think father would have looked for a clan sister to coach us and take us through the dim cultural paths of Nasila?"

"Resian, honestly, I don't know any better than you. But, your guess is just as good as mine. Most likely we would have been let loose to romp about in the village and gather our experiences as we go along."

"Exactly!" Resian said bitterly. "Yes, because we are females, a male in the name of a clan brother is sought to come along and teach us the 'a b c d' of a good

Nasilian wife so that we shall please our future husbands. No, I refuse to be taught. I will either be taught at the university what is universally beneficial to all mankind or be taught nothing!"

The following afternoon, when Joseph Parmuat came to visit them, the mysterious stranger also came. He wore a shabby, black-woolen-suit and a clean but wrinkled white shirt. He had had a haircut and his previously bushy moustache had been trimmed. Even his muddy shoes had been cleaned and polished to a bright black sheen. He came carrying on his shoulder, a hindquarter of mutton wrapped up in a khaki brown paper. Mama Milanoi received the meat gratefully. That had become the man's habit. He would disappear only to saunter in like the owner of the house two days later, bringing with him either a bag of flour, a bag of sugar, a quarter of mutton or a large bundle of lamb chops. He would hand over his gifts to Mama Milanoi quietly and because the house was always frequented by visitors, any additional food stuff was always welcome.

Later the girls came to know that the stranger was known as Olarinkoi. Whether their father had known him before, they could not tell. What they came to acknowledge was that their father had accepted the strange man's presence in his home graciously. And soon the man made his stay useful and his services invaluable and indispensable. He would often come very early in the morning to tend the flower gardens and slash the grass on the lawn. By the time they gathered for breakfast, he would be sitting silently ready to eat with them as if he was a member of the family. And although the girls hardly ever spoke to him, they had, nevertheless,

become completely accustomed to his presence. They strangely counted him as one of them when preparing meals.

On his part, Olarinkoi acted almost indifferently towards Taiyo and Resian. He directed his attention to their parents. What perplexed the girls was his ever silent presence in their house. He was always there, sitting quietly and staring unblinkingly, like a leopard would while stealthily stalking an antelope.

Joseph Parmuat did not like Olarinkoi. The two hardly acknowledged one another's presence and most of the time they did not even exchange greetings. But when Joseph Parmuat discussed a subject with the girls, Olarinkoi would listen keenly to what he was telling them. Once in a while he would butt in and give his unsolicited advice or his own version of a story.

The following day at about eleven o'clock in the morning, Taiyo, Resian and their mother were in the kitchen peeling potatoes in preparation for lunch. They were joined by the girls' aunt, *yeiyo-botorr*, who, after greetings, also took a knife and began peeling the potatoes with them. Even as they peeled potatoes, each girl had her own other assignment that went along simultaneously with what they were doing. Taiyo was cooking a meat stew. She took great care in its preparation, ensuring that all the necessary ingredients were in proper proportions. The heat was also regulated so that the meat fried gently in its own fat until it was deliciously golden brown, before adding chopped coriander, tomatoes, onions and a little bit of curry powder to make a tasty rich thick gravy. Any time she



added a little water, she threw in a pinch of salt and tasted the gravy to make sure that the taste was just right.

Resian had already cooked the rice that was now simmering slowly at one corner of the kitchen. She had already placed live charcoal on the lid of the *sufuria* so that the heat emanated from the top as well as from its bottom.

"What a diligent pair of workers you have here my *enkaini*," said *yeiyo-botorr* genuine praise of the girls, "and they are wonderful cooks too!"

"Whom would they take after if they are not good workers?" Mama Milanoi asked equally cheerful. "Their father is a diligent worker and so am I. When they eventually get married and are accused of laziness, or when their husbands complain that they can't prepare tasty meals, they will not blame us."

"No one can accuse us of laziness," cut in Taiyo happily, her spirit buoyed up by her aunt's praise. "And *yeiyo* here has been our ever resourceful teacher." "That is as it should be," *yeiyo-botorr* enthused, "We were taught by our mothers who were also taught by their mothers, and so on and on back to the time we ascended the Kerio Valley."

"I have no problem acquiring more knowledge, skills and even specialised experience," Resian said in a defiant tone that had Taiyo squirming with apprehension.

I have no problem at all and I thank *yeiyo* for her untiring effort in teaching us. But my question is: do we go to all these lengths to please some lazy bunch of busybodies who do nothing but lounge about in the living rooms, yawning and stretching, waiting for tasty food to land on the table before them? No, I refuse to be

taught to solely please male counterparts. They can also cook, and they can, and should also learn to please us females. Period!"

*Yeiyo-botorr* was shocked. Mama Milanoi was dumbfounded and was at a complete loss for words. Taiyo stared at her sister in consternation. "Resian-*siake*-!" pleaded Taiyo "Please give respect to *yeiyo botorr* and stop your uncalled for tirade.

"But surely, Resian," her mother said, regaining her composure. "Have you no respect for your father who is also male? What have gotten into you, child, lately?" Turning to the girl's aunt, she added "*enkaini*, *Yeiyo-botorr*, this child was not like this before we came here. I don't know what has gone wrong."

"Nothing is wrong with me," Resian retorted furiously. And pointing at the living room with her finger, she fiercely charged, "I have no quarrel with my father for whom, I have tremendous respect. It is the likes of Olarinkoi I am mad at, and all those other males who come here ordering us to do that or the other for them, simply because they are males. When women visit us, they give us the leeway to respond to their requests. But as we burn our fingers here, Mr. Olarinkoi is dozing off comfortably in our living room waiting for his lunch and possibly a little angry and impatient with us for delaying it."

"It is enough," cried *yeiyo-botorr* viciously. She instantly abandoned the peeling of potatoes and threw the knife into the pail that held the peeled potatoes. Supporting herself by holding onto a nearby wall, she painfully lifted her large, heavy body. "My *enkaini*, I agree with you that something is wrong with our child.

And I think I know what ails her. Come along with me and I will tell you what I think ails her."

"I'm not sick ... " Resian was saying when she was cut short by Taiyo.

"Even if you are not sick, you cannot argue with *yeiyo-botorr*," Taiyo told her sternly as soon as they were out of earshot of their mother and *yeiyo-botorr*, "there are things one has to learn on their own. One of them is that you cannot antagonise the older people by arguing with them, however, untenable their argument may be. That goes without saying, my dear little sister."

"I know what's wrong with your daughter," *yeiyo-botorr* told Mama Milanoi harshly as they walked out of the house, "Your daughter has *Olkuenyi*. You know what that is! It's a bad spirit. And it is in her blood. You can now see the danger of keeping *intoiye nemengalana* at home. It's not healthy and it is neither in the interest of the children nor their parents. To hide a boil that is under the armpit is unwise, for sooner or later it will burst and emit a foul smell. It is time to circumcise your daughters and get rid of *Olkuenyi*. It is that simple." And she was gone.

Resian's outburst troubled both her mother and her sister Taiyo. Mama Milanoi considered what her *enkaini* had said about the bad spirit called *olkuenyi* and she shuddered with apprehension. She knew what *olkuenyi* was.

In Nakuru, where she had been, the town people would have called it *kisirani*. It was always regarded as an ominous harbinger to a terrible thing. It was said to be contagious and, therefore, one with *olkuenyi* was shunned like the plague. The myth that by spilling blood

through circumcision the ill-spirit could be purged away, once and for all, was not new to her.

When she was young, a lot of diseases and especially those which could not be properly diagnosed were managed through a blood-letting treatment known as *angam*. In that practice, several nicks were made on the ailing sections of the body and the blood sucked out. She wondered whether she should tell her husband about her enkaini's diagnosis of their daughter's ailment. She would not be surprised if he summoned the enkamuratani the first thing the following morning with her *olmurunya*, and have the job done forthwith. If that happened, she knew it would terribly hurt the girls.

Although Taiyo did not like Olarinkoi, she did not hate him. She just did not care a hoot whether he ate or slept hungry. She wondered why her sister Resian hated him with such passion. And thinking of the man, she wondered who he was. Their father did not indicate that he was of their clan Ilmolelian, the way he told them about Joseph Parmuat. Who was he then? What was his background? And what was he doing in their home day in day out? Although he did odd jobs in their compound, Taiyo knew he was not an employee, and in fact when their father wanted a thorough job done at the compound, he always hired a man to do it. And obviously the occasional foodstuff that he brought into the house could not be the reason that made their father tolerate him. She knew their father was well-off and did not depend on the miserly bundles of food that Olarinkoi occasionally brought into their house. What was his mission in their home?

When Joseph Parmuat came in that afternoon, Taiyo enquired about Olarinkoi. In his usual jocular manner, he first roared with hearty laughter. Then he asked her whether any of them had fallen in love with him. Taiyo joined in the cheerful laughter interjecting to say it was much easier to fall in love with a creepy cold serpent than to fall for the likes of Olarinkoi, Joseph Parmuat said he knew two people who went by the name of Olarinkoi. He knew the person who sat in their sitting room and knew of another who went by that name who lived more than one hundred and fifty years before. "Which of the two do you want to know about?" he asked in his usually humorous way. "Don't ask me if they are related, for I have no idea."

"Tell me about the two," said Taiyo cheerfully, curiosity taking the better of her. "Hope the one who lived more than one hundred and fifty years ago did not have a tail and lived on trees like a monkey!"

"To the contrary, my dear sister," Joseph Parmuat chuckled, tickled by Taiyo's *comic* description. "The older fellow *is* more defined than the one we know physically."

"Tell me about the one we know physically," she said excitedly, her anticipation of an exciting story firing her curiosity, "and then you may tell me about the legendary one later."

He told her the much he knew about Olarinkoi, The man was a mystery. Nobody seemed to know him well. A man who thought he knew something about him said he was of Ilukumae clan and came from a place called Polonga, about two hundred kilometers from Nasila. Another who thought he knew him better

disagreed. He said he thought the man belonged to the Itaro-sero clan and that he came from a place called Enooloitikoishi, not far from where that woman who Nasila people demonized and called her a wasp, managed a government sheep ranch. A third person said he knew him very well and that he was of Ilmolelian clan but an Olkirikoi, a good for nothing wanderer who survived by ingratiating himself with the rich, offering to do odd jobs for them. A fourth person dismissed all the rest and described Olarinkoi as a useless sycophant who changed allegiance to clans as often as a chameleon changed its colour.

"Who do you think Olarinkoi, is then?" he asked Taiyo in jest amidst uproarious laughter. "Tell me, girl who is he?"

"He is the typical Nasilian gentleman," she said shaking with laughter. "Yes, a little of him is sprinkled upon the lives of all of you, Nasilian men!"

"I hope you are joking," he said seriously. "It's tragic if that is the way you judge all of us." "More or less," she answered jokingly. "But that is beside the point. Now that we have failed to place the present day Olarinkoi, tell me about the old Olarinkoi. Maybe by understanding the old we may come to know the present and possibly know the one who will emerge in future."

Taiyo sat quietly as Joseph Parmuat narrated the moving story of the legendary Olarinkoi.

The saga of the extremely brutal and despotic rule of Olarinkoi and his tyrannical warriors that were known as *Ilarinkon*, remained permanently etched in the collective psyche of the Maa people. Although it was

estimated that the infamous invasion took place between a hundred and fifty and two hundred years earlier, the Maa people were brutalized in such bestial cruelty that, after so many years men still burned with fury while women cried with shame when they were reminded of what befell their ancestors. And to ensure that the tragic history of that dark period was never forgotten, the oppression that was visited upon them by the tyrants was always vividly described, so that the struggle to free themselves from the yoke of that tyranny became a painful reminder of what can become of a people caught napping by the enemy.

The despot was said to have belonged to a splinter group of the Maa people that were left down Kerio Valley, when the ladder that they had used to scale the edge of the precipice broke halfway, sending those who had not ascended hurtling down the cliffs. It was not known when the Ilarinkon re-ascended, but it was thought to be not less than fifty years after the first ascension. They were said to have been so frustrated by their inability to ascend that when they finally managed to climb over the precipice, they were so stressed that they looked for anyone upon whom to redirect their frustration. By that time, their language had slightly changed and their warriors were heavily built on account of the daily exercises their bodies were subjected to as they built a new ladder, and scaled the edges of the cliff to put the ladder in place.

The spies that Olarinkoi had dispatched to gather intelligence on the Maa people immediately reported back to him that they found expansive land, lush with green grass, and luscious fruits of all kinds that hung

down fruit-trees ready to be plucked. Wild animals roamed the lands freely and thousands upon thousands of Maa people's cattle and sheep grazed lazily upon green pastures that stretched to the horizon. But of the people, only old men, women and children were living in the villages. No single moran was sighted.

They learnt that the Maa *morans* had gone to an *enjore* - a major raid that *morans* undertook from time to time, as an escapade meant to keep themselves fit for battle and at the same time to intimidate the neighbours. In such raids, they did not spare any young men they came across and they brought in all the cattle they could drive back.

It was after getting the report, that Olarinkoi and his men struck. Although they were met with little resistance, that did not deter them from visiting their frustration upon the people of Maa. The raid was executed with such lightning speed that within days they had subdued the entire countryside and caused such mayhem and destruction as had never been witnessed by the people of Maa; it was simply a blood bath. They slaughtered any male in their path, brutalised women and children and burnt down homesteads. Remnants of the male survivors were so intimidated that, nudged by survival instincts, they had to quickly lay strategies in order to save their lives. They discarded their male clothings and ornaments and put on women's wrap-ons called Olokesena and hang on their extended earlobes, ornamental coils of copper wire known as *isurutia* that were normally worn by old women or by circumcision initiates who were recuperating. That they did to



disguise their identities and pass as women instead of men in order to escape death.

Luck was not with the Maa warriors. For once, their *Oloiboni* who had always prophesied their success during the *enjore*, had guessed wrongly this time round. They were shocked to find the people they had gone to raid armed to the teeth waiting for them in the hills away from their villages. They engaged them in a fierce battle and many of the Maa warriors were killed and others injured. And those who returned did not drive back any cattle.

The Maa *morans* upon returning home were immediately confronted by the hostile, battle-hardened warriors of Olarinkoi. As they descended Iltepes hills, they could see files after files of the tall muscular Ilarinkon *morans*, resplendent in their red ochre-soaked *shukas*. Tall monkey-skin headgear swayed on their heads as they walked. They carried their heavy decorated shields, while their long spears gleamed in the shimmering hot afternoon sun. The jingles fastened onto their thighs made a terrifying clanging sound. This heightened the fearful foreboding that hung in the air.

It was obvious that the Maa warriors were disadvantaged. They had been demoralised by the recent defeat and weakened by the long trek back home. Some of them were nursing injuries, while all of them were hungry and thirsty. From where they were, they could see that they were terribly outnumbered by their adversaries. So when the two sides finally locked horns, the battle was brutal, brief and conclusive. The Maa

warriors were predictably defeated and resoundingly vanquished.

Buoyed up by their victory, the Ilarinkon warriors rounded up all the Maa people and assembled them on a hill so as to intimidate them and thereafter introduce them to their new ruler. It was then that Olarinkoi suddenly emerged from a nearby thicket. If his dramatic appearance was meant to shock the Maa people, then it more than did it! They were not only shocked by the towering giant that sauntered swaggeringly towards them, but his terrifying appearance sent shivers right down into their hearts.

The man was more of a monster than human. He was about eight feet tall and his entire body, save for the face, was hairy. The hair on his head, that was known as *oltaika*, that shimmered with oily red ochre, was thick and long and flowed flawlessly down to his shoulders. And his frame was so thick that three men standing behind him could not be visible to a person standing in front of him.

He demonstrated the strength of his large hands by grabbing two Maa men who stood shivering before him, and holding them by their necks, he forcibly squeezed their throats, instantly choking them. He then threw down their lifeless bodies onto the ground. He grinned with glee and glanced around him, his fierce, piercing, unsmiling eyes sending even more shivers to those he directed the beam. The women squirmed and gasped while the men ground their teeth with impotent fury.

The people were gripped by more fear when his spear, carried for him by two men, each holding it by

one end, was brought to him. It was about ten feet high and its blade was as wide as a machete. Its handle was as thick as the arm of an average man. He pointed it at the men and the women screamed with terror, pleading that he be merciful and spare their men. He relented. But it was his shield that was most scary. It was so huge that it was carried by four men. In the background thousands upon thousands of red *shuka-clad* and strong-bodied Ilarinkon warriors stood holding their weapons menacingly. Their sight alone, subdued the entire Maa population.

It was then that the man spoke. Making his demands, he emphatically told them he would brook no nonsense. He would wreak more havoc if they failed to fulfill and carry out his orders in full. From that day on, he ordered in a booming thunderous voice, that his men would be handed fifty bulls to slaughter every day. Ten cows out of every hundred that each family owned were to be brought to him immediately. Thereafter, one calf out of ten born, must be surrendered to him. All women who were of child bearing age were to make themselves available to entertain the Ilarinkon warriors when called upon to do so.

All the Maa were dumbfounded and at the same time bitter. They held meeting after meeting to find ways to resist the perplexing demands but they did not find any workable solution to counter them.

The women were most perturbed. They were forced to compose lewd songs which they had to perform in the most outrageous and indecent postures and styles. But what angered them most was that

mothers had to perform the offensive dances with their daughters.

On their part, the Ilarinkon warriors exploited their unassailable position to abuse the women. In their terribly obnoxious manners, they made bawdy jokes that demeaned the women. And they perplexed them when they teasingly provoked them knowing that they were not able to resist their natural instinctive desires, aroused by their immoral and repugnant suggestive moves made before them. And the women hated themselves for their apparent inability to refuse to give in to those desires that the ill-mannered Ilarinkon exploited with malicious hilarity.

The women held meetings all over the country searching for answers. After years of searching, one woman declared that she had located within herself, the source of that salacity that caused the involuntary gravitation towards men when provoked. After debating for long, the Maa women finally said they had found the answer to their perplexity. And when the solution was tried it worked perfectly. They then made a lasting resolution and celebrated its birth with song and dance. And it was from that resolution collectively made by women of Maa, that gave birth to *enkamuratani*. And her *olmurunya* was shaped, sharpened and handed to her. Many years later, after being subjected to all kinds of barbarities by the Ilarinkon, the Maa people eventually revolted and overthrew the Olarinkoi despotic rule. They killed Olarinkoi and liberated themselves, taking back the leadership of their country.

And long after the Olarinkoi and his warriors were gone, the institution that their misrule forced upon

the Maa women was still strong and kicking." Joseph Parmuat said triumphantly and ended his story.

"Oh God!" exclaimed Taiyo, shocked, "is that a true story?"

"It is a true story," Joseph Parmuat confirmed seriously. "And it has been handed down from generation to generation with very little added to it. If you want to know, that was the origin of the so called Female Genital Mutilation that the likes of *Emakererei* have devoted their lives to fight."

"Resian and I are soon joining her to fight the repugnant ritual," Taiyo said equally serious.

"I'll join you too," he said roaring with laughter. "But direct your fire at the right target. It is the women and not men who founded what eventually became a tradition. And it is only women who would end it if they so desired."

## CHAPTER SEVEN

Resian was still waiting for her sister to speak to their father over their enrolment at the Egerton University. It had been a frustrating long wait, but she was still optimistic that sooner or later, her sister would catch their father in an agreeable mood. She had given up on her mother who, after several attempts to draw her into their scheme, had proved to be cleverly evasive.

On that particular day, Resian was overly optimistic. That morning, Taiyo had left for the shop in the company of their father. She had excitedly promised Resian that if all went well, she would definitely bring up the subject of their enrolment at Egerton University. So, as she worked with her mother in the kitchen, Resian's heart warmed up with pleasant expectations. She let her spirit float fleetingly into the fanciful world of beautiful things. That was the world of *yote yawezekana*, a popular song of the day that cooed to say, all things were possible. In her mind, she imagined herself already admitted at the university and walking majestically with other students into one of those awesome lecture theatres, while donning her academic regalia. Her reverie was, however, cut short by her mother's introduction of a subject she least expected her to broach.

"My daughter," she called unexpectedly, while stirring her pot of ugali. "Have you ever heard of something called F.G.M?"

"Female Genital Mutilation? Why, yes, not only have I heard of it," Resian replied her eyes wide open with surprise. "I know about it. Why do you ask?"

"In Nakuru, this was not a subject that concerned us much. But in Nasila, it is on every lip."

"Yes, that's very true," Resian said trying to entice her mother to say more. "The other day Taiyo learnt from Joseph Parmuat that female circumcision was initiated by women themselves about two hundred years earlier. And that it was as a result of sexual abuse and harassment by an invading despot called Olarinkoi and his warriors. Is that true, *Yeiyo*? I thought it was one of those myths that were created by men to blame women for everything that works against them."

"What Joseph Parmuat told Taiyo is factually correct," her mother told her confidently. "It was the shame and anger that was provoked by Ilarinkon taunts, lewd teasing and provocative posturing that made the women do what they did to curtail those desires the worthless predators exploited to prey upon them." "That may have been true then;" Resian said looking directly into her mother's eyes. "But what is the reason for doing it today? Ilarinkon are no longer with us, or are they?"

"The original Ilarinkon may have gone," her mother said unconvincingly, "but other Ilarinkon are still with us."

"Exactly!" said Resian triumphantly. "Yes, it's the latter day Ilarinkon who are wreaking havoc on us women. Surely *Yeiyo*, if one discovered a nasty but potent medicine that once taken cured an ailment, must they continue to swallow it every day - ten years down the line. I find that absurd. The sensible thing would be to discard the bitter medicine once people are cured. Period! Tell me *Yeiyo*, what use is F.G.M to today's

woman?" "Are you suggesting that it is men who continue to perpetuate this cultural rite?" her mother asked perplexed by her daughter's argument.

"Yes, they are creators of the labyrinth that the women continue to meander around," she said philosophically. "Even if I am reluctantly convinced that it was women and not men who initiated that obnoxious ritual, who provoked the women to do so? The Ilarinkon who were purported to have pushed women into mutilating their sexuality were men. And the ancient Ilarinkon were no different from today's Ilarinkon. The ancient Ilarinkon were sadists and despotic. Today's Ilarinkon are worse. In addition to being despotic, they are oppressive tyrants; 'and one of their ways of oppressing us is to demand that F.G.M be perpetuated against us forever!"

A loud knock at the door disrupted their conversation. Before they could respond, there was another knock. Only this time, short urgent raps made in insistent quick succession followed.

"See who it is," her mother told her, happy to get rid of her. She rued the moment she introduced that explosive subject.

Although she had got used to people knocking at any time, that particular knock nearly angered Resian. Why should anybody butt in when she and her mother were carrying out a fruitful discussion? It was rare for her mother to open up to that extent and she would have wished to bring up other issues that required such frankness. Muttering under her breath, she quickly walked from the kitchen through the living room to the outer hall and opened the front door.



A man stood at the doorway, briefcase in hand. He was tall, broad-shouldered and he wore a blue business suit, white shirt and a light blue tie. The muscles of his arms bulged under the sleeves of his coat. His face, above his closely trimmed beard and moustache, was brown and leathery; possibly from exposure to the sun and wind. He had a wide mouth from which protruded two long upper teeth with a wide gap between them, making him look like a warthog. She did not like his long slanting eyes. His pierced and extended earlobes hang comically down his neck, each loop seeming to beg for something to be hooked over it. "Is this the home of Parsimei Ole Kaelo?" the man asked in a cold, sharp voice.

"Yes it is," answered Resian in a subdued voice, an ominous feeling creeping into her heart. "What can I do for you?"

"I have come to see him," he said authoritatively and took a step into the house. In an arrogantly confident manner, he asked, "is he in?"

"No he's not in at the moment," Resian answered also taking a step forward to block him. She hoped he would go away. She added impatiently. "He's probably at the shop in town."

"He's not there," the man said emphatically, shaking his head, "I have just come from there."

He peered at Resian. Those slanting black eyes had slid from her face and were now deliberately scanning her body. A creepy sensation sent shivers down her spine.

"Would you want to come back later when my father is back?" Resian asked hoping that the detestable

man would not stay. "No one knows what time he might come back."

"No, I'll rather wait," he said confidently. "I am very sure your father would be very happy to find me here." As if he had just remembered something, he cleared his throat and told her importantly, "By the way, my name is Oloisudori. Yes Mr. Edward Oloisudori Loonkiyaa." He waited for a moment, obviously expecting her to recognise those important names. Seeing that she did not react to the mention of the names, he said again insistently, "just wait until you see how happy Ole Kaelo will be when he finds me waiting for him in his house." Suddenly, his voice becoming softer and almost intimate, he whispered, "I'll be happy to tell him what a hospitable daughter he has." "Who else is here in the house?"

"My mother," Resian answered nonchalantly.

"Perhaps you will tell her that I am here to see your father."

"I'll do ..." Resian said impatiently as she stepped back. But before she could complete her statement, he had brushed past her in one swift movement that nearly caught her off-balance. In a flash, he had pushed his way into the living room and as he passed by her, she certainly felt the fingers of his lifted hand graze the fullness of her breast. With a surge of outraged embarrassment, she glared at him viciously. She muttered inaudibly, "what an ill-mannered devil this man is!" And as she fled to the kitchen she felt those black eyes, sharp and probing, moving like creepy fingers upon her back.

Her mother was stirring a vegetable stew when Resian entered, and she glanced abstractedly at her. "Who was that?" she asked.

"A man who says his name is Oloisudori," she said acidly. "He says he has come to see *Papaai*."

"Oloisudori? Let me see ... Oloisudori?" her mother said repeatedly, rolling her eyes to the ceiling as she tried to place the name. Failing to remember where she had heard that name, she shook her head, "No, I don't think I know a man by that name."

"Whoever he is, *Yeiyo*" said Resian angrily, "he is a mannerless old man!"

"Check your tongue, child!" her mother rebuked her harshly. "Soon you are going to disgrace your father by the way you speak. Didn't you see the way you horrified your *yeiyo-botorr* the other day when you spoke like one with a demented spirit? You must bridle your tongue. Be careful of what you say, otherwise you will soon be called *enadua-kutuk*."

"I am sorry, *Yeiyo*" said Resian remorsefully. "But surely, *yeiyo*, mustn't one mention the despicable character of an old man who behaves badly before a girl young enough to be his daughter?"

"However disreputable the man may be," her mother warned her, "be careful Resian. We don't know what connection the man has with your father and it would be catastrophic if your tongue would be the one to sever his relations with other men. Go to the living room and tell him I'm busy preparing lunch. Get him a cup of tea or something else to drink and make him comfortable before your father comes. I am sure he will be here soon."

Reluctantly, Resian took a flask that contained tea and a cup and slowly walked back to the living room. The moment she reappeared, Resian saw Oloisudori crane his neck, watching her. She quickly placed the flask and cup on the table and her hands automatically flew to the buttons of her blouse that she suddenly felt, from the look in his eyes, must have been unbuttoned. But she found them intact.

"It must have taken long for you to decide whether to give me a cup of tea?" he said sarcastically. The man's words shocked Resian and she backed away from him. In the process, she collided with a nearby coffee table and nearly lost her balance.

"Sorry," she said regaining her balance and composure. "But we always serve tea to our visitors even when our mother has not told us to do so."

"In that case, I must apologize for my mistaken thought," Oloisudori said as he took the cup of tea. He let a small suggestive silence grow between them before saying, "I'm indeed sorry, pretty lady." Then he smiled at her; a demonic and intrusive smile.

For the very few minutes she stood before him, she felt his black languorous eyes move up and down her face and body with a relentless intimacy that nearly immobilized her with embarrassment. She felt as if his hands were all over her body caressing her against her will. She even felt angry with herself, when she reasoned that by standing there she was encouraging him to humiliate her. But somehow, it was as if he had hypnotized her, for as much as she had wanted to flee, she found her feet rooted to the spot. As inexperienced as she was in the way men behaved, she could tell from

his smile his pleasure in her obvious fear and confusion. And instinctively, she sensed cruelty in him. Sweat trickled down her stomach, broke out on her face, before becoming clammy on her cheeks. She shook her head as if to check whether she was really awake.

"*Yeiyo* told me to tell you," she said, like one who was awakening from sleep, "she's busy preparing lunch. She asks that you make yourself comfortable and wait for *Papaai*. He is about to come."

"Very well," he said authoritatively and then added quickly in a changed soft voice. "By the way, you haven't told me your name."

"Resian," she whispered.

"What a beautiful name," he said once more in his intimate voice, his huge, slanting eyes probing her, stripping her naked, assessing her, shaming her and judging her. "*Resian ene* Kaelo," he added.

Just then, Resian heard her father talking to someone outside. She all but ran to the kitchen to announce to her mother that her *Papaai* had come then she rushed back across the living room, down along the corridor that led to the small hall, to the door. She clumsily threw the door open and collided head on with her father.

"Have you run amok, child?" her father asked irritably aghast at Resian's queer behaviour. "Why do you run like one who has seen an apparition?"

"I'm sorry, *Papaai*," she said with utter embarrassment.

"There's a man in our living room who has come to see you."

"Is he a cannibal that you have to run away from him so recklessly?" he asked sarcastically and then

added acidly, "sometimes your behaviour borders on imbecility. Who is he?"

"He says his name is Oloisudori," she said in a subdued voice, her eyes downcast.

"Oh, my God!" her father exclaimed under his breath, straightening up, his eyes suddenly dilating widely. "Oloisudori of all people! Oh my God! I wonder what has gone wrong for him to come looking for me!"

"I don't know, *Papaa*," Resian said concernedly, worried at the turn of events. "He was saying ..."

Her father ignored her. Brushing past her, he strode briskly into the living room with both his arms outstretched in front of him, ready to embrace his visitor.

"Oloisudori Loonkiyaa!" he called out loudly, laughing in feigned excitement. "What an unexpected pleasure to have you in my house. I hope all is well, my dear brother."

"The pleasure is mutual, brother Ole Kaelo," Oloisudori said importantly, struggling to stand in order to receive Ole Kaelo's hug. "I assure you all things are under control."

It was then that Resian, who had followed her father to the living room noted that the two men were of the same height and possibly of the same age. But what greatly perturbed her, was to hear a slight tremor in her father's voice as he addressed Oloisudori. She certainly detected a measure of desperation and fear in him. She noticed a faint sheen of perspiration on his face and Oloisudori took advantage of her father's discomfiture to grin at her, as if to gleefully tell her "you see, what did I tell you?"

"Where is your mother?" Ole Kaelo suddenly asked turning to Resian. But before she could answer, he was already calling her out loudly using her formal maternal name, "*Ngoto Taiyo*."

"Yes," answered Resian's mother from the kitchen.

"Come here at once," he ordered in a panic-stricken voice. Turning to Resian once more he snapped irritably. "Resian, for heaven's sake, what are you still doing here? Go to the kitchen at once and make yourself useful!"

"Yes, *Papaai*," Resian answered demurely. But before she disappeared, Oloisudori detained her for a moment with a wave of his hand to say, "Brother Ole Kaelo, you have a wonderful daughter here. In your absence, she received and entertained me in the most delightful manner." Ole Kaelo snorted and grunted but said nothing.

When Mama Milanoi appeared, her husband introduced her to Oloisudori. He then became quite lyrical about Oloisudori's pivotal role that gave them the financial stability they were now enjoying in Nasila. He mentioned the contracts that he had assisted him to win and others that were still in the pipeline. "This man is more than a brother to me," he said emotionally "There's nothing, and I repeat, nothing that he ought to be denied in this home."

Resian shut the door behind her and effectively cut off her father's effusive praise of the man she loathed. She walked through the kitchen to the back door. Opening it slowly she got out, shut it behind her, and leaned against it; grateful for the clean cool air. She

shuddered when she thought of those shamelessly questioning eyes. Was there no better man that her father could find to do business with? Then she remembered her sister Taiyo and the promise to speak to their father. "Oh, my God," she exclaimed to herself excitedly, "I'm standing here foolishly thinking of Oloisudori's stupid antics, while I could actually be on my way to the university!" She felt sure Taiyo had spoken to their father and possibly he had already consented. She stood quite still for a moment. She was enthralled. Then she quickly walked round the house and got back to the front.

As she walked to the gate, she saw her sister sitting on a log next to Joseph Parmuat. One look at her sister's face, and Resian was sure things did not click. She hoped that her father had not rejected Taiyo's proposal to take them to the university. She wanted to remain hopeful Her fear was to have the door shut permanently on them.

Taiyo knew her sister's expectation. As soon as Resian got to where they were seated, she explained to her, how she tried, without success, to talk to their father. She had hoped to find him alone and in an agreeable mood, but all that had proven difficult.

Strangely, for the first time, she found Resian understanding. Instead of getting sulky, as she often did, she said she had appreciated her sister's effort and that she was happy the door was still open. She was sure an opportune time would offer itself, and at that time, she believed, divine powers would have prevailed upon their father. She was that optimistic.



"*Papaai* has a monster for a visitor this afternoon," Resian said, effectively changing the subject. "You should see him to believe me when I say he's ugly and mean. He is an absolutely horrible man with deplorable manners. I can't imagine what business *Papaai* would be transacting with such a person! He is simply *olbitirr*."

Taiyo exploded into an uproarious laughter at the man's description, while Joseph Parmuat's dark eyebrows shot up almost to his hairline, eyes gleaming with surprised amusement.

"Honestly, Resian, what a thing to say about a human being!" Taiyo said still in stitches. "Only a man out of this world would look that horrible!" "And for some reasons, *Papaai* seems terrified of him." "*Papaai*, of all people, terrified?" Taiyo said wide-eyed with incredulity. "I have never seen him terrified." "Did you get to know the name of the monster?" Joseph Parmuat asked perceiving that the girls were overly amazed rather than being over anxious about their father's discomfiture.

"He announced importantly that his name is Mr. Edward Oloisudori Loonkiyaa," Resian said mimicking him while roaring with laughter.

"Did you say Oloisudori? Of all people!" Joseph Parmuat exclaimed to the consternation of the girls. "That man is bad news! He is a monster in the true sense of the word."

"Who is he?" the girls asked simultaneously. "What kind of person is he?"

Oloisudori was a feared man not only in Nasila but far and wide. If there was anything obnoxious that

Nasila had ever exported to other parts of the country, apart from the ancient infamous cattle raids and the services of the *enkamuratani* it was the notorious criminality of Oloisudori. Just as his name implied, he was a shadowy figure. Nobody seemed to know his exact business. He liked to refer to himself as a jack-of-all-trade, which was true because he had his fingers on agriculture, finance, tourism, import and export, mining and motor trade. He was also known to be a poacher, smuggler and robber. But what he perfected skillfully was being an extortionist. That went hand in hand with his other specialised role of a hired assassin. He did not play all those roles alone as his gang of collaborators and agents worked under his direct supervision.

Little was known of Oloisudori's background. Those older than him said he came to Nasila when he was a boy of ten. It was said he was adopted by the family of Loonkiyaa who brought him up alongside their other sons. He was circumcised with the rest of the sons and became a valorous *moran*. But after his stint as a *moran*, he turned into a hardcore criminal who had been jailed on numerous occasions. He was now said to be incorrigible and the fact that he was often successful in his criminal forays, however devious they were, often portrayed a wrong image to the youth who thought he offered an alternative route to wealth and riches.

It was as an extortionist that Oloisudori excelled. In most cases he enticed his victims by loaning them large sums of money or organising for them to clinch and sign lucrative contracts with big organisations or win attractive contracts to supply agricultural inputs to large parastatals. Once his victims were deeply involved in the

business, he would turn up to make ridiculous demands and threaten to withdraw the contracts. In many cases, his victims were left with little options but to play to his own rules. The consequences of not playing the game as he wished, were always brutal and unpalatable.

By the time Joseph Parmuat was through with the monster's history, the girls were near tears. They feared for their father and for themselves. They wondered why their father had got himself involved with that monster's murky business. Was the house they were living in and the business that their father had founded, financed by the monster? Resian was even more fearful when she recalled the anxiety that was evident in their father's face when he found Oloisudori in their house. When she recalled the condescension that Oloisudori had displayed while in their living room, she was in no doubt that their father had fallen victim of the demonic extortionist.

But Taiyo looked at things from a brighter perspective. She was convinced that their father could not be that naive as to get involved with such an evil man. She reasoned that there must have been another explanation for the monster's visit to their home. But the three agreed on one thing: Oloisudori was a bad, bad man.

After sitting on the log chatting for a while, Joseph Parmuat departed. The girls then proceeded slowly to their house, talking.

"Guess what, Taiyo-eyeiyo," Resian said excitedly. "Yeiyo, this afternoon shocked me by voluntarily talking about F.G.M."

"No, Resian, that's not true," Taiyo answered, her eyes dilating with surprise, and stopping so as to give

serious attention to what her sister was saying. "Yeiyo talking about F.G.M on her own accord? Unless she was preparing ground for shocking news. By the way, I hope she did not tell you that there are plans to drag and take us soon to *enkamuratani*?"

"No, not at all," Resian said vehemently. "You know if she did, we would not be here saying what we are now saying."

"Anyway, tell me," Taiyo pursued the subject relentlessly. "What did she say about F.G.M.?"

"She asked me what I knew about it," Resian said gesticulating wildly to emphasize her words. "And I told her not only what I knew about F.G.M but I added that it was certainly a tool of oppression used by men to put women down. I also told her that, that story about F.G.M having been introduced by women who had been harassed and sexually abused by Ilarinkon invaders centuries earlier, was not convincing. Had the practice been introduced by the women of the time, to stem the Ilarinkon lewd excesses, I argued, then it should have become extinct with their departure."

"Did you ask her whether she supported F.G.M.?" Taiyo asked tongue in her cheek. "And did you find out whether there was a plan to have us conform with the obnoxious Nasila ritual?"

"That was what I was going to find out when the monster came knocking," Resian said as they resumed their walk towards the house.

"We must find out that this evening," Taiyo said seriously. "To be forewarned is to be forearmed."

They climbed the steps slowly and as they reached the front door, it opened to reveal Ole Kaelo and

his visitor. Taiyo and Resian stepped back to allow Oloisudori through. He greeted Taiyo politely and smiled at Resian confidently as if to suggest that a bond between them had been established and their familiarity was now a matter of mutual understanding. Resian dropped her gaze to the floor.

"There goes the monster," Resian hissed angrily through clenched teeth, as her father and Oloisudori walked down the steps. "He's the devil incarnate!" Bearing in mind what Joseph Parmuat told us about him, Taiyo said nonchalantly. "Olosudori could very easily pass as just another innocent Nasila elder."

"God forbid," Resian hissed, her lips tightening dangerously. Just the sight of Oloisudori had revived the loathing she had for him. "I pray that God will never give him a chance to pass as an innocent Nasila elder."

Just then, their father returned. Resian looked at him and perceived something queer about him. She was alarmed. Did she imagine it or was there something unnatural about him? She wondered. And what was it? Her father looked at her and quickly averted his eyes and looked elsewhere. She noticed that something was amiss. She felt very certain there was something awful in the air.

"Resian, go to the kitchen and help your mother prepare supper," her father said sharply. "And make it snappy!" The look on her father's face immobilized her. She glanced at him curiously. He was watching her too, his wrinkled face unsmiling. She then regained her composure and was about to go when once again something in his face made her hesitate for a moment, thinking he was about to say something more to her.

"What are you waiting for?" he thundered angrily. "Go to the kitchen this instant."

Taiyo was by then busy closing windows and drawing curtains. Standing by one window that faced the west, she looked through it for a long moment, lost in thought. Then she walked into the living room where her father sat rigidly on an armchair, his right elbow planted on his right knee while his right cupped hand supported his chin. He was staring without blinking at the fireplace, his thoughts obviously not in that house.

"*Papaai*," Taiyo called her father, looking at him with reverence. "Is something wrong?"

"What? Oh no," her father said confusedly, turning unfocused eyes upon her. "Nothing is wrong my dear daughter."

"Brother Joseph Parmuat told us," she said taking utmost care not to upset him, "that the gentleman who has just left is a reputable financier and that wherever you see him, great business transactions are in the offing, is that right, *Papaai*?"

"Yes, yes, that's right," he stammered fidgeting uncomfortably in his seat. "Yes, he is certainly a reputable businessman and truly a great business transaction is in the offing."

"And all is well, *Papaai*?" Taiyo insisted relentlessly.

"Yes, yes, I have said," he said smiling sheepishly, while avoiding her eyes, "everything is fine. It is just ..." he hesitated for a moment, and then scratched his head absent-mindedly. "... just that we are going to do a few things here at home a little bit differently. A few changes here and there affecting all of

us. Other than those little changes, everything else is just fine."

"What are those little things, *Papaai*?" asked Taiyo inquisitively, her eyes staring at him fixedly.

"Nothing serious," he said getting impatient. "And whatever they are, know that your father is in control. Now join your mother and Resian in the kitchen and make sure food is ready soon. I would like to retire to bed early today."

When the girls went to the kitchen they were surprised by their mother's aloofness. Her absent-mindedness that evening had already made her burn and ruin the rice that was to be their evening meal. Her daughters tried to charm her, tease her, prod her, provoke her without much success. Had her taciturnity anything to do with Oloisudori's visit? If that was the case, they reasoned, then, the demonic extortionist's visit was outrageously ruinous.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

It was the turn of Parsimei Ole Kaelo and Mama Milanoi ene Kaelo, to have a long, troubled night. Husband and wife had gone to bed early. They were now agonising about the same matter but lamenting separately in their minds and in their forlorn hearts. They turned and turned again on their bed repeatedly, like *ilmintilis* being roasted in the fire.

Ole Kaelo's head spun incessantly. He rued the day he met Oloisudori. Seeing what befell him that afternoon, he wondered what devil had convinced him to carry out business dealings with such an evil man. Judging from the queer demand Oloisudori had made on him, he wondered if he was a member of a shadowy cult that he had heard mentioned for a long time, and which was known as *ilmasonik*.

It was said that the cult thrived on blackmail and extortion. One of the ways it operated was to approach an ambitious businessman and lure him into their ensnaring schemes. A lucrative money-making business proposal would be hatched and handed to the unsuspecting businessman by a member of the cult. Once enticed and convinced that he would make millions of shillings within a short period of time, the businessman would be loaned large sums of money to plough into his business. Within a short time, the business would boom and the businessman would



prosper. Then the woes would begin. It was then that absurd demands were made. Often, it was demanded that the indebted businessman sacrifices his beloved ones to the gods of the cult. And the beloved ones included wife, sons or daughters. The consequences of failing to fulfill the demands it was said, were always catastrophic.

He had never believed those stories, but that night, as he lay on his bed, he began to wonder whether Oloisudori was not a member of such a cult. What, in the name of God, had he done to deserve such torment? He cried silently and bitterly. Although he was an experienced businessman, he lamented, he had acted so perilously as to risk the lives of his family.

He certainly had known Oloisudori's criminal records for a long time. But he could not tell why he had turned a blind eye to his enticement. He had even been warned of his villainous behaviour but he declined to heed the warning. Ole Supeyo, his friend and mentor, had told him bluntly that doing business with Oloisudori was like toying with a live electrified wire. He had likened Oloisudori's rotten behaviour to that of a randy he-goat and warned him to keep him away from his daughters.

Oloisudori's notoriety as a lethal extortionist was not unknown to him. He knew many people who had become victims to his blackmail tactics after failing to meet his demonic demands. And it was not once or twice that he had heard of his arrest and detention on suspicion

that he had been involved in bank robberies, assassinations or disappearance of certain individuals. But being adroit in the manner in which he executed his criminal activities, in addition to having a knack in covering his tracks, he always bounced back after such incarcerations to continue with his nefarious activities.

He knew it was the pursuit of success that made him interact with Oloisudori. And men who mattered in society-men of property-were the successful. Success was attainment, fortune and prosperity; it was triumph and it gave one happiness. It did not matter how it was obtained. No, the end product justified the means, however horrible.

Oloisudori was successful, he thought angrily. Yes, he was successful and was reverently bestowed respectful titles such as *mzee* and *mheshimiwa*. He often rubbed shoulders with the mighty of the land and all doors swung open automatically when he approached. And who did not want to be referred to as a successful businessman, just like Oloisudori was? Who did not want to have a blooming import and export business, a flourishing transport business or a thriving farming inputs supply business? What could be better than when one reached that state of affluence, as Oloisudori did, where one was able to live in six ostentatious houses in six different towns, with a woman and servants in each one of them?

Yes, that was how Oloisudori defined success, Ole Kaelo thought bitterly. And he and many others desired to define it in the same way. The archaic adage that exhorted young and upcoming businessmen to take care of cents and let shillings take care of themselves was regarded by the likes of Oloisudori to be untenable. Instant riches, just as instant tea or instant coffee were the in thing. And the instantaneous bliss brought in an on-the-spot feeling of well being, felicity and happiness. That was what everyone wanted, Ole Kaelo reasoned, and that was what he himself had always wanted. And that was the reason, like a stinking rotten carcass would draw a torrent of flies to itself, people like him and many others got drawn to the murky business of Oloisudori.

"But now the chicken had come home to roost," Ole Kalo lamented ruefully. Oloisudori was now demanding his pound of flesh. He recalled the events of that afternoon when Oloisudori came calling. Seeing him in his house unexpectedly, had signaled trouble with his contracts. But Oloisudori had allayed his fears, saying all was well in that direction. That had restored his peace and calmed his frayed nerves. The success of the shop depended entirely on those contracts. Even the large stocks that he held in those godowns were secured on the strength of those contracts. It was, therefore, gratifying to hear him confirm that all was well. What did he want then? He had wondered. But he did not have to wonder for long for Oloisudori did not believe in niceties. He

had lifted his head, and letting a small silence draw out between them, he told him, "There is a small matter that I would like to discuss."

"Yes," Ole Kaelo had said, terrified.

Oloisudori had reached into his pocket, pulled out a packet of cigarettes, extracted one and lit it. He inhaled and exhaled the smoke unhurriedly, and then added, "that daughter of yours, Resian," he said condescendingly, "she interests me."

"Pardon me?" Ole Kaelo had asked, in disbelief. The man's reputation was truly barbarous, he thought angrily.

"I'm interested in your daughter Resian," Oloisudori said evenly, as if he was talking of a sheep or goat. "And I have a friend who will also be interested in your other daughter. Simply put, I would like to relieve you of your two daughters!"

"Oloisudori Loonkiyaa, please," Ole Kaelo had pleaded desperately. "Ask me of anything else, but spare my daughters."

"Didn't you tell your wife just now that there is nothing I should be denied in your home?" Oloisudori had asked smiling unpleasantly, "or were you just pulling my leg?"  
Regrettably, Oloisudori had got his way, even if partially. Ole Kaelo's shut eyes rolled in their sockets as he painfully bit his lips that were caught between his tightly clenched teeth. Since the time he heard them, Oloisudori

demands had not ceased to anger him. Even then, as he lay on his bed, he was still seething with impotent fury. When he first heard Oloisudori say that his daughter Resian had interested him, he did not understand what he had meant. But when he said he had a friend who he thought would be interested in Taiyo, and he therefore intended to take them both, he was shocked.

He had then given thought to the girls. As a father, it was his responsibility to bring them up, care for them, educate them and guarantee their safety at all times. He could see them in his mind as they played around when they were helpless babies; skipping up and down as toddlers and thereafter as they walked around proudly and carefree as grown-up happy daughters that they were.

It excruciatingly pained him to think that circumstances would force him to hand any of them to a man who was not, their choice. He thought of Taiyo, his favourite daughter and the apple of his eye. How terrible it would be, he thought sorrowfully, to see her cry forlornly, while questioning the sincerity of his love for her, and asking him the reason for his betrayal. Even Resian, with her sullenness and gracelessness that he disliked, he had found out surprisingly that he had a soft spot for her. He cried and his heart bled for her, when after an intense hard-tackling haggle amid Oloisudori's threats of fleecing him and ensuring that he did not have

a penny in his name, they had eventually agreed that she was to be the sacrificial lamb.

For him to save his business, to save his home and to save his daughter Taiyo, he had agreed, she had to go.

Her mother was inconsolable, but what could they do? Even his other demand that the girls' status of being *intoiye nemengalana* should be terminated infuriated him. Although it was true that his daughters were late in undergoing the cultural rite, he had argued vehemently, it was his prerogative as a father to decide when to call the *enkamuratani*, and nobody had the right to push him to do it against his will. Oloisudori had then decided that he would take her in, and have the ritual performed on her at his home for, he had argued, he did not trust *intoiye nemengalana* at his home. Ole Kaelo had felt sick and nauseated by the whole affair. Such talks were abnormal between a father-in-law and a would-be son-in-law. But could Oloisudori, a man of his own age, be his son-in-law? The world had come to an end, he decried sadly. Did he even know Oloisudori's clan? Had he been of Ilmolelian clan as he was, would that have deterred him from marrying Resian?

Little did he know that Oloisudori's strange demand was made on the spur of the moment. He had intended to come and make a monetary demand on Ole Kaelo based on his blackmail tactics, but all of that was forgotten the moment he saw Resian. He had instantly

fallen in love with her. For some strange reason her instinctive terror had awakened in him an excitement he had thought was long lost to him. It had delightfully sharpened his tired senses and reminded him of his youthful moments of ecstasy and vivacity. He admired her physical and sensual attraction, especially those of her full breasts, her strong and supple waist, the curve of her wide hips and her shapely long legs. Long after he had left Ole Kaelo's house, the thought of Resian's young, lush, body, not only brought moisture to the palms of his hands, but a stirring in his loins.

Like all other things that he had desired in life, he told himself Resian was his for the taking. There was nothing that Oloisudori Loonkiyaa desired and did not get.

Mama Milanoi also turned in her bed. She tossed, writhed and cried with pain like a woman in labour. Her anguished cry burned deep in her heart and in the pit of her stomach like an inferno in the bowels of the earth. Yes, she was inconsolable. Was that what she set out to achieve in Nasila? She lamented bitterly. No, certainly not.

She had thought Nasila was beckoning them back into her fold the way a mother would beckon back her wayward children. She had thought Nasila was calling them back to share in its good fortunes and have a chance to be associated with the great and powerful culture of its people. Above all, she had thought that

Nasila was going to offer them a golden chance to marry off their two daughters to its respectable sons and usher them to greater prospects than they would have ever dreamed to get in Nakuru.

A voice in the dark night told her that they had received their just reward. They had wanted prosperous sons-in-law, and Oloisudori was one such son-in-law, for he was stinking rich, and he had already offered them the chance to share Nasila's good fortunes. The magnificent house they lived in was built with finances secured by the guarantee Oloisudori gave by way of those invaluable contracts. Similarly, the business they ran in Nasila was financed through the banks by guarantees that he offered, and they, therefore, depended on his goodwill.

She learnt all that from her husband that afternoon after Oloisudori had left. But the timing was immaterial for had she known earlier it would not have made any difference. Just as it was during her time, it was the man who made decisions as to which direction their lives took. When he took a wrong decision, the family was the one to bear the brunt of its unpalatable consequences.

Could Oloisudori be her son-in-law? God forbid! How could a man who was the age of her husband be her son-in-law? Where was the Nasila culture?

In the past, she recalled, such a thing would have never happened. Culture would not have allowed it to



happen. In those old good days, had her husband tried to enforce such an abomination, she would have appealed to the elders court which certainly would have ruled him out of order and possibly fined him together with his purported son-in-law. A public rebuke and an ensuing cleansing ceremony conducted by the fearsome *oloiboni* would have shamed the culture-abusers and their collaborators and that would have acted as a deterrent to future attempts.

Culture gave her room to call for mass action. Mass action was swift, vindictive and decisive. And it was most feared by men. It was rarely activated, but when it was, it paralyzed all activities in the homesteads. Men instinctively knew its battle cry and even the old and infirm took to the hills when they heard the cry. Yes, it was a 'tsunami' that did not discriminate. It swept away all the men.

She recalled one incident when she was about ten years old. A mannerless old man got infatuated with a fourteen-year-old daughter of his age-mate. The randy old man followed the girl everywhere she went. He followed her to the river when she went to draw water, and to the bushes, when she went to fetch firewood. He would get up very early in the morning just to have a glimpse of her when she was milking. One day, he became bold enough and seduced her as she milked her mother's cows. The girl was infuriated and reported the incident to her mother.

The girl's mother appealed to the women's court. Immediately, the 'village wireless' was activated and it spread the news like a bush-fire during a drought. Within hours, all women had been informed and a plan of action was hatched. The girl was called and instructed on how to act.

The following morning at dawn, women from all homesteads except the one where the offending old man resided, let out the calves. They allowed them to suckle their mothers freely. No cow was milked that morning and no fire was lit in the hearths. Then all the women proceeded to the homestead of the accused, armed with all kinds of weapons that included firewood, *ilkurteta*, *ilkipiren*, *isosiani* and their husbands' knobkerries.

The girl had been instructed to act normally and carry out her milking duties in the manner she always did. As usual the old man was there trying to seduce her. The poor fellow did not know what was in store for him. He was ensnared!

Then all hell broke loose! Women poured into the homestead in their hundreds. They descended upon the poor old man beating him thoroughly and stripping him naked. They teased him and taunted him, offering themselves to him en masse. They pulled his ears, slapped him and kicked him. They then bound his hands and the girl was given the rope to hold as a leash. She was instructed to lead him as the women prodded him with their sticks, pushing him along the path. He was

paraded naked, and led to all the homesteads. Woe to any man that was found on the way! He was beaten and shamed. Any time they came across a group of people, the girl was told to ask the old man, "*Papaai*, did you really intend to do this to me?" and the old man was forced to reply shamefully, "Yes, my dear daughter!"

So, when the men heard the women battle cry, they knew the 'tsunami' had come and they ran out of their homesteads as fast as their legs could carry them. They fled to the hills. And it was only in the evening, after sending a peace delegation made up of the very old and infirm men, were they allowed back into the village. By that time, the accused had gasped the last gulp of air, and was no more.

After getting to their homes, the women did not give their men any food. There was no milk because they had not milked the cows that day, and the houses were cold for no fire had been lit. The men did not ask any questions for that was the punishment that the culture meted out to the menfolk collectively when one of them offended the sensibilities of Maa. The following day, the hungry old men called the fearsome *oloiboni* to cleanse the homesteads and restore peace, love and unity.

Mama Milanoi wondered where that culture had fled to. Was there no one to tame the likes of Oloisudori? Had the culture become moribund, useless and impotent? Another husky whisper told her the Maa culture had

gone nowhere. It was still there and it was intact. It was like the waters of Nasila and all other rivers of Maa.

Nasila river had been there as far back as Nasila people could remember. It had sustained the life of man and beast from time immemorial. But Nasila water was no longer the water she drew when she was a little girl. It was no longer the water she and her friends scooped up with their hands and drank happily to quench their thirst after a long hot day in the fields. No, the water was no longer the same. The water had been polluted. In those days the water was so clean and clear that the pebbles on the riverbed were visible. Even the mudfish and the crab-like creatures called *enkileleo* were so clearly visible in the water one would have thought they were in a clear glass container.

That was no more. Upstream, people were washing vehicles, they were washing smelling hides and skins, they were emptying sacks of agricultural chemicals and other offending and poisonous pollutants into Nasila river. It would not be long, Mama Milanoi reasoned sorrowfully, before the life-giving water of Nasila began to sicken and kill.

And so was Nasila culture. The founder had intended that the culture would regulate the lives of the people, and indeed it did. It charted out the way for everyone, from cradle to the grave. It defined relationships, it created laws that governed the ownership of property and settled disputes. It did not

discriminate, it did not favour anyone over the others, it gave everyone a chance to live a full life; it protected everyone within its confines and provided cleansing procedures for those who defiled it. It was simply a cherished way of life for all the Maa people, including those in Nasila. It was no more. It was now defiled and polluted by the likes of Oloisudori. Yes, the old Nasila culture had become mutable and it now contained defiant mutants that it could not regulate and which were above Nasila laws.

She thought of her own house. Yes, change was creeping in. Her daughters were different. They had gone through a school system that intermingled them with children from other cultures. They knew very little of Nasila culture. They were children of a new undefined culture. Theirs was a mutant of another kind.

Her daughter Resian, Mama Milanoi thought sadly, as she turned once more on her bed, was a hard nut to crack. She was obstinate and defiant. She certainly epitomized the new undefined culture. She knew she had an independent mind and she was not easy to handle. If her father thought she was docile and that he would just call her and hand her over to Oloisudori, he was in for a rude shock. No amount of intimidation or threats could easily break her. She always said she knew her rights and would not allow anyone to trample on them.

She did not know how they would have handled the question of her circumcision had not her father

turned down Oloisudori's demand that it be done before he took her to his home.

She wondered how Oloisudori would react when Resian rebuffed him. From what he saw of the monster that afternoon, he feared for her daughter's life. The monster could do anything including snuffing out the life of an innocent child like Resian. What in the name of God did her family do to deserve the anguish they were going through? She cried out silently and passionately.

Next to her, her husband turned. He gritted his teeth like an animal that was unable to free itself from a snare. He yawned and shook his head vigorously the way a bull would do to expel water from its ears after a rainy night. He then rubbed his nose violently and sighed. "Are you awake, *Ngoto* Resian?" he asked, referring to her unusually as Resian's mother rather than Taiyo's mother as he normally did.

"I never slept a wink, *menye* Resian," she answered in the same manner.

"Have you thought of any other thing we can do about Resian?" He asked in a heavy sorrowful voice. "About Resian?" she asked puzzled. "Were we contemplating any other action other than the one we agreed upon with Oloisudori?"

"No, not any other action," he said sadly. "I have been thinking of how to break the news to her." "Since Oloisudori said he will be back in a month's time," Mama Milanoi said equally sorrowful, "let us not

rush it, my husband. This is a delicate matter that requires careful handling."

"I agree with you, my wife," Kaelo said groping for her hand. He squeezed it gently and added soothingly, "I did not plan this to happen to our daughter."

"I know"

"Who knows?" he said a flicker of hope lighting his troubled heart, "something positive might come out of this"

"Who knows?" she repeated resignedly.

A beautiful sunrise of yet another morning that was dominated by flights of birds that flashed between the trees in the compound, seemed to bring back sanity and serenity into the home of Ole Kaelo. Tiny *intinyoit* and brilliant *ilekishu* birds twittered and chirped, making the air alive with their constant motion and their cheerful calls.

Ole Kaelo was the first to come out of their bedroom. His morning greetings were unusually cheerful. Resian was, however, quick to detect something artificial in that cheerfulness. She thought their father was being somehow insincere. Where was his usual insensate anger that she had come to expect whenever he found her in a room? Why were his eyes shifty and withdrawn into their sockets like one who had had little or no sleep at all?

Taiyo on the other hand, was very happy to see their father cheerful. He had appeared gloomy the previous night. Their father could be high-handed and

tyrannical but the central position he occupied in their home and the pivotal role he played in stabilizing their sometimes turbulent lives could not be underrated. Any sign of instability in him, was the worst threat to their lives. It sent untold shivers right down to the bedrock of the family's foundation.

Their mother's sweet smile when she entered the living room bewitched the girls it brought a ray of sunshine that seemed to cheer up Resian's mood. So when they sat for breakfast that morning the Ole Kaelos were a happy family again. And Taiyo took advantage of that regained happiness to announce that their brother Joseph Parmuat had accepted to coach them in traditional music and dance. Their father readily consented and went further to give them a room outside the main house, that he intended to use as an office, as the practising room. Seeing their father's enthusiasm, Resian nearly got tempted to put her request to him to be allowed to go back to N akuru and enrol as a student at Egerton University. But she had a premonition that all was not well. She also feared that should he reject it, it would be impossible to bring it up again. At the end, she opted to be patient.

Even the entrance of Olarinkoi into the house and his rude intrusion onto the breakfast table, did little to dampen the high spirits that embraced the Kaelo family. It was surprising that, of all people, it was Resian who



fetches him a cup, poured tea into it and handed it to him cheerfully. He acknowledged her with a throaty grunt.

Mama Milanoi knew in her heart that all that was a meaningless charade. It excruciatingly pained her to see Resian smile cheerfully, oblivious of the impending disaster that loomed large like ominous black clouds.

## CHAPTER NINE

Joseph Parmuat began to coach Resian and Taiyo in traditional song and dance. He did it every evening after school. But soon, Resian's interest in the coaching quickly fizzled out and waned. She knew her unquenchable thirst was in university education and that could not be substituted for anything else. She eventually stopped attending and left Taiyo to be coached alone.

Soon, Taiyo found her happiness. She looked forward to seeing Joseph Parmuat in the evening, and when at the end of the practice session, time came for them to part, she was reluctant to leave. Over the past weeks, she had unexpectedly discovered a haven, a place of song, dance and laughter in that room. It was truly a place of relaxed companionship and mutual understanding. She found a place where she could enjoy song and dance with someone who through ties of Nasila kinship, and shared interest, related with her on one-on-one basis.

Joseph Parmuat also enjoyed Taiyo's company. He found it a joy to coach her, and dancing with her elicited a deep elation. He was, however, cautious in the way he expressed that elation. Ever since he knew that the Kaelos were from the Ilmolelian clan and of the Iloorasha-kineji sub-clan, like his family, he considered Ole Kaelo to be his father according to their culture. He tried to internalise that Taiyo and Resian were his sisters.

He also knew the profound respect and trust with which he was regarded by the girls' parents. He did not, therefore, want any untoward behaviour on his part to raise any doubt or taint his hitherto untainted character.

But it had not been easy for the two of them. Even that very evening as they stood close heaving their chests to and fro, it was still not easy. Joseph Parmuat glanced around her; his smile warm. He loved the way she swung, her earrings that glinted in the soft evening sunlight, emphasising the graceful length of her neck. That particular evening, she wore a tight green woollen dress that accentuated her narrow shoulders and bulging hips. The effect was striking. She danced with abandon. Her eyes gleamed beneath her eyelashes and she moved her head haughtily. She gyrated her hips seductively. And as she did so, mischief was written all over her pretty face, eyes downcast in a modesty that was so false as to be a challenge to him. He noticed it and smiled again appreciatively.

At the sight of that smile, Taiyo's heart lifted with tender happiness. Her excitement showed on her face. It shone with innocent serenity from her eyes and softened the line of her mouth. They looked at one another and their eyes held, for the briefest of moments, and then Joseph Parmuat turned away abruptly.

Joseph Parmuat was determined not to let shame and scandal besmirch his name and that of the Kaelos. He also did not want Taiyo to be hurt, for he knew the

end result of an illicit and clandestine relationship, as theirs, if allowed to develop would be catastrophic to her and her future. He himself would not escape castigation and the punishment that was meted out to offenders by Nasila culture. Such punishment would include payment of compensation in the form of cattle, in addition to suffering a public rebuke and undergoing a demeaning cleansing ceremony.

In order to avoid a situation where he would find himself alone with Taiyo, he ensured Resian was always with them when he taught Taiyo song and dance. To achieve that, he introduced an interesting lesson about Nasila culture after each coaching session. He selected aspects of culture that touched on the lives of young people and to his delight, he found Resian ardently interested to know more. Her constant presence chagrined Taiyo greatly, but she could not raise any complaint, for it was her sister's right also to be taught.

He taught them about love. He told them the kinds of love that young people in Nasila were involved in. There was the conventional kind where a young man and a girl would fall in love. Since nearly all the girls were always booked for marriage, sometimes even before they were born, those involved in the conventional kind of love were regarded as betrothed, and, therefore, any other love, other than to the betrothed was regarded illicit and clandestine. That did not,

however, deter young people from loving one another passionately.

The *elangatare* which was what that kind of love was called was competitive, but abstinence was strictly observed. Winning the admiration of the girls was adored by young men and they did anything including engaging in dangerous stunts to win the girls' hearts. And there was nothing that filled the girls with admiration more than the mention of valorous feats such as killing of marauding lions or defending the people and their cattle from enemies, that the young men often engaged themselves in. Those who excelled in those feats and were known to be of good behaviour and discipline were always the darlings of the girls.

A song of praise composed by a girlfriend in praise of the valorous deeds of her boyfriend, and which was adopted by the rest of the women, was the highest accolade that a young man could get. And the song of praise was only adopted by all the women when there was an agreement and consensus by all the young people that the deeds mentioned in the song were indeed valorously achieved by him. When that happened, the young man would bask in that glory until another young man broke that record by achieving better results.

Should the betrothed misbehave or do anything to offend the sensibilities of the Nasila culture and, therefore, lost the favour of the girl's parents, he would forfeit the right to marry the girl. And if the *Olangata*

was ready to marry his *elangata* the young man's parents would approach the girl's parents seeking marriage. When that *enkaputi* was sealed and the marriage ceremony performed, the young people regarded that as the greatest achievement; that was always the most blissful marriage in Nasila.

The other kind of love was called *patureishi*. It ran simultaneously with the conventional kind of love, in that a young man and a girl were individually allowed by culture to have a *patureishi* love alongside the conventional type of love. *Patureishi* was a platonic love that each young person was allowed to engage in. And the way it operated was that, a young man looked for a girl who was not related to him in any way, and who was known to be of good behaviour and discipline. He would approach her with the assistance of his sisters, and request her to be his *patureishi*. If the girl accepted the proposal, the young man would be asked to swear that he would strictly adhere to the stringent regulations that must be observed in that kind of relationship. If the young man vowed to observe the rules, there was an exchange of ornaments and *esongoyo*, an aromatic herb, was given to the girl by the young man. Then the relationship was sealed.

The news of the sealed relationship was circulated and spread among the young people. It also reached their families and the young man's girlfriend and the girl's boyfriend. It was made sure that there was no

rivalry whatsoever between the two sets of friendship. In all cases, it was made clear that *patureishi* took priority over the conventional love. When a young man came to visit his *patureishi* the girl made sure that she informed her boyfriend who would then keep his distance. And all other people, young and old, respected the relationship. The *patureishi* institution was meant to check the conduct and behaviour of the young people and keep them disciplined. Parents of the young man would give him a young bull to sell, to buy beads and ornaments for his *patureishi*. Later when the relationship had matured, they would give him a ewe to give to the girl as a mark of respect that would continue between them for the rest of their lives. When the young man swore in the name of his *patureishi*, the swearing would be taken as serious and solemn, and he would not be expected to negate it.

Woe to the young man if he reneged on that deal. The *patureishi* would investigate the matter and if she confirmed that her young man had engaged himself in a disgraceful act of misconduct, such as molestation of children, petty thievery, disrespect of women, or an act of cowardice; she would act swiftly to shame him. She would remove all the beads ornaments that he had given her and carry them to the pastures where the calves were grazing. She would look for a calf that belonged to his mother and would adorn its neck with the ornaments. When the calves streamed home in the evening, there would be the decorated calf that belonged to the mother

of the estranged and shamed *patureishi*! All the people in that village and in all other villages would know that he had been abandoned by his *patureishi* because of his misbehaviour and indiscipline. And the young man would have to run away from home for sometime, to escape the burning shame. In a case like that, he would have to work extra hard and for a long time to win back the confidence of the girls and build his reputation anew.

But a young man who balanced his two relationships appropriately and behaved in accordance with the norms given by the culture of the Nasila people, was accorded respect and regarded as a potential leader and elder of the future of Maa.

"Let me be your *patureishi* if it really exists," Resian said jokingly. "No way," Joseph Parmuat answered happily. "Since you are my sister, you don't qualify to be my *patureishi*."

"To speak the truth, brother Parmuat," Resian said seriously, "I have never heard of *patureishi*. Does it really exist?" "It is a recent casualty of the changing trends in Nasila," Joseph Parmuat said, his face-wrinkled with concern. "Individualism, petty jealousy and lack of trust killed that once important aspect of Nasila culture."

"I believe culture and traditions are never static," said Taiyo pointedly. "By being dynamic, culture shades off aspects that become irrelevant with time. Two examples of such moribund aspects of culture are F.G.M and the clan system that forces people who have no



blood relations whatsoever not to have relationship contrary to their wishes. These should have disappeared at the turn of the last century. But, alas, they are not disappearing soon, thanks to those who continue to have a stranglehold on the culture for the sole purpose of perpetuating their rule."

"Oh, my! I didn't know that you hold such strong views on the Nasila culture," Joseph Parmuat said chuckling. "In any case, you cannot say our culture has been static. It has already shed off many negative aspects some of which were obnoxious, such as the tradition of throwing the dead and the dying to the hyenas, or the inhuman tradition of abandoning the very old and terminally ill people in deserted homestead to be disembowelled by wild animals. That was ghastly, wasn't it?"

"Yes, those traditions were certainly ghastly." Resian said vehemently. "They were as obnoxious as F.G.M is obnoxious today. If I had power, I would constitute a committee that would go through all the known culture with a fine tooth comb and consign all the bad and negative ones to the dustbin of history."

"If one did that," said Joseph Parmuat knotting his brows to show the seriousness in which he considered the matter, "that person would be as tyrannical and despotic as the old Olarinkoi was."

"Okay, okay! Let us agree that Nasila culture will soon shed itself of F.G.M," Resian said

uncompromisingly. "There are no two ways about it. But, by the way, why is that there is always a scramble for girls to marry in Nasila, to the extent that men are forced to book unborn baby girls, and then they still have to wait for thirteen to fourteen years for them to mature?"

"It is simply because demand outstrips supply," Joseph Parmuat said roaring with laughter. "You see, when one man marries seven women, he deprives another six of potential wives. It is that simple. Soon you will see Nasila men coming to your father's home to book the two of you for marriage!"

"Not us!" Taiyo and Resian said simultaneously. "We shall never allow it!" Taiyo added jokingly. "But why go fishing in shallow waters while the blue sea is teeming with fish? Advise Nasila men to go to Nakuru and other towns where girls cost a shilling for a dozen of them. There is an inordinate demand for men there."

Joseph Parmuat glanced at her enquiringly. He knew Taiyo had been trying to put a message across to him all the time during that evening, but he deliberately declined to take the cue. Any time she tried to look directly into his eyes, he slyly averted his and either turned and looked at Resian or looked across the distant plains and to the hill beyond.

His elusiveness did not however deter Taiyo. She had fallen in love with him and she knew without doubt that he too had. The only thing that stood between them was the archaic Nasila culture. And she did not give a

hoot about it. She therefore did not feel guilty whatsoever in pursuing the desire of her heart. The apparent chasm that separated them did not matter to her. Moreover, she told herself decidedly, if she visited him in his house and convinced him that they belonged to one another, they could always leave Nasila for another destination and life would continue without the bothersome Nasila culture.

Once she made up her mind, she set out to visit him in his house in the evening of the following day. She had never been to his house before, but he had pointed out to her where it was. She had also observed his routine. He would go to his house first after school to change into evening clothes, before coaching them in song and dance.

Joseph Parmuat's two roomed house was the first one in a row of blocks that had four such houses each. When she got to the door, she found it unlocked and pushed the door open. She peeped in.

"Joseph, are you in?" she called and hesitated for a moment before walking into the living room. "Joseph, where are you?"

Joseph Parmuat was not in the living room. She stood silently observing a room she had not seen before. Considering that the house belonged to a bachelor, she appreciatively thought it well arranged. In one corner stood a round table covered with a long fringed cloth and upon it was a tray on which a water jug and neatly

arranged glasses stood. There was another table at the centre of the room with four armchairs around it. In another corner, stood a sideboard upon which several framed photographs were set. Nearby, upon a coffee table, was a stove and a few spotlessly clean pots and other utensils. She thought the entire room was as tidy as the most virtuous housewife could ever have wished to find.

Curiosity and an inquisitive impulse made her slip into the next room, that was Joseph Parmuat's bedroom. That too, she found it neat and tidy. His bed was wide and was neatly made. It was covered in an exquisite blue bed cover and a pillow in a matching colour pillow case, lay at the headboard of the bed. The wall behind the bed was lined with shelves neatly packed with books. More books were stacked beside an armchair set comfortably beside the bed. Another sideboard stood at the corner of the bedroom. Upon its shiny surface, silver framed photographs of school children either singing or dancing, stood.

Then she picked the only photograph that was different. It was a picture of a tall, handsome, distinguished looking young man in a black suit and tie, looking out upon the world with a quizzical amusement. There was a hint of humour about the eyes on the wide face she had come to love. She was still scrutinising the picture when the soft closing of the door behind her

made her jump. Joseph Parmuat stood with a surprised look in his eyes.

"I'm so sorry for intruding into your house," Taiyo said her face with its usually brown complexion becoming ashamed with embarrassment. "It's okay," Joseph Parmuat replied, an inscrutable smile on his face. "This is your brother's house and you are welcome any time."

There was a fleeting moment of silence that drew her eyes to his face. He too lifted his eyes to hers, and for the briefest of seconds, the two pairs of eyes met and held.

"I felt a bit bored and I thought I could call on you so that we can walk back to our house ..." she stopped, swamped in confusion. Then she added quietly, "I am sorry. I suppose I really should not have come."

"Don't be ridiculous," he said still smiling. He dropped the bag he had carried onto the bed. "I have just been to the shops to purchase a few items before coming to your place."

There was another moment of silence in which neither of them moved.

"Joseph," she began eloquently. "There is need for us to talk about us."

"No, Taiyo, my dear sister," he protested vehemently. "There is no need for us to discuss matters we know are hurtful to us."

In silence she watched him as he took his velvet jacket hung behind the door and shrugged it onto his shoulders. "We may now go." He turned abruptly from her and began to walk quickly towards the door to the living room.

"Joseph!" The tone of her voice stopped him in his tracks. He stood for a moment, quite still, his back to her, his hand on the door handle, his wide shoulders slightly and defensively hunched before he slowly turned back to face her.

"Joseph," she called again her eyes searching his face. "Let us not pretend that the two of us are not hurting."

"What are we going to do?" he asked his heart in terrible agony from which, for that one moment he did not attempt to shield. "It is for you I fear my dear lady. Nasila culture is violently dangerous when its sensibilities are violated."

"I don't care," she shouted and lifted her chin sharply, feeling the rise of such a conflict of emotion in her heart, that for a moment she feared she might scream. "No, I don't care about the oppressive Nasila culture. Why should I care about violating the backward culture when it does not care when it violates my own rights? I know you are in love with me the way I am in love with you." She looked up at him and his tall figure blurred before her eyes. "Joseph, deny before me right now that you love me. Do it right now!" she said hysterically, her

voice too loud and out of control. The tears spilled hot down her cheeks. She did not bother to hide them or to brush them away.

Suddenly, Joseph Parmuat's heart was touched and he moved swiftly towards her. A single step took him to where she stood and he passionately took her into his arms. All control lost, she sobbed furiously, her body shaking, her head buried in his shoulder. His arm tightened about her while she felt his hand gentle in her hair. He was murmuring quiet soothing words that through the storm of her emotions meant nothing. The only thing that mattered and which she was aware of at that moment was the feel of his body against hers; its warmth and the brush of his crisp woolly hair against her cheek. She could not move. She pressed so close to him that she could hear the beating of his heart as if it were in her own body.

"No, Joseph," she said in an infantile whimper. "I can't bear that we can't express the love that we have for one another because of some primitive culture. If by loving you, I offend the sensibilities of Nasila then let me offend them and face the consequences of doing so!"

"I also love you, very much," Joseph Parmuat responded finally. "I loved you the moment I saw you during your father's homecoming ceremony. But then the clan matter came to separate us. It is true we have no blood relation. But Nasila culture dictates who are

related and who are not. We are slotted among those who cannot marry."

"No, it can't be, I cannot accept its verdict," she said petulantly her words agonised. "No way, never!" She stopped, confused and angry with herself at her inarticulate outburst. She took several long steadying breaths and then said, "I cannot accept that a culture that does not feed, clothe, or house me comes to control my life. Our lives belong to us, Joseph. The destiny of our lives is in our own hands. We should guard it jealously."

At last they drew a little apart. His eyes were open, honest and steady upon her face.

"I have also made up my mind, here and then," he said with exhilaration. He closed his eyes, took a deep slow breath and said with a trembling emotional voice. "I am too, ready to face any eventuality that may arise out of our love for one another."

"Thank you," she whispered and her tears began to overflow again. Her warm delicate fingers gripped his firmly as she said excitedly, "I knew all along that, you too couldn't throwaway something so special. I do not care what others might think. We knew it right from the beginning and we know it now that something so wonderful cannot be wrong. We must, however, initially be careful not to hurt others, especially *Papaai*, but eventually it will be inevitable that we reveal our love to everyone. After all, we cannot love in darkness forever, can we?" He said nothing to that.



When they later walked into the practice room they found Resian waiting for them, sitting as she always did hunched up in a chair, her nose determinedly buried in a book. If she detected anything strange with her sister and their adopted brother, she did not show.

Taiyo was exhilarated beyond words. She was simply in a seventh heaven. From the first day she saw Joseph Parmuat, during her father's homecoming ceremony, she had fallen in love with him instantly. She thought he was the incarnation, the very picture of her dreams. She recalled the way it happened. She had been standing there with her sister Resian, their eyes glued to the handsome, arrogantly athletic *morans* who cut such a dash, as they danced and shrieked boisterously. She was greatly attracted by the way they moved to the centre of the circle, and one by one or in pairs, jumped high up in the air in step with the guttural chants of the other *morans* as they heaved their chests forwards and backwards excitedly. One *moran* in particular caught her eye. He was unique among the rest in that he was dark-haired while the rest had smeared greasy red ochre into their hair. He was a tall lithe young man, who, when he got his chance to jump, leapt higher and with more grace than any of the others. She was immediately attracted to him and her gaze henceforth riveted upon him. The attraction translated into love. And from that day, she was besotted with that love.

Taiyo had won over Joseph Parmuat or so she thought. Ever since they relocated to Nasila, she considered herself to be in a war zone against the debilitating Nasila culture. It was a war of liberation of the Nasila woman. She knew there were many battle fronts in a war. Other combatants had come out to fight and all that was needed to win was strong leadership. She thought they already had that in the Minik ene Nkoitai, *the Emakererei*. She was in one of the fronts. How she burned with an ardent desire to join her one day. She was their role model. She was their inspiration.

Taiyo knew that the day her secret love to Joseph Parmuat became public knowledge, there would be angry reactions from the elders of Nasila. But she intended to defiantly stand her ground. But if the heat became unbearable, she concluded, they could always relocate to town and join what their mother, the other day, called people of an undefined culture, or what the Nasila people would call *ilmeekure-kishulare*.

Joseph Parmuat felt differently. When he went back to his house that evening after coaching the girls, something seemed to have changed dramatically. He recalled Taiyo's dazzling smile and the way her beauty filled him with enchantment. But the enchanting feeling seemed to have evaporated fast and in its place, his heart was now filled with a devastating feeling of hopelessness. There was a strange emptiness in him, a sort of

hollowness he had never experienced before. His heart was desolate like a deserted house.

He could not place the problem. He had won the heart of the girl he ardently admired. That should have filled his heart with exhilaration. Instead, it was filled with a frightening premonition.

Yes, he now knew. He was like a fish that had just jumped out of water in pursuit of one morsel, but was now finding itself unable to breathe and was on the verge of death. Yes, it had swallowed the morsel, but what good was it to its body if it died? It was now desperately trying to wriggle back into the water. Was the morsel worth the risk the fish had taken and nearly lost its dear life? The morsel was enticing, succulent and luscious, but was it worth dying for? Other morsels that did not require one to die for, were available in the water. They were equally succulent and luscious, although they may not be equally attractive and enticing. Did he have to abandon Nasila culture in exchange of a woman who sneered at its tenets? Was she one who could be tamed or was she like a wild donkey? Even if she could, how would he ever jump the hurdle of her status that negatively described her as being among *intoiye nemengalana*?

How about the complication brought about by the fact that she was a daughter of an Ilmolelian elder who was of Iloorasha-kineji like his own father and which made her his own sister? How would he ever go round

that? He considered running away from Nasila and its culture but that left a sour taste in his mouth. No, Nasila culture was too valuable to be abandoned. It gave him values. It gave him his identity. It gave him the latitudes within which to check his excesses and warned him when he went out of its confines. Yes, Nasila culture was the father and mother that brought up and nurtured its children to maturity. Nasila culture was too valuable and too important to be abandoned in exchange of a woman's love. But was Taiyo just another woman? He searched and searched his heart again. At the end, it was the wisdom of Maa that prevailed. Its founder had said a man could never run away from his clan and his age-set. He declined her love.

## CHAPTER TEN

Apprehension set in the hearts of Ole Kaelo and Mama Milanoi. The awaited day was here; Oloisudori was about to claim his prize. Since the day Oloisudori left, they had had sleepless nights. They turned the subject over and over, but they were yet to find a way out of the impending disaster. Ole Kaelo had therefore continued to bury his head in the sand like the proverbial ostrich with a hope that time might provide a solution. He hoped against hope that the Nasilian adage that said bad days receded while good days approached, would come true.

Although they had decided to conceal the information regarding Oloisudori's evil intention, Resian continued to be apprehensive. She had a premonition. She had become hyper sensitive about her future and the possibility of her enrolling as a student at the Egerton University. Fear had crept into her life and a small voice seemed to warn her of impending danger. She wondered at times whether she was hallucinating or she was seeing faceless persons lurking at every dark corner of their house, especially at night. Before they went to bed, she made sure she had double-checked the doors. Although she was not superstitious, a recent incident where a bird called *Olmultut* came to coo sorrowfully at their gate, worried her. Joseph Parmuat had told them that when the

bird cooed sorrowfully, it was always a harbinger of bad news. Its cry was always ominous.

It was different with Taiyo. Her mood was upbeat. Even her mother had noticed that in the last few days she had become extremely happy. She carried out her housekeeping duties while humming, whistling or singing loudly. What a wonderful daughter she had in Taiyo, her mother repeatedly thought happily, while observing the way she satisfactorily played her multiple roles as first-born daughter of the Kaelo family, sister to Resian, capable organiser in the home, ever present help as a housekeeper and a most cherished companion to her mother. Her mother thought her daughter's new found happiness was a welcome ray of sunshine in a home where gloom, and despondency had become a hallmark.

After procrastinating for quite some time, Ole Kaelo and his wife decided to seek help. Ole Kaelo would consult his friend and mentor, Ole Supeyo, while his wife would consult her *inkainito*, the wives of Simiren, Ole Kaelo's brother.

That morning's breakfast was taken in a sombre mood. Olarinkoi was the only one who did not seem to be preoccupied. His ubiquitous presence at every meal had now been accepted by everyone in the home. His silence and withdrawn nature nearly made him invisible, which was the opposite of Ole Kaelo whose presence dominated the room.

"*Yeiyo*, shall we prepare a meat stew or a vegetable stew to go with the rice for lunch?" asked Taiyo as they neared the end of the breakfast.

"No, don't prepare anything." We have asked Maison to organise lunch for you at the shop. Your father and I are going out for some business and we shall not be back until this evening."

Ole Kaelo shot a significant glance at his wife who, impervious, worked with neat dexterity at her crochet. He then turned and looked at Resian with a piteous mien. Resian observed that her father was troubled but she did not know the reason. She wondered if his troubles had anything to do with the business taking him away for the day.

Taiyo's happiness insulated her from any feelings. Her mind was preoccupied by a pleasurable expectation that seemed to drag the hours of the day. She eagerly looked forward to meeting Joseph Parmuat in the evening so that she could express to him the ecstatic feeling borne of their newly found love. The girls went to the shop where they were kept busy by Maison, the manager, who gave them stock bin cards, the records of which they were to reconcile with the physical stocks. They were delighted to find that he had prepared them a delicious lunch of *nyama choma* served with *ugali*.

At about three, they took their leave and set to go home. It was a hot afternoon and the heat was oppressive.

They, therefore, walked slowly, occasionally stopping under a shady tree to take a rest. They had just resumed their walk and were passing through a bushy area when Resian spotted two men eyeing them from behind a tree. She pointed them out to Taiyo who suggested that they walk on as probably they were harmless herdsmen.

After getting closer, they immediately recognised one of the men who accosted them on their first day in Nasila and later jeered at them on that occasion of the homecoming ceremony. They trembled as the two men stood grinning down at them.

The men came out to the road and blocked the girls' way. The bravery which might have enabled them to face the two vagabonds, fizzled out quickly when they saw the bulging muscles of their arms and the demonic determination in their eyes to harm them. Their fear was heightened by the heavy knobkerries that the two men brandished menacingly. One of them, got hold of Taiyo and tried to drag her into the bush while the other wrestled with Resian. The girls screamed and screamed as they scratched the men's faces with their sharp fingernails.

But that was the farthest they could go. What happened next, happened so fast that the assailants and the victims were dumbfounded. It was like a bolt of thunder in a clear cloudless day.

Suddenly and unexpectedly, a third man sprang out of the bushes like a ghost. He first went for the man



who was struggling with Resian on the ground. He seized the front of his shirt and coat and jerked him to his feet. He brought his right fist down in a powerful blow, lifting himself to his toes and putting the strength from his legs, back and arm behind his knuckles as they crushed into the man's nose and mouth. Blood exploded from the man's nose and mouth. He reeled across the road and slammed into a tree trunk with a force that shook the whole tree. He lay there motionless.

The stranger then took three quick steps and caught up with the man who had been dragging Taiyo into the bushes. The man tried to flee, but the stranger caught him by the collar of his coat and yanked him back. As he bounced back, the stranger drove his fist into the man's stomach and he doubled over. He then brought down his right fist and hit him on the side of his head. Blood splattered onto the ground. He too slumped on the ground writhing in pain.

It was then that the girls recognised their hero. It was Olarinkoi. He did not talk or look at them. He stood trembling with anger, breathing heavily, with his fists clenched and looking down at the men who lay in a heap. One of the men moved his limbs weakly and moaned hoarsely as thick, heavy streams of blood trickled from his nose and lips to the soil. Olarinkoi stepped forward, lifted his foot and kicked him viciously on the ribs. The man let out a loud yell and fell silent.

"That will teach them a lesson," Olarinkoi said. He pompously straightened the collar and the cuffs of his shirt and dusted its sleeves with his hand. "Now, go home girls."

Taiyo and Resian looked up at Olarinkoi gratefully. They could not find words to express their gratitude. It was only when he told them to go home that they collected themselves and began to walk. Although not injured, they were terribly shaken. They sobbed with rage and shame. The incident left a feeling of invasion and degradation. Their dresses were soiled and torn and one of Resian's breast ached from the vicious squeeze by one of the vagabonds.

When they got home, their parents had not returned. The girls still felt soiled and greasy. The stench on the men's sweaty filthy clothes and bodies still lingered in their nostrils and the feel of their rough hands still burned on their delicate skins. They took a bath and washed the dirty clothes.

They could never thank Olarinkoi adequately. They were lucky he had come at the nick of time. They could not imagine what would have happened to them had he not come at the very moment. One thing was certain: they would have been raped!

Later that night as they lay on their bed, each one of them was contemplative. Resian thought how hazardous it was to live in a society where men thought they had a right to every woman's body. The sooner she

left Nasila, she thought angrily, the better it would be for her.

Taiyo also seethed with fury. She thought the two vagabonds that accosted them were part of the tyrannical Nasila culture that did not respect women. The incident strengthened her resolve that she was a combatant in a war zone. She hoped she would one day team up with the *Emakererei* to fight for women and girl child rights.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

Taiyo and Resian tearfully and eagerly waited for the arrival of their parents. They burned to tell them of the traumatizing incident. They also wanted to tell them of Olarinkoi's unexpected arrival and his quick valorous action which had rescued them from rape. Indeed, the two were humbled by Olarinkoi's bravery and concern for their safety, especially when they recalled the way they had always ignored him and regarded him as good for nothing baggage.

Resian impressed upon her sister to use that incident to push their father to accept to let them go back to Nakuru and enroll at the Egerton University. Although the incident was unfortunate, she reasoned, it could convince him that Nasila was not a safe place. It was teeming with wolves, hyenas and crazy vagabonds. Had they been raped, his worry now would be whether his daughters had been infected with the HIV and AIDS. The fact that they were lucky that time round, she told her sister emphatically, did not mean the incident could not recur with disastrous consequences. The alternative, she concluded in jest, was for their father to engage Olarinkoi's services to guard them twenty-four hours a day.

Taiyo did not require a lot of persuasion that evening. She was equally, traumatized. She was still dazed and she had not stopped seeing the blurred figure

of that big-bodied hooligan zooming before her eyes as he tried to drag her into the bushes. She was determined to take the first available opportunity to persuade their father to let them return to Nakuru and enroll at the university. After all, she reasoned, both of them had attained the required qualifications and all they needed was the enrolment at the university and a sponsor.

Their parents looked tired, and aloof when they arrived home. Their father immediately removed his shoes, slumped into a chair and stared at the ceiling unblinkingly. Their mother went straight into their bedroom and did not come out. For reasons they did not know, Olarinkoi did not return after that afternoon's incident. Joseph Parmuat too did not turn up. The girls had to keep their horrific story, however urgent, to themselves until their parents had recovered from whatever was troubling them.

And they were truly troubled. Ole Kaelo's mission to Ole Supeyo had backfired. He had hoped, being his friend and mentor, to persuade him to take over all those stocks in his godowns that he had secured on the strength of those contracts that Oloisudori had enabled him sign with the parastatals. Had he accepted the arrangement and paid off all his liabilities to the banks, Ole Kaelo would have sneered at Oloisudori and told him to keep his hands off his daughter Resian. But Ole Supeyo had declined the offer effectively throwing him back to the hyena.

Mama Milanoi's mission did not fare any better. When she sought advice from her *inkainito*, regarding Oloisudori, they candidly responded that she and her husband were behaving like the proverbial greedy hyena that straddled two parallel paths with the ridiculous intention of reaching two destinations simultaneously so as not to miss the-meals in either places. It, however, died miserably without reaching any of the places. They accused them of being aloof and selective on the aspects of Nasila culture they chose to interact with.

They had challenged her to persuade Ole Kaelo to let the girls stay with them for a period of time and let them bond with the other children. If they did that, they told her, they would see the difference. The senior most wife of Simiren, *yeiyo-botorr*, said Mama Milanoi might be surprised to find the girls asking to be circumcised without any coercion.

She had said she would take the challenge. But when Mama Milanoi found her husband devastated by whatever he was told by Ole Supeyo, she was not able to broach the subject.

When the girls got up the following morning their hearts were still heavy and the gloomy atmosphere of the previous night still hung in the air like a dark cloud. Nature seemed to be in agreement with the depressing atmosphere, as a thick mist clouded the distant hills to the east, blocking the usually radiant sunshine from pouring into their living room. But their

mother's mood was completely different. Her previous night's taciturnity had turned into loquacity.

When their father later turned up for breakfast, he was edgy and his eyes were shifty. It was only when they told him what had befallen them the previous day that he was shocked back to his senses. He got agitated and angrily gnashed his teeth. He hit the table top with his clenched fist, rattling the crockery on it. He shouted in a thunderous booming voice saying an assault on his daughters was not only an affront to him personally that he could not tolerate but a threat to the security of his children and home that he could never ever allow to surface as long as he lived. Getting up suddenly, he briskly walked back to their bedroom. Their mother who was equally shocked and angered by the depressing news, followed her husband. The girls were left there crestfallen. Despondency and downheartedness alternated in their young hearts wreaking untold havoc in their already troubled lives.

Melancholy turned into fear when the girls saw their father re-emerge from the bedroom armed with a sword and knobkerrie. His eyes glittered with fury and his face turned ashen with combat. His mouth frothed and trembled as he murmured expletives. With long angry strides, he walked out of the house in a huff banging the door behind him. The girls were left wringing their hands and biting their fingernails with grief and apprehension.

When their mother eventually told them what she wanted them to do, the girls found that the quick succession of events that culminated in their father angrily storming out of the house, had taken away their fighting spirit. They readily accepted that they needed a change of scene, if only temporarily. With their mother promising that in their absence she would try to convince their father to allow them to go back to Nakuru and enroll as students at the Egerton University, she nipped in the bud any opposition that Resian might have raised. She told them she wanted them to move into their uncle Simiren's home and live with them for sometime so that they could get to know them well, as well as to know other people who lived in the neighbourhood. She repeatedly assured them that there was nothing sinister in the offing. As their loving mother, she told them reassuringly, she only wanted the best for them.

By noon, Taiyo and Resian had packed their suitcases and they were on their way to their uncle's home. They were most surprised by the warm reception that they received and when neighbours heard that Ole Kaelo's daughters had come to live with their aunts, cousins and their other relatives, they streamed into Simiren's homestead, and like that first day when they arrived into Nasila, there was a celebration mood in the air. They were greeted by so many cheerful people who shouted and hooted excitedly that they nearly got confused. This sharply contrasted with the gloomy



atmosphere that they left behind in their home and for that they were appreciative.

Seeing the hearty welcome, the girls wholeheartedly plunged into that life with adventure in their hearts. With renewed interests and fresh feeling of affinity, they observed the life at Simiren's home.

Life and work in that home was communal. Although each mother had her house and cooked her own food, all grown up daughters helped each one of them, to bring in water, firewood, and assisted in the actual cooking. Those mothers who were incapacitated by pregnancy, as two of them were at that time, received most help as the grown-up daughters were posted to their houses nearly permanently.

The most senior mother of the house, *yeiyo-botorr*, could be said to have had patriarchal authority that neared that of Simiren, because she deputed him in the home. Whereas Simiren took care of weightier matters of the family such as the animal husbandry, trade and the sources of *food*, *yeiyo-botorr* took off his shoulders all matters of administration in the homestead. Hardly were there any disagreements on that front. When disputes arose they were speedily and amicably settled.

The girls were housed by *yeiyo-kiti*. It was in there that they slept on that first day when they arrived from Nakuru. They occupied the same bedroom and slept in the same comfortable and warm bed.

They quickly bonded with her, for they found her closer to them both in age and thinking. She was modern, judging by the standard of that home. They also found her amicable, kind-hearted and understanding. It was a joy staying in her house.

It did not take long before Taiyo and Resian got used to the tempo of life in their uncle's home. Within that short period, they had learnt quite a lot. They could now tell how easy it was to stereotype the Nasila culture by highlighting the negative aspects while ignoring the positive ones. In their uncle's home, they learnt basic truths of Nasila culture and the day to day life that they would have never been taught by anybody anywhere.

They learnt with a lot of interest and excitement that to be able to fit into their uncle's home, one had to be selfless. That was inevitably so because in that home, everything was shared. In no time, the girls found themselves sharing with everyone else in that home, love, news, happiness, sorrows, experiences, time, lotion, combs, work and anything else that could be shared. They gave and they received in equal measure. They experienced children being taught, right from infancy, to be mindful of others and be respectful to seniors. They were taught to shun such negative attributes as selfishness.

Other than the old women, like *Kokoo-o-Sein*, who lived in a hut adjacent to Simiren's homestead, and who told riveting stories to children in her hut every

evening, there was no formal learning of Nasila culture. *Olkuak* was the way of life. *Olkuak* was culture the young learnt from the old. If one wanted to belong, he or she had to take all its aspects in stride.

In school, the girls recalled learning that culture was the advance development of the human mind and body by training and experience. What they were now learning in that home was that Nasila culture was part of the larger Maa culture. And that elders defined it as the way of life of Maa people. It was *Olkuak le Maa*. It comprised their beliefs, their social institutions, and all their characteristics as a people. Any new way that went contrary to that established norm was considered to be against the Maa culture.

With the introduction of formal education, Resian thought, she could now understand the origin of a contradiction that existed in the minds of Nasila people. She could now see that although parents in Nasila wanted their children educated, they also feared the influence of that education, and rightly so. They must have found soon that the brightest of their sons, such as their own father who pursued education out of Nasila, soon got alienated and hardly came back home.

Yes, it was the value systems that the new education introduced, that violently shook the foundation of Nasila culture. The quest for the new education was, however irrepressible, and its gains invaluable so much that it was now Nasila culture that was grappling with

the changed it brought. And the changes were not only subtle but insidious, threatening an explosion in the not too distant future.

Their yeiyo-kiti told them that she had been observing a new trend that other people might have ignored. A few of those Nasila sons and daughters who had emigrated to towns, were now slowly returning to settle in the rural areas. She gave the example of their own father, Minik ene Nkoitoi the *Emakerereei*, Reteti Korema, Setek Tumbes and a few others. Depending on how successful their return would be, she said, they might influence other people in towns to follow suit on finding that life in the rural areas could be meaningful and bearable.

The girls were excited to learn that their yeiyo-kiti was known to their role model, Minik-ene Nkoitoi, the *Emakerereei*. She told them they originated from the same village called Mbenek Dapashi and they went to the same primary school. But being four years older, Minik left her behind when she passed her examination and was called to join high school away from their village. Years later after she was married, she learnt that Minik had gone to Makerere University where she studied veterinary medicine and acquired the name of *Emakerereei*.

They were very interested in *Emakerereei's* story for in her story, they saw themselves. "Was she circumcised?" they asked their yeiyo-kiti mischievously.

*Yeiyo-kiti* dodged the question a little by busying herself with some tasks in her kitchen where they sat. The crackling of the fire had stopped and only the smoldering log called *ologol* still glowed, with the charcoal on it winking and twinkling weakly in the darkening room.

"I am not certain about that," she said smilingly at last.

"I must say I admire *Emakererei*," Resian said happily. "She seems to be a courageous woman who firmly opposes what she considers wrong without caring whether she rubs the men of culture the wrong way. Many women would not dare go against the grain. I would definitely want to be like her."

"So would I," Taiyo said. "We hope to join her soon. And when we do, Nasila will have the Kaelo's daughters to reckon with!"

Later in the afternoon as they walked down to Nasila river to draw water, Taiyo and Resian revisited their discussion with *Yeiyo-Kiti*. They also gave thought to Minik ene Nkoitoi, the *Emakererei*. They admired her gallant fight against intransigent positions held by men on women. The fight she was spearheading would inevitably eradicate all those oppressive edicts and still leave the Nasila culture intact.

"Can you imagine the fury of the fathers whose five hundred girls she has snatched?" Resian asked excitedly. "I can see them grudgingly returning the

bride-price that they had received." "It is no wonder they hate her with a passion," said Taiyo equally excited.

They were silent as they climbed the hill on their way back from Nasila river to draw water. The water containers that they carried on their backs were now heavy. The straps that supported the containers pressed down their heads with a painful exhaustion.

As they walked, each one of them allowed her mind to fleetingly roam the fanciful land of wishful thinking. Resian thought how wonderful it would be, had she had a chance to enroll at the Egerton University and after graduation had a chance to work with her role model, Minik ene Nkoitai, the *Emakererei* at the sheep ranch that she managed. She imagined herself already there driving a large flock of sheep. And when she thought of sheep, her mind flew back to fifteen years or so earlier and reminisced the first time she saw a sheep. It was a childhood memory, a memorable picture from the swirling scene around her which had been captured and preserved by her mind when she and Taiyo accompanied their father to the Nakuru Agricultural Show. She could still see in her mind a group of big, docile, tawny woolly animals that stood panting drowsily in a green pasture, with the sun beaming down brightly from a clear blue sky. She had then admired the white long overcoats that the handlers wore.

Taiyo also thought of *Emakererei*. She would ask Joseph Parmuat, to assist her compose a song in her

praise. She had already put words to a tune she had composed to ridicule the three women who she thought collaborated with men to oppress the women folk. They were Nasila's three blind mice who, she thought, did not seem to know that the world was changing. Those were the *enkasakutoni*, who threatened to curse *intoiye nemengalana* and ensured they did not get husbands nor children; the midwife *enkaitoyoni* who threatened to spy on the young women as they gave birth to ensure that any who was still among *intoiye-nemengalana* had her status altered there and then; and the dreaded *Enkamuratani*, who would never tire of wielding her *olmurunya* menacingly. She sang the song silently in her heart and a smile lighted her face.

*Ndero uni modok*, - Three blind mice,

*Tenidol eipirri* - If you see the way they run,

*Nemirr entasat naata olalem*. - One chasing a woman with a knife,

*Olalem okordiloki enhashurr* - A knife that was crooked in its sheath,

*Eitu aikata adol ina kingasia* - I have never seen such wonder,

*Naijo Ndero uni modok*. - Like those displayed by the three blind mice.

After breakfast, on one of the days, Taiyo and Resian received a message from their parents, asking them to go back home. Their stay in that homestead had

been so enjoyable and refreshing that they were reluctant to end it. However, they could not defy their parents' order and they began to prepare for their departure.

The following day was a special day. Directed by yeiyo-botorr, the entire family ate together. On such days, food was prepared, cooked and rare delicacies served in her house. No child, under whatever circumstance, would have wanted to be absent from *Yeiyo-botorr's* house on such a day, they loved the special meals.

In uncle Simeren's home favoritism was never allowed. It was an offence to pretend to be a favourite child. If that was detected, the child was always shunned by the others. It was only *Yeiyo-botorr*, who occupied a special position in the home, who received favour from her husband without anyone frowning.

If an animal was to be slaughtered, it was done in *yeiyo-botorr's* house where the first share of meat was cooked or roasted and eaten by the whole family together, and the rest was shared out equally to all the houses. Similarly, when shopping was done in bulk, it was first brought to yeiyo-botorr's house from where it was shared equally to the rest of the houses.

On that particular day, two he-goats had been slaughtered and *Yeiyo-botorr* gave instructions as to which pieces of meat were to be fried, which ones were to be stewed and which ones were to be reserved for roasting. *Yeiyo-kiti* was a specialist in making sausages out of the tripe and the small intestines. She was already



busy cleaning them and making them ready to be stuffed with the already chopped cooked meat.

It was when Taiyo and Resian went into *yeiyo-botorr's* house, where all the children were seated together with their mothers and uncle Simiren, that they were surprised to find their parents present. Apart from being totally unexpected, their visit was an anticlimax of some sort, coming at the time when they were really enjoying themselves.

Later in the evening, when the children of the four houses learnt that their sisters whom they had come to love so much had to go back to their home, they all cried without restraint.

But what awaited them at their home, only their parents knew. However, Resian felt apprehensive when on more than one occasions, her father glanced at her furtively. In the past she had got used to her father glaring at her with disapproval but she thought the sheepish look in his eyes was frightening and only time would tell what it portended.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

When Ole Kaelo heard of his daughters near-rape incident, he was so incensed that he was hopping mad. He was raving mad like a buffalo that had been infected with the east coast fever that was known as *olmilo*. He was aggressively spoiling for a fight. Every now and then he groaned loudly like one in pain and clicked his tongue. Like a madman, he muttered to himself, making nasty waspish remarks.

He stopped any man he met on the way and gave a harangue on the corruption of Nasila morals, to an extent that his innocent defenceless daughters could be beastly attacked by deranged morons in broad daylight. The bitter and emotional invectives, he angrily uttered, had provoked and incited so many young men, especially of Ilmolelian clan, that by the time he reached his destination, the school where Joseph Parmuat taught, twenty or so young men armed to the teeth had joined him and were now furiously baying for the blood of whoever attacked his children.

"What are you doing here?" Ole Kaelo charged angrily and thunderously at Joseph Parmuat. "Must you teach other people's children when your own sisters have been devoured by hyenas?"

"Oh, my God!" gasped Joseph Parmuat with shock "What has happened, my dear father?"

Tremblingly, Ole Kaelo gave him a brief explanation of what had happened to his daughters. He said by sheer mercy of God, Olarinkoi happened by coincidence to have been passing by, and saved the girls from molestation and possible sexual abuse. By the time he finished explaining, Joseph Parmuat was so agitated that he too was trembling with anger like the *olourrurr tree* under a turbulent gale. He considered the disturbing news to be an emergency.

Striding swiftly to where a gong hung from a frame, he took a metal rod beside it and repeatedly struck it, forcefully giving it a deep ringing sound. The deep sorrowful sound sent panic-stricken children streaming out of their classes to the assembly line. The teachers had taught them over the years that the ordinary school bell was for announcing the commencement and the ending of classes. But the sounding of the gong either meant that the matter to be announced was too dangerous and therefore required prompt evacuation, or too urgent that it could not wait to be announced at the end of the day. They had been taught that on hearing the gong they were to instantly abandon everything they were doing and immediately run to the assembly line. And when they came out running, they were struck by fear when they saw many young armed men suggesting that danger was looming dangerously in the air. Their eyes dilated and they squirmed with fear when they saw the tall muscular man, whom they had known to own the

biggest shop in Nasila, trembling and with froth oozing from the corners of his mouth. His razor-sharp weapon glittered dangerously in the morning sunshine.

Joseph Parmuat loudly called out the names of the boys from the Ilmolelian clan and told the rest to go back into their classes. He then instructed the Ilmolelian boys to immediately go home and tell their elder brothers and their fathers that there was an urgent meeting of the clan that they were required to attend immediately and without fail at *oerata* plain.

As soon as the boys were dispatched, those present immediately put their heads together and made enquiries amongst themselves as to who could be the possible suspected culprits. Olarinkoi, who would have told them who the vagabonds were, was nowhere to be found. He had vanished into thin air immediately after rescuing the girls. At the end of their deliberation, they had come up with a list of suspects.

When the larger group arrived, the meeting began in earnest. Speaker after speaker spoke, each one of them whipping up the emotions for the others. When after a long deliberation it was eventually concluded that the culprits were none other than Lante son of Kanyira of Ilukumae clan, and Ntara son of Muyo, also of Ilukumae clan, the die was cast. It was said that the Ilukumae clan had a grudge against Ilmolelian, and the action of the two vagabonds was nothing but a smoke screen that hid the real intention of the Ilukumae. They said, all recent

provocations showed the disrespect and contempt in which they regarded the Ilmolelian. They even thought the provocative and scornful action of the two vagabonds was a gauntlet that was thrown at their feet by the Ilukumae men who were daring them to pick it. Instances in the past, were given, when the same Ilukumae had provoked them but when they had ignored them, the Ilukumae had construed that to be a sign of weakness or cowardice.

After enumerating all the evil that was purportedly visited upon Ilmolelian by the Ilukumae, it was decided there and then that a decisive action be taken at once to stem out further provocation by the Ilukumae. It was imperative, they declared, that they retaliated with such vindictive force, so as to show the Ilukumae, that Ilmolelian were not their whipping boys. And the beginning point, they declared angrily, was the hunting down of the two men who accosted the daughters of Ole Kaelo.

Later that evening a battle cry was sounded. The Ilmolelian young and old men who were still strong enough to fight and their sympathizers from Ilmakesen clan who were their distant cousins, came out fully armed and formed enkitungat, which was an ad hoc group of warriors that was specifically formed to hunt down the two vagabonds. It was an abrasive group that was instructed to be deliberately aggressive and corrosively provocative when dealing with any member

of Ilukumae clan so as to annoy them and provoke them to engage them in battle.

The search for the two vagabonds was intense and thorough. There were thirty angry men thoroughly combing the bushes. They remained constantly on the alert as they proceeded swiftly but with caution, their eyes on the ground looking for the two men's footprints. Ole Kaelo panted with exhaustion, but he soldiered on, the anger that still burned in his heart energizing his legs. Joseph Parmuat followed him closely, to ensure the old man was safe, for he knew he was not used to walking in the harsh terrain.

Now and again, the footprints of the two men would be spotted on the ground, sending the hunters wild with renewed vigour and vindictive determination to find the evil men and avenge the atrocities visited upon the Ilmolelian clan by the Ilukumae clan in general, and the evil and immoral act that the two villains had visited upon the two daughters of Ole Kaelo in particular.

They soon reached an area of rolling hills and wide open stretches of low Olosiro undergrowth. To avoid being seen by the two fleeing vagabonds, the men had to stay under the cover of trees and skirt around the open space.

The men had just topped a hilly rise and had started trotting down the other side, when two old men walking along a path from the direction they were facing became visible in the distance. One was tall and heavysset,

with his blanket roll hanging from his shoulder, his knobkerry and spear held in one hand while the other held a walking stick. The shorter one wore a long overcoat over a red *shuka* that protruded below it at the knee. Large blue beads hung down his extended earlobes and swayed in constant motion as he walked. They conversed animatedly as they walked leisurely.

Ole Kaelo was looking at the two old men when three or four green-breasted birds called *ilkasero* flashed through the air and perched in a bush further back in the trees. Then they fluttered their wings rapidly and flared away from the bush. Ole Kaelo turned his head slightly and looked absently at the bush. There seemed to be something strange. He suddenly stiffened and his eyes widened. He thought he saw a shadowy figure in the trees. He peered once again, and confirmed that it was a man on a tree. He was completely motionless and invisible against the mottled pattern of the ground and foliage. Then there was a slight flowing movement and a couple of leaves on the lower branch of the bush stirred slightly as though a breath of wind had touched them; then the man was gone, disappearing instantly behind a tree.

Ole Kaelo's eyes riveted on the tree almost missed another movement. A dusky shadow flicked from another tree to an adjacent one in the space of time it took his eyes to blink. He looked from the first tree to the second, still not very sure he had seen people and not

monkeys. Then there was a sinuous movement along the ground by the second tree as the man there disappeared into another bush.

The other men got interested with what Ole Kaelo was studying and they stealthily began to encircle the trees where the men hid. By then, there was an open space of about fifteen or so metres between the trees in which the two men hid. Two old men advanced towards the group.

Suddenly and without warning, the two men darted from the bushes in a lightning speed across the open space. The thirty men together with Ole Kaelo and Joseph Parmuat sprinted murderously from the bushes and hotly pursued the two with their weapons high up in the air ready to strike deadly blows.

The two old men walking towards the group saw the thirty armed men running towards them with swords and knobkerries, and got alarmed. They stopped and stared confusedly. The happenings dawned on them when the young men, who seemed to be fleeing from mortal danger, fell at their feet and hugged their legs pleading for intercession. When the old men hesitated, the two cried more, pushing themselves underneath the old men's clothing between their legs. But before any pleading could take place, they had been clobbered and were bleeding profusely.

*"Aatulutoiye, Papaai!"* one young man fearfully pleaded.



*"Aatasaiyia tomituoki siake!"* the other cried out passionately.

The men were eventually spared. According to Nasila culture, a man who pleaded for mercy and fearfully hid his head between the legs of an old man, no matter what crime he had committed, always had his life spared. They were, however, roughed up and made to undergo intense interrogation.

Joseph Parmuat slapped and kicked them several times before they involuntarily gave all the details that were demanded from them. Parmuat thought he owed it to the two girls to avenge their torment and the embarrassment they had received from the shameless would-be-rapists and vagabonds. Ole Kaelo too, slapped and kicked the two men to avenge the shameful act that the two brutes had visited upon his daughters.

It was during the interrogation that a queer revelation surfaced. One of the vagabonds, although he was of Ilukumae clan, was related to Taiyo and Resian. Ntara Muyo was their first cousin. He was a son of Mama Milanoi's sister who was married to Muyo, an elder of Ilukumae. On learning that, Joseph Parmuat was most embarrassed. Although he was of Ilmolelian clan of Iloorasha-Kineji sub clan, he was not as closely related to the girls as that vagabond was. Ole Kaelo too was flabbergasted. He was, however, grateful that a major disaster had been averted, for had he caused the death of

that young man, he would have brought upon himself a curse that could not be easily cleansed.

And that revelation spared the Nasila people a blood-bath. The anticipated battle between Ilmolelian and the Ilukumae clans was averted by the shameful revelation. An elaborate cleansing ceremony was planned and the Ilukumae clan were to compensate Ole Kaelo for the trauma he had undergone. Ntara Muyo was to give a heifer each to Taiyo and Resian and an extra heifer to erase the shame that was brought about by the offence and restore the respect for which a brother and his sisters regarded one another. Lante son of Kanyira was to pay two heifers.

Mama Milanoi thought that the offence her nephew committed was inexcusable, especially now that it had introduced tripartite complications that involved her father's clan of Ilmakesen, her husband's clan of Ilmolelian, and now the young man's father, Ole Mayo's clan of Ilukumae.

Although she did not consider herself irascible, the offence the young man had committed against his cousins incensed her so much that at times she thought she was becoming irrational. At one extreme point of her irrationality, she had found herself wishing that the rascal had been clobbered to death on that day he was cornered. But when reason prevailed upon her, she discarded her intransigent view that the young man was

an incorrigible criminal whose only remedy was elimination.

Mama Milanoi began to see the wisdom of the Maa founder who ensured that justice was always tempered with mercy. It was that tenet of Nasila culture, she thought, that gave that villain son of her sister and his criminal friend a second chance to live when they tucked their heads between the protective legs of the two old men. Like chicks that tucked their heads under the protective wing of their mother when a hawk appeared in the sky, so did they find protection in the indispensable Nasila culture. And who could tell? The young men, now that they had been given a second chance, could develop virtues such as loyalty and truthfulness and live to be respected elders of Maa.

When her husband joined her, she was surprised to find his mind more liberal. He said he regretted his earlier views that an offence committed by an individual was committed on behalf of the clan the individual belonged to, and therefore, the entire clan became culpable and collectively punishable.

When calm returned and there was a conducive atmosphere for discussion, Ole Kaelo thought it was time they revisited issues pertaining to Oloisudori's impending visit. He knew how relentless and pertinacious the demonic man was. No amount of persuasion would change his mind about Resian. Two days earlier he had received a message from him saying

he was delaying the visit for another month to allow time to put finishing touches to the house where his bride would be accommodated.

Before discussing Oloisudori's issue, Ole Kaelo thought it better to touch on a matter that was less controversial. He told his wife about the meeting and the verdict of the council of elders that met to deliberate upon the case. The two boys had been fined two heifers each with Mama Milanoi's nephew, Ntara Muyo, being fined an extra heifer to cover the shame that he had occasioned by accosting his own sister. In addition, Ntara Muyo had been banished from ever stepping into Ole Kaelo's home or having anything to do with his daughters for the rest of his life. To mollify his wife's feeling, knowing the attack was carried out by her nephew, Ole Kaelo said he would give back the three heifers Ole Muyo was to pay on behalf of his son, as a peace offering - to cement their families relations. That done, peace returned in earnest.

But Oloisudori's impending visit continued to gnaw at them. The mere thought of the visit brought a nasty twinge of conscience in his heart. What Oloisudori saw in their daughter Resian, he simply could not understand. Truly even as a father, he could see that his daughter's body was blossoming like the body of any other girl at her age but, he thought there was nothing spectacular in her body that was so much at odds with her plain and unremarkable face. He had to admit that if

it were not for his reputation and the age factor, Oloisudori would have been the perfect match for that sullen and hardheaded daughter of his. After all Oloisudori was not just any other suitor. He was a man of substance and a man of property. Ole Kaelo began to warm up to the idea that Oloisudori could, after all, be a son-in-law. Where else would he ever get such a business offer as the one Oloisudori had offered him, and for what a price? When all but one road was closed to a protagonist, however, narrow that one road was, the protagonist had to squeeze through it especially if that road was a matter of life and death. To lose his business premises, lose all those stocks and possibly lose his only dwelling, was to him a matter of life and death. To survive, he realised with finality, he had to change his attitude towards Oloisudori; he had to embrace him.

He began to rationalize all matters pertaining to Oloisudori. He thought of the disquieting matter of his reputation. He thought it was all hearsay; probably vague gossip or pure nonsense. He concluded that those lies about Oloisudori were being bandied about by enemies of his development. The six wives the man was said to be married to, were daughters of men like him. There was therefore, nothing wrong with his daughter being the wife of Oloisudori. Who else could have made it possible for him to sign those lucrative contracts other than Oloisudori who, as it now transpired, did it purely to win his daughter hand? If his daughter Resian

abandoned her *olkuenyi* and accepted to be married to Oloisudori, he told himself, she would soon have her own establishment and a wealthy husband who had much ambition. But, even with all those pleasurable convictions, the mention of Oloisudori's name brought a wry twist to Ole Kaelo's lips.

Once convinced, Ole Kaelo also persuaded his wife that all what remained for them to do was find an agreeable and amicable way of handing Resian to Oloisudori.

The return of Taiyo and Resian brought back life to the nearly desolate home. Excited laughter and exchange of bantering remarks returned in earnest. They were elated at having visited their uncle's home and they hoped to continue and maintain the established relationship.

Their mother told them of the vagabond saga; one of the apprehended villains Ntara Muyo, was their cousin. He was a son to one of her sisters, married to an Ilukumae man called Muyo. When she told them of the council of elders' verdict and the number of cattle each villain had to pay as a fine, Resian hit the roof with indignation.

"No, never!" she thundered angrily, "*Yeiyo*, that can't be. The thugs must be arrested and taken to court so that they go to jail. The least they should get is twenty-years jail term."

"I agree entirely with Resian," Taiyo said emphatically "Our trauma cannot be appeased by a mere two heifers while the villains are walking freely. Who knows, they could even right now be stalking another pair of young innocent girls. Surely, *Yeiyo?*"

The angry girls complained tearfully. Their mother thought they were being petulant and she did everything she could to allay their fears and calm their nerves.

The surface ripples caused by the incident passed away within the next few days. Mama Milanoi had her say in the matter and expressed her gratification for having been able to stem the tide of rebellion within the girls hearts. She did not doubt that Resian was capable of carrying out the threat, and she feared if that happened, new deadly battle fronts would be opened. For one, the fragile truce that had been established between Ilmolelian and Ilukumae clans would flare up afresh. The two, the Kaelos and the Kuyos, would battle afresh, while she would be seen to wrestle her own sister to the ground as the entire next conflict pitted them against one another.

Although the ripples had calmed down, below the surface was a longer lasting effect from the incident, and the way it had been resolved. There was another subtle shift in the relationship between the girls and their mother. The girls ties and the bonding with their uncle's family could not be concealed. The result was a

strengthening of their independence and a diminishing of their parents authority over them. The change in the relationship between Resian and her father was less subtle. It appeared that her father became aware of the possibility of a serious rift between him and his daughter, and apparently went to greater pains to make himself more congenial. She was still moody and sullen at times but ever since they began interacting with their uncle's family, she was consistently more amicable. However, their mother still found Resian's attitude to life unpredictable and her daughter's grasp of her personality remained vague.

One pleasant thing the girls noticed when they began interacting freely with Nasila people, was that the men began to treat them differently. There Were no more impudent stares and grins when they walked past them. One or two surreptitiously stared or watched from the distance, but when they passed near them, they were greeted with respect. Some of the younger men grinned and spoke in a friendly manner mixed with admiration. But the older men regarded them with a friendly and almost fatherly attitude. The girls had never been happier. A feeling of involvement developed as they came to know more people in Nasila.

Little did they know it was a lull before a turbulent storm.



## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Edward Oloisudori Loonkiyaa had ambushed them again. He had promised to go for Resian in two weeks but he abruptly changed his mind; he would pick her up the following day. He was going to be accompanied by three important friends and he specifically wanted Resian to cook for them.

The message sent panic into the hearts of Ole Kaelo and his wife. They had been dilly dallying for a long time unable to find the best way to approach Resian and break the news to her. At last, their procrastination had caught up with them.

Taiyo and Resian had been to the practice room where Joseph Parmuat had been coaching Taiyo in song and dance. Resian had sat reading. At the end of the coaching, Taiyo had gone straight to the bathroom to take a shower and change. Resian sauntered into the living room where her parents sat in the overstuffed armchairs set in the corner near a warm charcoal brazier. Her father was reading an old newspaper which he set aside when she entered.

*"Ne-yeiyo-ai nanyorr"* he called her pleasantly, his voice warm and cordial.

*"Yeoo,"* she answered, greatly surprised by her father's use of the pleasant diminutive reserved only for the person one loved very much. The determinedly pleasant tone raised an eyebrow.

"How was your day, my dear child?" he asked a broad smile lighting his face.

"It was fine, *Papaai*," she answered a little confused. "Taiyo and I went to *Yeiyo-botorr's* garden and helped her weed her potatoes."

"Wonderful," he roared with a warm friendly laughter, "so you can now weed, eh?"

"Of course yes, *Papaai*," Resian answered apprehensively. She pushed her hands into the pockets of her skirt and hunched her shoulders defensively. As long as she could remember, her father had never taken the slightest interest in anything she had said or done, except to criticise or rebuke her. That conversation was making her suspicious and uneasy.

"I know you are a wonderful cook and an efficient housekeeper," her father said unexpectedly, his eyes glittering in unexplained excitement. "Now that you are able to take care of a farm, I am proud to say I have got a daughter who is an all rounder, who is able to take care of her own establishment."

"Thank you, *Papaai*, for the compliment," said Resian sheepishly, too embarrassed at being the focus of attention. Absent-mindedly she added, "Tomorrow we shall be assisting *Yeiyo-kiti* to plaster her kitchen."

"No, not tomorrow, Resian," her father answered emphatically, his tone suddenly hardening. He withdrew behind the wings of his chair the way a tortoise withdraws into its shell. "Tomorrow, I would like you to

remain here at home and help your mother prepare lunch for some visitors."

"Visitors?" Resian asked, surprised.

"Yes, Oloisudori is coming for lunch," her father said evenly as if to show there was nothing special about him, "I was going to ask Taiyo to stay and help your mother, but it seems as if you had impressed Oloisudori so much the last time he was here, that he particularly asked that you be here to receive him and his party. It is good to be impressive, isn't it, eh?"

Resian did not respond. The long moment of appalled silence was so dense that it was suffocating. It was ominously pregnant and Resian was amazed to see her mother sit quietly as if nothing was happening.

"Must I be there, *Papaai*?" Resian asked desperately. "Surely, *Yeiyo* can manage on her own. Isn't it *Yeiyo*?"

"You have to be there, Resian!" her father thundered with finality. "It is important to me that you be there."

"But, *papaai*, please ... "

"I have said you have to stay at home tomorrow and help your mother with the preparation of the lunch," he growled, the familiar edge of ill-temper showing in his voice, but his eyes avoided hers. "There is an end to all this nonsense!"

"I have never served such important people, *Papaai*," she once again said pleadingly. "And you know

I get nervous when I am forced into such a situation." "You must learn to get used to such situations!" he shouted angrily and glared at her with such distaste that Resian stepped back from him, biting her lip. His voice was cold as he added acidly. "What kind of a wife will you make if you don't take time to learn the social graces?"

"*Papaai, siake,*" she made a last attempt to plead to her father's inner feelings. She hesitated for a while and then plunged headlong. "I can't just stand Oloisudori. He is like a monster and he frightens me ... "

"Enough of that," her father ordered angrily, "and now get out of my sight. But remember to be there tomorrow. And you must stem out that argumentative attitude that is creeping into you. Now go!"

With a clenched right fist, he forcefully hit his open left palm, his eyes fierce with anger. But right inside his heart he knew his anger was coupled with something else. It had some edge of guilt on his part. It was also bewildering and frightening. Even more frightening was to hear her call Oloisudori a monster. It was simply dreadful!

As she hurriedly left the living room, Resian staggered and caught her foot under the leg of a chair. Her father's lips tightened and he glared at her saying nothing. Blindly, she walked out into the outer hall, through the front door, down the steps, and right to the garden. Her jaw was clenched, her lower lip caught

painfully between her teeth. Why, in God's name, she asked herself, did Oloisudori have to insist that she must be there when he and his friends ate their lunch? She shook her head fiercely. She could not do it, she would not do it, she declared.

She walked to an *oloponi* tree at the centre of the garden. Finding a log underneath it, she sank down on it her shoulders drooping, her knees drawn to her breasts and her arms folded upon them. She sat so for a long time, shivering in the gnawing cold, staring into the darkness. In a helpless gesture of unhappiness she bowed her head, resting her forehead on her arms, and went into serious reflection on what her father was forcing her to do.

She did not believe him when he said Oloisudori had chosen her over Taiyo, to prepare lunch for him. She did not believe that. She knew her father despised her ever since she was young. She wondered what he disliked so much about her. Was it her fault? Her father would never provoke Taiyo the way he constantly provoked her. He would never rebuke, scold or ridicule Taiyo the way he repeatedly did it to her. She thought he was now going a step further to make her an adjunct to his enterprise whose only purpose was to entertain his business associates, such as Oloisudori and his friends. Had her father respected her feelings, he would have listened to her when she said she did not like Oloisudori.

She wondered why he was still insistent that she must be there, even after giving her reasons.

It was Taiyo who went to get her sister in the garden.

"Resian, for heaven's sake, what are you doing here?" she rebuked her sternly when she found her hunched up in the dark. "It is so cold out here. Look at you, you are shivering!"

"I was about to come in," Resian said demurely.

"Stupid thing!" Taiyo snapped. "Imagine coming out here without a pullover. Honestly, Resian, haven't you the slightest common sense? Come on now, let's go!"

They went into the house and Resian angrily told her sister, about her father's demand. Taiyo, however, thought her sister was being frivolous. Although she had always known that their father disliked Resian, she thought she was now giving him reason to hate her even more. And truly, she had seen that their father was growing more and more disappointed with her. His continued reprimand to Resian had become very embarrassing to Taiyo as he kept on giving her as an example of a well behaved and well disciplined girl to the chagrin of Resian. Even their mother had said several times that Taiyo was a paragon of virtue; a true model of Maa feminine decorum. And that was because she hardly ever talked to her father unless he spoke to her, and then only to answer him with utmost respect whatever

question he had asked her. Their mother thought Taiyo had learnt from her not to question things or ask why they were done one way and not the other, unless it was really her business to do so.

And because of Taiyo's behaviour which their father perceived to be exemplary, he never lost an opportunity to impress upon Resian, to emulate her sister. However, the comparison had always upset Resian and remained a constant reminder of her perceived failures. Obviously, she could not have known how disillusioned her father had been right from the day she was born. Had she known how deeply the misfortune of having a daughter rather than the son her father had wanted had hurt him, she could have probably reacted differently to his constant and unceasing rebuke and ridicule.

Resian blamed her father for the tension that continued to grip their home ever since they came to Nasila. And she did not hide that fact from their mother. She blamed the new development on what she called a newborn mongrel; a new culture that was partly Maa and partly a combination of a myriads of cultures found in Nakuru town. And that was the animal he had introduced into his home in Nasila which was now threatening to devour her first and thereafter everyone else, one by one.

When they recently stayed in their uncle's home, she had come face to face with some of the best tenets of Nasila culture that was also the Maa culture. She found out that the girl child was always protected and shielded

from males who ogled and stared at them with not so good intentions. Whenever there were male visitors in the home the girls were shepherded away, into one of the aunts houses. And their aunts served the visitors. The girls only came out after the guests had gone. Some of the elders, were courteous enough to ask, before they entered a house, whether there were children in there. And in Maa, the term children always referred to girls. If they were in, elders would either move to another house or if they must enter, the mother of the girls would tell her daughters to move to one of her aunts' houses and in such a case, the elders would politely stand outside the house until the girls had left. During their stay in their uncle's home, they hardly came face to face with him. There was hardly any interaction between the fathers and their daughters. And the fathers jealously guarded the privacy of their daughters and ensured their security.

It took a lot of persuasion to have Resian agree to serve Oloisudori and his friends the following day. And she was only convinced when she was told her father's business depended on her decision.

By morning, stubborn Resian had gotten her way. She had demanded that her sister Taiyo also be enlisted among those who would serve the distinguished guests. When her mother resisted, saying the guest's wish should be respected, Resian had put up a spirited fight, arguing that it was wrong for them as a family to allow a visitor, whoever he was, to dictate as to who amongst the



members of the family should attend to him. She rejected Taiyo's argument that since they had promised *Yeiyo-kiti* that they would go and help her plaster her kitchen, she would better be there to represent her. Resian said their *Yeiyo-kiti* would surely understand if they told her they were serving her father's guests. In lowered tones, she had told Taiyo. she needed her presence to fortify her spirit for Oloisudori terrified her.

It was after their mother consulted their father that it was settled. Taiyo was to assist in serving the visitors alongside her sister Resian.

Taiyo found her sister's fear of Oloisudori's presence justified. He arrived in a procession of four imposing chauffeur-driven four-wheel drive vehicles. Behind the four vehicles trailed a pick-up whose back was covered in a tarpaulin. At the back left of each of the four vehicles sat a man of stature.

Taiyo and Resian craned their necks to watch through their kitchen window as the four great men arrived in style. They were driven slowly to the front of the house, with their amber parking lights flickering in unison. The girls thought their father looked harassed as he stood alone, hands clasped in front of him as if in prayer. He kept shuffling his feet nervously as he waited. Resian compared her father to a male character she had read about in a book entitled *A Major Domo*, who was in charge of servants in a large house. Although Taiyo did not share the snideness of her sister, she too thought their

father cut a sorry figure as he stood alone with an ingratiating smile on his face. His faded beige suit was unimpressive.

When the first big car stopped before him, the girls saw their father's tongue flick out like that of a chameleon as he nervously licked his dry lips. His eyes glittered as he stooped to carefully open the door of the shiny limousine.

"Oloisudori Lonkiyaa, Sir," the girls heard the tremor in their father's voice, excited and stammering. "Welcome to the humble abode of your friend and bro...er...er...fa...er."

The man who came out of the car was a sight to remember. It was evident that he meant to be ostentatious. Right from the designer shoe thrust out of the high-sided vehicle; the blue pin-striped designer business suit; the golden watch that dangled from his hand; the golden bracelet matching cuff links; and the golden chain that adorned his neck, all were flaunted in a show of opulence. That was Edward Oloisudori Lonkiyaa.

And when his three friends alighted, Taiyo and Resian shuddered at their sight. Even Taiyo who was usually not interested in discerning appearances, got alarmed and wondered what the men's mission was. All the men looked alike; they were of the same height and possibly weighed nearly the same. Like a bridegroom and his escorts, they wore matching suits and adorned

expensive golden ornaments like those of Oloisudori. Only one of the men had an extra adornment: a golden tooth that shone brilliantly when he smiled.

Resian's words in a way were prophetic, Taiyo thought; not only did she dislike Oloisudori the moment he walked through the door to their house, but she also immensely hated the pomposity that he and his friends displayed. The tall, muscular and distinguished looking Oloisudori, was indeed exactly as Resian had described him. He was bad mannered, discourteous and certainly overbearing. With sure feminine instincts, Taiyo sensed that the man's mission in their home was more than a business excursion.

She was alarmed, even fearful when it dawned on her that the evil looking man was possibly targeting her sister Resian, and hence his demand that she be there to serve him on that day. His pretentious warmth and charm as he greeted them, was nothing but an empty facade, she concluded. Taiyo thought the man's obvious disdainful regard for their father was enough to make her consign him to the dustbin. Even the very many gifts he brought for every member of the family did not impress Taiyo. They all paled in her eyes and looked worthless. And like the demon that she thought he was, Oloisudori doled out the gift gleefully.

To their father, he gave suiting materials that would make four suits of different colours; six lengths of beautifully embroidered materials to make the coveted

*vitenge* to the mother; silk materials of different colours to Taiyo and a pretty golden brooch and twelve lengths of different kinds of material to Resian. In addition, there was a golden pendant, a golden bracelet and a cutely designed golden ring. And finally, to their father came another gift: a briefcase whose content was not immediately disclosed.

The lunch was a great success. At first Resian was reluctant to perform the special task that had been assigned to her. But after being nudged by Taiyo, she consented. She carried the water dish in which people would wash their hands though she did not like doing that because it entailed moving from one person to the other, and she had to stand before each person and allow them to stare at her face or engage in some ridiculous discussion as they

washed. And true to her thoughts, when she stood before each one of the three friends of Oloisudori, they detained and peered at her as if to try to pry and know her worth. When she got to Oloisudori, he took a long time washing his hands as he gloatingly peered at her. Mama Milanoi outdid herself in honour of her husband's visitor and his friends. She presented before them a fitting delicious meal. First there was the tasty appetizers which included chopped little pieces of roast liver, heart, and *ilimintilis* that were followed by a selection of cold boiled mutton. Then there followed Mama Milanoi's speciality of delicious *nyama choma* eaten with

*kachumbari* and vegetables. The men ate ravenously. Although she had not made any desserts ever since she left Nakuru, Mama Milanoi thought Oloisudori and his friends deserved special treatment. She, therefore, served them very tasty thinly sliced oranges sprinkled with sugar. And the men loved them.

The conversation at the table was entertaining but reserved. Ole Kaelo was tense and kept on throwing furtive glances at his daughters as if to make sure that they did not do anything to spoil the party. The girls, however, did not disappoint him. And the men told Mama Milanoi and her daughters that they had a beautiful home. They had enjoyed their visit. Oloisudori's friends were loquacious, especially after the fifth bottle of hot spirits was emptied.

When the party broke up at three in the afternoon, amidst warm appreciation from the friends of Oloisudori, Ole Kaelo was all smiles. He thought he had been rated a worthy companion of the likes of Oloisudori. He had 'arrived'. And when Oloisudori asked his friends what they thought of the girl, it was thumbs up by all the three. "She is the catch of the year," they declared.

Later in the evening after Taiyo and Resian had cleared the table, washed all utensils and cleaned the kitchen, Taiyo came back to the living room. She found her father sitting alone enjoying a last glass of the hot drink the visitors had been drinking. He was reading a newspaper, his reading glasses perched upon the tip of

his nose. On hearing his daughter enter, he looked up, pushed back the reading glasses and briefly stared at her. Taiyo was careful in the way she approached her father for she knew he was edgy and sensitive. She, however, wanted to find out from him what he thought of the luncheon and in the process see whether she would get a hint on what it was all about. The body language of the four men and the lavish gifts they gave had disturbed her and got her suspicious. She had a lot of trust and confidence in her father, but she feared unscrupulous people like Oloisudori could, like Joseph Parmuat had told them, lead him into a murky alley and then turn round to extort the impossible from him.

"I came to see whether you are comfortable, *Papaai*," Taiyo said pleasantly.

"Yes, indeed, I am," he answered and nodded a little absently. "I am comfortable, my dear child."

"It was a lovely day, wasn't it, *Papaai*?" she asked as she plumped up a cushion on a sofa.

"And I hope Resian and I did everything you expected us to do to make the visitors comfortable and happy."

"Indeed you did everything," he said curtly. "Yes, I must say the visitors were happy."

"And Mr. Oloisudori is becoming a very close business associate of yours, isn't he *Papaai*?" she asked eyeing him slyly as she moved a chair back to its

accustomed place. "He can really be generous, eh?"  
"Most certainly he is."

"Did he take part in funding our shop?" she continued and rued it immediately for she noticed he was getting irritated.

"Yes, but why do you ask?" he snapped showing signs of a rising temper.

"Nothing, *Papaai*," Taiyo answered quickly trying to avert an oncoming clash. "I just thought we should know so that we can in future treat him with the respect he deserves."

"Good!" he said with finality and picked up his glass, tipped and drained off its content in one quick gulp.

Taiyo hesitated. Now that she had failed to get any information from her father, she thought she could try another line. From the day they came back from their uncle's home, she and Resian had been waiting for their mother to tell them what their father's response had been regarding their request to be allowed to go back to Nakuru to enroll as students at the Egerton University. Over the past few weeks, Resian irritating sulks notwithstanding, Taiyo knew her conscience had not been entirely clear. She had on several occasions promised her sister that she would speak to their father, but she had never come round to doing so.

"*Papaai*," she called him pleasantly.

By then, her father had folded his newspaper and was now busy folding his glasses - putting them into their leather case. That done, he placed the leather case neatly upon the folded newspaper. "Yes, my dear child."

From the kitchen came the loud voices of Resian and their mother as they argued about something. Taiyo saw her father turn his head and cock it to that direction, listening. She knew she had lost his attention. "I am sorry my child, what were you saying?"

"I was just saying," Taiyo hesitated and noting that her father's thoughts were no longer with her, gave up the idea of speaking to him that night about the university. She hoped there would be another chance soon. "I was just wishing you a good night."

"Yes, of course," he said absentmindedly. "Good night my dear."

And as she left the room, her father called back and said. "Please call Resian for me."

That alarmed Resian but strangely, the alarm turned into optimism. As she quickly walked to the living room where their father was still seated, she felt optimistic: glad tidings had finally come. Either their mother had successfully argued their case before their father and he had finally consented to their request to enroll at Egerton University, or her sister Taiyo had at last done it. Oh, wonderful sister Taiyo! She was still replaying those pleasurable words when she reached where her father was seated.



"Yes, *Papaai*," Resian said apprehensively. "I am here. Taiyo tells me you are calling me?"

"Yes, yes," her father replied. "Please take a seat."

"Yes, *Papaai*," Resian repeated as she sat on a chair far away from her father.

"Come nearer ... child," her father said pleasantly. "Why do you sit a mile away? Come nearer."

Resian moved her chair hardly an inch from where it was and then she looked up into her father's face with eager expectation.

"If I do remember well," her father began in a low even tone, "you will be nineteen in September this year, am I right?"

"You are quite right, *Papaai*," Resian answered eyeing him curiously. His face was unusually kind. His eyes held hers as he smiled broadly. 'That's it!' she thought triumphantly. 'That must be it!'

"You and I have not discussed important issues for a long time," he said with a friendly chuckle that was intended to bring her closer to him. "I thought today would be the best day to break the news. Your future is very important to me, my dear child."

Resian thought the concern in her father's voice, rang false. She hesitated, but could not hold herself any more. The anxiety was too great.

"*Papaai*, is it *Yeiyo* or Taiyo who spoke to you?" she asked sensationally, thinking she was stating the

obvious. But seeing her father's face cloud, she added quickly. "Who between them spoke to you about our enrolment at the Egerton University?"

"What are you talking about, child?" her father who seemed dumbfounded, asked after a long and uncomfortable silence.

"Both *Yeiyo* and *Taiyo* promised to talk to you about it, and I thought she had."

"What, in the name of God are you talking about, child?" he repeated, this time agitated and shaking his head vigorously. "No, I have never spoken to anybody about any of you enrolling at the university. Never! When I said I wanted us to discuss your future, that isn't what I meant at all. Of course not" Resian looked at her father's face enquiringly.

"I was going to tell you ..." he hesitated and then stopped. His usual irritation and short temper reasserted themselves. "Never mind what I was going to say. For heaven's sake, Resian, go back to the kitchen. I'll talk to you another day. Ask your mother to come here immediately!"

The sound of his tone carried a definite finality.

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Ole Kaelo's visit to Oloisudori's home greatly changed him. He felt rejuvenated like a man who had just returned from the mountain top where he had inhaled the thin, fresh and invigorating mountain air. The scales, it seemed, had fallen from his eyes and suddenly he was able to see what he had failed to see all the years he was working in Nakuru.

Oloisudori had invited him and his wife to visit one of his six homes ostensibly as a gesture of appreciation for the hospitality he had accorded him and his friends when they visited his home. However, he had wanted them to see and appreciate in the proximity of his kingdom. During the visit, he had hoped they would savour the pleasures and the kind of life their daughter Resian was going to enjoy. He was sure if they had a glimpse of the palatial home that was nearing completion and which he had particularly built for Resian, his struggles to entice and lure her to accept to move in and live with him would come to an end. He was sure they would immediately take over the struggle to persuade her to agree to marry him.

Ole Kaelo had felt greatly flattered when Oloisudori compared Resian with the legendary beautiful brown girl who dominated the songs of four generations of *morans* in the past fifty years. Her beauty had set new standards upon which the Maa beauty queens were

judged, and were up to then still appreciated. The legend described the girl as so charmingly beautiful that she caused the *morans* to traverse the vast, dry and hot plains of Susua all the way to Mosiro, where the girl lived with her parents, just to have a glimpse of her beauty. It was said that the *morans* on seeing her, would stand in a daze staring fixedly at her. They would drink in the subtlety of her beauty: her baby face with those bewitching dimples on her cheeks, her white pearl-like teeth planted on black gums, and that captivating natural gap called *enchilaloi* that prettily sat conspicuously between her upper front teeth. She was said to be petite, had a narrow waist and long shapely legs. Her large languorous eyes were said to sap energy from the knees of those to whom she directed her glance, incapacitating them at once. All those besotted with her love could not help but sing in unison:

*Entito nanyokie naitudungo* - Brown girl who caused  
*Ilmurran Susua* - Morans to traverse Susua.

Oloisudori thought Resian was like that girl and more. She was also like the famous English lady whose love besotted a great legendary gentleman called Lord Ngata. In fact, Oloisudori thought he and Lord Ngata could have been birds of the same feather. What he learned of the great settler, he thought, put him shoulder to shoulder with him.

When the two of them settled on what they wanted to do, Oloisudori thought pleasantly, nothing would hold them back. The great settler went to England, met a lady and fell in love with her so much that, he was prepared to bring heaven down to earth to please her. Similarly, when Oloisudori went to Nasila and met Resian, he thought he felt what the legendary settler felt. Like him, he was also ready to undertake everything to have her installed in his palatial home as his wife. His only hope was that the chivalry he felt was not going to end up in disappointment like it happened with Lord Ngata. It was said after building a stately castle for his beloved bride to be, the lady was said to have come the whole way from England, looked askance at the majestic castle, turned and looked another way, never to look at it again. From then on, the love of the Lord to the much admired and esteemed lady was unrequited and that pained him a great deal. And that had triggered such virulent hatred for women in the heart of the old gentleman, that for the rest of his life, he never allowed a woman to come anywhere near him.

To avoid that kind of disappointment and great pain, Oloisudori thought he would beautify the palatial home that he was building for Resian so much that on seeing it, she would have no option but to fall in love with it. And when he had had her as his wife, he would do everything possible to win her love. Even when Ole Kaelo had told him that his daughter yearned to go to the

university to study, he had said he would readily consent to the request and would let her enroll as a student as soon as she settled. The only little delay anticipated, he had thought triumphantly, was the period required for her to undergo the little ritual of removing her from the list of *intoiye nemengalana*, a process that he thought would hardly take more than three months. How wonderful it would be, he mused delightfully, to have a graduate among his wives. It was certainly going to be an added feather to his cap.

How unfortunate it was that he did not have his daughters with him when he and his wife visited Oloisudori? Ole Kaelo reminisced as he sat in his living room musing quietly. Had they been with them and had they seen what he and his wife saw during that conducted tour, the story would have been different.

He imagined his stubborn daughter Resian would by now be thanking her God for creating her a woman and endowing her with the kind of beauty that would enchant a wealthy man like Oloisudori. And it was only a stupid woman, like his daughter Resian would probably be, who would turn down the offer to own the riches they saw in Oloisudori's home.

It was true, he thought as he recalled what his grandfather used to say, only a woman went to bed poor and woke up stinking rich the following morning. Even his beloved daughter, Taiyo, could also be lucky soon. Did Oloisudori not say on that first day when he visited

them that he had a friend who would be interested in Taiyo? He hoped he would come soon and he would be like Oloisudori, who would quietly hand over to him a briefcase stuffed with notes worth a cool half a million shillings without as much as a glance or a mention of what he had given.

He reclined on his sofa and allowed his mind to enjoy the pleasures of reminiscence. And with a smile on his lips, he travelled back with Oloisudori to his palatial home in Naivasha.

They had sat on the back seat in the imposing vehicle, while his wife had sat next to the driver. Bodyguards rode the vehicles closely behind them. It was not until they got to the first gate that opened to his compound that they came to know who Oloisudori was. It was unbelievable that one man would employ so many people to do nothing but indulge his every whim. To man his numerous gates that opened to the lawn, were fierce looking guards who searched visitors so thoroughly that one would have thought they were unwanted criminals. By the time they got to the last gate, Ole Kaelo felt tired and harassed. But his host seemed to enjoy that, saying it was the only way to keep out the undesirable vermin that always milled around looking for handouts.

When the last gate swung open and the car slowly drove in, Ole Kaelo and his wife were not

prepared enough to behold the imposing and splendid buildings that stood before them. They were humbled.

They were in a cluster of red-tiled houses whose tall outer walls painted in brilliant white, surrounded one large two-storied building that was also of the same colour. A few metres from the fence that enclosed the homestead, was the expansive Lake Naivasha and across it was a scenic sight of hills and a forest that covered them. As he watched the hippopotamuses frolicking in the lake water, Ole Kaelo thought of the grandeur of nature. He could not help but chuckle a little, amused by the fact that, Oloisudori and the hippopotamuses were two different kinds of animals that nature had brought to live side by side, each minding its own business.

The house was awesome. Kaelo had more than once made to nudge his wife when she stood by the windy corridors of the magnificent house, mesmerized at the elegant and luxurious rooms that lay open wide ready for viewing. The living room was lavishly furnished and the furnishing must have been done by a person whose mind must have been preoccupied by the need to be showy, and ostentatious.

When they were introduced to the lady of the house, who was simply referred to as *wife number three*, they thought she was as beautiful as her surroundings. She was taciturn but friendly and she served them with dignity and decorum.



At the end of the tour, they made a detour that took them to Nakuru Milimani area where Oloisudori had just completed the house he had been building for Resian. Ole Kaelo was speechless. His wife was stupefied by its grandeur and magnificence. They gazed with amazement at the expensively built double-storied house whose large windows glinted in the afternoon sunshine. In the leafy neighbourhood were other equally imposing and lofty mansions and apartments where the rich businessmen and women lived alongside the senior executives of large organisations.

When a servant opened the front door for them and Oloisudori ushered them in, they were greeted by a large beautiful chandelier that gleamed brightly as it dangled above their heads in the room that was obviously going to be the living room.

Oloisudori led them through the yet to be furnished but brilliantly lit rooms, across the smooth shining floors, up a ceramic tiled staircase that was guarded by a polished mahogany balustrade, and into a spacious room that was self-contained and which was going to serve as the master bedroom. The back door opened to an open area that held a swimming pool and a sauna. Standing by the swimming pool, one had a fine view of Lake Nakuru to the east, and a happy scene of school children playing in a nearby school to the west.

For a few minutes, minutes that fleetingly floated along like the morning fog that drifted in the wind, the

would be father-in-law and would be son-in-law stood together at the poolside, their thoughts drifting into different directions. They were both thinking of Resian.

Looking at the distant hills to the west which was the direction of Nasila, Ole Kaelo stood there musing silently. He then made one decision: he was not going to allow his daughter's ignorance to destroy her future. As a father, he declared, he had a God given duty to guide her to a secure future; to lead her to the honey pot that would be part of her future. Whatever happened Resian was to be married to Oloisudori.

Before they parted, Oloisudori took them to a restaurant in town for another cup of tea. It was then that an idea on how to deal with Resian was hatched. Oloisudori was to come on the appointed day and time. Ole Kaelo would have prepared the ground so that Oloisudori would find Resian alone. Oloisudori would then persuade her to accept his marriage proposal, without alarming her. If she was agreeable, well and good. In that scenario, the rest of the plans would take their natural course. If she declined, he would leave it at that until the evening when his men would pounce on her and abduct her. They would then drive her straight to the house prepared for her in Nakuru.

The three of them, Oloisudori, Ole Kaelo and his wife roared with rich laughter when Ole Kaelo equated the scenario to that of a goat's kid that stubbornly refused to suckle after it was born. Its owner would tuck it

between his knees and forcefully open its mouth and tuck its mother's teat into it. He would then squeeze out the milk into the kid's mouth. The taste of the milk would make it suckle and removal of the teat from its mouth would be a struggle.

"So would be Resian," Ole Kaelo concluded triumphantly. "When she sees what you have laid out for her pleasures, she would rebuke herself for her procrastination in the first place."

To cap it all, Oloisudori had given Ole Kaelo and his wife his four-wheel-drive and a driver to take them back to Nasila. Mama Milanoi sat in her corner of the back seat appreciating with awe the leather upholstered interior of the vehicle. She then turned her head to look out of the window, her mind and her heart in a turmoil.

Although she had laughed with her husband and with Oloisudori, the plan to ensnare her daughter like an antelope left a feeling of betrayal in her heart. Truly, the riches were in plenty, she argued to herself, but should not Resian be persuaded to accept them rather than being ensnared into them? The idea of ensnaring her daughter in a web like a spider did with a fly, did not appeal to her at all.

It was different for her husband. He felt on top of the world as he sat comfortably at his left corner of the immaculate vehicle. A happy mood pervaded his heart. It was a feeling of satisfaction and achievement.

They were driven smoothly and swiftly through the streets of Nakuru town and driven out into the flat wooded countryside past the gates of the Egerton University where their daughter Resian yearned to go. A strange pang of sadness twisted the nerves of Mama Milanoi's heart. How sad it was, she thought hopelessly, that Resian would miss to join that institution that seemed to have occupied her mind so relentlessly. Ole Kaelo also noticed the gates of the university and he recalled angrily his daughter talking foolishly of wanting to join the institution. It was that kind of frivolous talk, he thought nonchalantly, 'that made him dislike Resian with a passion.

Tossing the thought aside, he looked askance at a group of untidy peasants who walked by the roadside, leading their heavy laden donkeys. Some of them stopped momentarily to stare at the stately vehicle as it sped past them while they shifted from one shoulder to the other, the heavy loads they carried. He disdainfully looked the other way. He was in his element and he would not allow any unsightly view dim his spirit. Instead he looked at the waters of Lake Nakuru that glittered through the trees, reflecting the fire of the sunset through the branches of the yellow acacia trees and the evergreen *Olouurrurr* trees. Small mud-plastered houses, many of them with brightly painted tin roofs, stood in the clearing of the recently hived out forest, chicken pecking about the yards. Dogs sprang to life as

they passed, barking furiously and chasing the wheels of the strange awesome vehicle.

And later when they got to the Nasila plains the road was rough and rutted. Even the powerful machine slowed down. There were few other vehicles on the dusty road, and as they were tossed up and down, Ole Kaelo questioned the wisdom of his own decision to move to Nasila in the first instance. He began to admire the luxurious life of the likes of Oloisudori; the urbanite.

However, the notion that he was about to hand over his own daughter to a gangster continued to gnaw at the conscience of Ole Kaelo relentlessly. He felt guilty, especially when he recalled the atrocities that were known to have been committed by Oloisudori over the years. But another voice told him quietly that he was being foolish and unreasonable to question his own conscience over the matter of Oloisudori, for he was just one among many who were enjoying the fruits of their labour. And it was hardly anybody's business to know how honest that labour was. After all, the small voice reassured him tauntingly, those who committed bigger crimes such as Goldenberg and Anglo-leasing, were still enjoying the 'fruits of their labour.' Had they not invested the yields of their ill-gotten money in housing estates, in shares, in import and exports in tourism, in transport and in other trades, just as Oloisudori had done?

When he went to bed later that evening, he remained awake for many hours pondering over those

disturbing thoughts that went through his mind fleetingly, like water that churned violently in a turbulent sea. He thought of Oloisudori's impending visit and his intended marriage to Resian. He knew the success or failure of the event would determine the fate of his business. Even his continued ownership of that house where he and his family lived, depended on the outcome of that event. Should Oloisudori fail to get Resian and recall the loan he had extended to him to buy that house, he was done. And knowing Oloisudori, he could very easily draw the rug from beneath his feet, leaving him vulnerable to all kinds of vagaries. And the thoughts gave him anxious moments.

At dawn when sleep overtook him, Ole Kaelo had a pleasant dream. Resian had consented to Oloisudori's proposal. After Oloisudori reported that to him, he was greatly pleased and relieved. His wife was rapturous. Although they were astonished at the turn of events, they were relieved to know that they would not have to live with the guilt of having forced their daughter to get married. What a wise child his once hardheaded daughter had turned to be after all! And how devious! After all those years of sullenness, awkwardness and tactlessness, she had finally brought relief to their life and ushered in a period of peace and tranquility. But then, it was just that. A dream!

As the parents pondered over the dream that had given them false hope, their daughters were busy

hatching their own little plan in their bedroom. They had been observing their parents, especially their father, ever since the arrival of Oloisudori and they were convinced that there was something fishy going on.

Resian came up with a two- pronged plan. They would find a carton and into it pack all those gifts Oloisudori had given them. They would then find a piece of beautiful wrapping paper and smartly wrap the carton and address it to Oloisudori as a reciprocal gift from the daughters of Ole Kaelo. When Oloisudori came to their home next time, Resian said she would personally hand the gift to him and ensure that it was safely deposited in his imposing vehicle. Once the gift was in his vehicle, she would then pretend to be docile and give him the impression that she could be manipulated. She would agree to go along with him, allowing him to lead her until she knew the direction of his thoughts. Once she got to know his intentions, she would decisively react. Woe to him if he thought she was a chattel to be secured by the content of a briefcase! Oloisudori would have Resian the daughter of Ole Kaelo to reckon with! And they hoped that when Oloisudori got back to his destination and ripped open the carton, he would find all those gifts he brought them sitting there prettily, staring back at him. That would serve him right!

It did not take long before Taiyo and Resian had their chance to put into practice their plan. It was a little conspiratorial game they thought they were playing

behind their parents' backs. The mission was intended to show Oloisudori that they were not on sale. And if he thought the prize of one of them was equivalent to whatever amount of money was in the briefcase previously handed to their father, he was mistaken.

They also wanted to show him that they were young modern women who had their own pride, self respect and self esteem. They wanted him to know that they were not rudderless objects drifting in the sea without direction. They already had their aims and projections that could only be enhanced by the lofty ideas they held and the desire for higher learning at the university and career development. It was therefore an insult to their intelligence, dignity and integrity to think that mere material things such as the gifts he lavishly gave them would sway them from the goals they had already set for themselves.

"Since he seems to target me in his demonic designs," Resian said determinedly, "I shall try to face him bravely and tell him what I think of him, especially if he shows me his ill manners."

"Well, I don't know whether I would be able to face him alone," Taiyo said apprehensively. "He looked rapacious and I can't trust him if we are left alone with him in a room."

"The man is a monster. I fear him too," Resian said balefully. "It is only the desire to right things that



gives me courage to face him. To speak the truth, when I think of the monster, I squirm in my shoes with fear!"

"What you should never accept, little sister," Taiyo told her sister emphatically, "is to be left alone in the house with the monster. However brave you are, you cannot be locked with a boa-constrictor in a room and expect to survive."

"That I know, Taiyo-e-yeiyo," Resian answered timidly. "I would only accept to be in the living room with Oloisudori, if *yeiyo* is going to be in the kitchen. I can't take that risk."

Little did the girls know that their parents and Oloisudori had also hatched their plan. So when Ole Kaelo discussed with his wife Oloisudori's day and time of arrival, he was apprehensive. Knowing how stubborn Resian was, he was not sure how they would lure her and make her accept to be with Oloisudori in their living room. It had, been agreed that Oloisudori would arrive the following day at ten o'clock in the morning.

After the visit was made known to the girls, and it was suggested that Resian was to receive and serve him with coffee, the parents were most surprised that Resian accepted the proposal without a fight. Ole Kaelo wondered whether the dream he had had was coming to pass. He hoped the rest of their plan would be as smooth and that Resian would accept Oloisudori's proposal without much ado. They had decided that Taiyo would be sent to their uncle's home to help their *yeiyo-botorr*.

He himself would be at the shop while Resian would remain with her mother at home to wait for Oloisudori.

The plan also suited the girls. They had already packed Oloisudori gifts in a decorated carton that was now awaiting delivery to the owner.

When Resian appeared for breakfast the following morning, her parents were astonished. Her father suppressed an alarming premonition that suddenly nagged his old heart. Her mother stared at her daughter confusedly, not knowing whether to appreciate or allow the astonishment take the better of her. She opted to keep silent and watched with amazement the transformation of their usually sullen daughter into a cheerful and jovial child. But what amazed them most was the apparent preparation she had made for that morning.

She was clad in her maroon taffeta dress whose stark neckline was softened by a cream and maroon silken scarf that fluttered about her neck. Her usually braided hair had been carefully made and piled softly upon her head. Her golden colour earrings glinted in the morning sunshine as they swung, emphasizing the graceful length of her neck. She carried in her hand a maroon handbag that matched the colour of her shoes. The effect of her attire was dazzling and contrasted sharply with Taiyo who was wearing her usual simple blue dress.

"*Sasa Yeiyoy!* Look at me, I am ready for our visitor," Resian said cheerfully addressing her mother. "How do you like my dress?"

"Splendid," her mother answered cautiously.

"My little Resian-e-yeiyoy, how lovely you look!" her father who was uncharacteristically emotional said. "You almost look like a grown up lady. What do you think, Olarinkoi?"

Olarinkoi who was present that morning looked up at Resian, grunted and snorted. He then grinned in grudging admiration.

"Not bad," he said looking at Resian sheepishly. "Not bad at all."

Oloisudori was time conscious. In the kind of business that he had done in the larger part of his working life, time was of the essence. As a gangster, he had to be punctual, precise and punctilious. A small delay, inexactness or careless disregard of the plan could not only result in missed opportunities but, could also prove to be fatal. Punctuality had therefore become his second nature.

That was how he approached Resian's issue. Like all other tasks that he undertook, he approached it with singleness of mind. He planned meticulously, putting a precise time frame to it. His retinue was well chosen and all details taken into consideration. He had hired an anesthetist if the need to render Resian unconscious arose.

At nine-thirty in the morning, they were assembled somewhere near Nasila. Oloisudori was reviewing the detailed instruction that he had given each individual who was to take part in the task ahead. Except for him and his driver, none of the others were to appear anywhere near Ole Kaelo's residence before six o'clock in the evening. They were to arrive at six o'clock on the dot, pounce on the girl, seize her, carry her into the car and speed off. If there was need to render her unconscious, that would be done on the way. The next stop would be at her house in Milimani Estate, Nakuru.

The moment Taiyo left, Resian's confidence began to wane. She began to tremble quite literally. In order that her mother did not notice how nervous she was, she excused herself and fled to their bedroom. But on seeing the carton into which they had packed all those gifts that Oloisudori had given them, and which she intended to give back to him, her courage returned. She had vowed to face the monster gallantly, and it was foolish of her to develop cold feet at that point, especially after promising her sister that she would face him, come what may. She was in the battle front and success or failure was in her hands. She had to do it even if her father would never forgive her. If she rebuffed him successfully, an inner voice told her, a whole new world would open up before her. She had therefore to be stoic and face the monster bravely. She glanced at the clock beside their bed; it was a quarter to ten.

She mustered her courage, picked the carton and quietly left the bedroom. When the stately limousine pulled up at their gate, she was at the steps holding the carton, as she prepared to receive the distinguished guest. She held her breath.

She saw him alighting from the vehicle. As usual he was immaculately dressed: a pair of white trousers; a flowing short-sleeved white flower-patterned collarless shirt and white leather shoes. Without his suit, his expensive golden ornaments were more conspicuous. The golden chain that dangled from his neck, the golden bracelet and the golden wrist watch, all glittered brilliantly in the morning sunshine. But no fancy wear could disguise the arrogant power of the tall, muscular individual who now stood there beside his powerful machine, surveying his surroundings. Before he noticed her, Resian watched that pair of large black, appraising eyes in that large brown weather beaten face. He beamed his glance at all directions of the home, as if to confirm that no dirty tricks were being played on him. She thought his well trimmed black moustache gave him the look of a bandit!

When he saw her, his facial features immediately changed. He smiled at her broadly and his rapacious eyes flickered dangerously. The skin of her body crept, raising goose pimples on her fore-arms and neck. She knew she was playing with fire, but she had promised to be brave. As he walked towards her though, she nearly

backed off, but he did not give her much time to think of other options. In a few quick strides, he had crossed the front yard, mounted the steps, and was now standing beside her.

"Good morning, Sir, Oloisudori," she began tremblingly. "May I kindly, hand over this humble gift to you. It is a reciprocal gift from my sister Taiyo and I, our appreciation for your many gifts."

That little speech that she had memorised and rehearsed several times, nearly took away her breath. But it worked. It completely disarmed Oloisudori. He least expected that gesture and for a brief moment he was speechless. He took the carton from her, and looked appreciatively at the square label on it, on which was written, in a flowery female handwriting:

*To Mr. Oloisudori Loonkiyaa  
with love  
from Taiyo and Resian*

What he thought was going to be a battle of nerves, had turned out to be a walkover. But that did not unduly surprise him. In fact he nearly expected it. In the case of the other six women who were married to him, he had not struggled to get any of them. Actually it was the reverse. For him to accept any of them, each had to fulfill certain conditions and agree to live a certain pattern of life. One or two did not pass the test and he

rejected them outrightly. The six who passed the test were happily married to him.

He had thought Resian was going to be an exception. He thought he was going to have a tough struggle and he had come prepared for it. He was a little disappointed though, for the anticlimax had lessened the anticipated adventure. He called his driver, handed him the carton and instructed him to take care of it for it contained items of great value.

"I can't thank you and your sister for this kind gesture," Oloisudori said happily. "Rest assured, beautiful lady, that this will be repaid a million times. Just wait and see."

He took Resian's hand and carried it to his lips kissing her palm. His moustache was rough and wiry against her sensitive skin. She shivered a little as she opened her fingers, surrendering herself to the small outrageous intimacy!

"Would you come in, please," she invited him cautiously leading the way to the house. "My mother is in the house and she has prepared tea and tasty pancakes for you."

"Thank you very much." He followed her into the living room.

Hardly had they got in when the familiar paralysing panic rose in her. The moment he took his seat, his gaze deliberately dropped from her face to her bosom and lingered there. She decided to ignore that stupid look on his face excusing herself to bring his tea.

"Tea is not very important to me," he said pleasantly and added softly, "there are many things I know you want to know about our future. Oh, yes. Many things."

"What do you mean by our future," Resian asked petrified by his words.

"Don't be ridiculous, Resian," Oloisudori said his large eyes narrowing a little. "Must we repeat what is obvious, my dear? But if I may say, you will never regret taking the decision you have taken. You will be the happiest lady in the whole of East Africa!"

"What are you talking about, Sir?" Resian asked trying to learn a little bit more.

"What I mean, is simply this," he said slowly like one talking to an obstinate child. "When you are married to me and you are settled in your palatial home at the Milimani Estate in Nakuru, you will be exceedingly happy!"

She stared at him speechlessly. His words did not at first make sense to her. But slowly it dawned on her that her father had already sold her. Yes, the briefcase that was handed to him contained her dowry money. What that meant was that, she was literally Oloisudori's slave. She was his playing thing. And as if to confirm her fears, he stood up and began to walk towards her saying, "Our fate with you Resian is sealed. You can never escape. You are my wife and only death shall part us. You hear me, eh?"



"You are mad!" Resian screamed at him. "You are stark mad if you think I am your wife. I can only be your wife over my dead body. Yes, you and my father can kill me and carry my dead body to your palatial home."

He was stunned by those harsh words. He winced as if he had been struck. The already harsh line of his mouth tightened and he stood tense for a moment. Then he relaxed and watched her mockingly. "You can never escape Resian," he repeated quietly, smiling. The very normality of his voice as he spoke those monstrous words was most shocking and disturbing to her. "Whether you scream your heart out, or jump into the deep sea, Resian, you are mine. You are my wife from now henceforth!"

"I want to go now," Resian announced angrily, shuddering with disgust and terror.

"You want to go?" he asked, the contemptuous quiet of his voice a menace by itself. "Go! You want to be persuaded, coaxed and pampered to marry Oloisudori Loonkiyaa? Sorry I will not do that! If you want to go, please yourself. You may opt to go, but when you are mine, you will do as I please. No one plays games with Oloisudori. Ask your father, he will tell you." "Stop it! Stop it!" Resian screamed excruciatingly pained by the disdainful remarks of Oloisudori. Putting her hands over her ears, she made a dash for the door. He

made no effort to stop her but she flung it open and turned to glare at him with tearful eyes.

"You are mad!" she screamed again sobbingly. "You are stark mad! You hear me? You are nothing but *ol-ushuushi*." She walked away and as she did so, she heard his soft laughter behind her.

Blindly she ran through the house, blundering into a table and stumbling over a chair. Banging the outer door, she ran and pattered down the steps ignoring the surprised looks of Olarinkoi and Oloisudori's driver who stood wondering what had happened.

Outside, she inhaled several gulps of fresh air before turning to run down the rough road that led to her father's shop. She ran without looking back, determined to put distance between her and that foul tongue of Oloisudori, his disgusting eyes and his intimidating threat.

When she neared her father's shop, she slowed down and her spirit quietened a little. But she was still angry. She was raving mad with indignation. Her eyes were twin rivulets from which hot tears streamed down continuously. Her young spirit was sore as she tried to come to terms with what had just happened. Although she had always known that her father disliked her, she never thought that he could go as far as selling her. How could he do that to her? Was there a curse for being born a woman that took away her right to her own body or her own mind? What did the monster mean when he asserted

that she could not escape? Tearfully, she searched for the answers to those questions but they were not forthcoming.

When she met three old men walking down the same dusty road, she peered at them through the mist of her tearful eyes. They glanced at her curiously and one of them kindly asked her who had beaten her.

*"Na kerai, aingae likitaara?"* he enquired.

*"Meeta,"* she answered demurely her eyes downcast.

It was then that she suddenly became aware of her tears and her hair that she had carefully made in the morning but which was now blowing untidily in the dusty wind. She rubbed at her swollen eyelids, trying to wipe the tears with the back of her hand, but more tears flowed as if from an inexhaustible source.

She had to calm down and collect her thoughts before embarking on a fact-finding mission. She would have to behave as if nothing had happened at home so as to hear what her father had to say about Oloisudori and also know the fate of their request to enroll at the Egerton University in the forthcoming academic year.

When her father saw her enter his office, he was alarmed. He tried to read her face but she was not giving herself away.

"Where is our visitor?" her father asked her as calmly and as casually as he could manage.

"I left him at home enjoying his tea and pancakes," Resian answered calmly without batting an eyelid.

"And what brings you to the shop this time of the day instead of remaining at home to help your mother?"

"I'll go back there, *Papaai*, as soon as possible," Resian answered pleasantly, trying to be as calm as she could, "I thought I should come down here and ask what you thought of my recent request to enroll as a student at the Egerton University at the beginning of the new academic year this September."

"University?" her father asked astonished that the question of their enrolment to the university should crop up at the time when a weightier matter about her marriage to Oloisudori should presently be occupying her mind. He got confused and wondered what had taken place between her and Oloisudori. He cleared his throat portentously and said, "I thought about it alright, but decided that I am not sending- you there!"

"Why not, *Papaai*?" she asked angrily as she stood rigidly before her father's desk, her hands clasped firmly to prevent them from trembling.

"Because I think for now, you have had enough of formal education," he answered eyeing her sharply, and then stretched his arm, took some papers from a tray at the far end of the table and leafed through them. "There is always time for further education later and ..."

"But *Papaai*," she interrupted him.

"There is always time," he said, ignoring her interruption. With studied patience he tapped the papers back into order, laid them neatly before him, squaring them with the edge of the desk. Then he looked up, his face stern. "It is only that you children are at times stupid and have myopic minds. When we as your parents try to plan for your future, you refuse to see ..."

*"Papaai please,"* Resian pleaded. "If you can only listen to me for a second ... "

"You refuse to see that we always have your interest at heart," he interjected. He waited until she lifted her head and met his eyes. He thought it was time he told her what Oloisudori had not possibly told her. And if he appended her wish to join Egerton University as an added benefit to marrying Oloisudori, he thought he could lure her to move to Nakuru immediately. He softened his tone a little and said "You see at the moment, there are a number of programmes at the university. You can enroll and stay at the campus, you can take a parallel degree programme or you can study by correspondence.

"All that I know," Resian said impatiently. "But..."

"If you do," her father added shifting in his chair and spreading his hands expansively, "then you can take any of the last two options for I have made appropriate plans for you, my daughter. I have been waiting for an opportunity to speak to you about them. In fact that was

what I wanted to tell you the last time when I called you. You are a lucky child, Resian. A very lucky child, dear Resian." Resian stared at him. She already knew what he was to say next.

"No," she said flatly.

"You are a very lucky child as I said," he continued, ignoring her protest.

"I am delighted to tell you that my good friend and business associate Oloisudori Loonkiyaa has approached me asking that he marries you. You know he is ..."

At first she was stunned like one hit by a bolt of lightning. Then suddenly she began to shout. She threw her head back and screamed so loudly one would have thought she was engulfed in a ball of fire. She hollered, shrieked and shrilled, saying all sort of things to express outrage. She cried, accusing her father of hatred and betrayal by betrothing her to Oloisudori. Her father stared at her in horror. But she would not stop, she shouted even more and screamed like one possessed with demented spirits. After a moment of frozen immobility, her father suddenly pushed back his chair, moved fast from behind the desk and slapped her face, sending her reeling back so that she almost fell. She stared at him in disbelief. He slapped her again backhanded.

"That should teach you never to talk like that to your father," he said fuming, his nostrils flaring and his eyes glittering with anger.

"It is better you kill me, *Papaai!*" she cried out outrageously. "You'll better kill me than hand me over to your monster friend. Yes, kill me right now!"

He watched her with distaste as she heaved her shoulders and blew her nose. She tried to control the flow of her tears but she could not. By then there was a multitude of people, standing and milling around the building, peeping curiously, wondering what was happening inside.

"I may as well tell you, my dear child," her father said in a low angry growl, "I have taken dowry from Oloisudori. You are now his wife whether you like it or not!"

In silence, Resian turned and walked to the door opened it, and stepped into the corridor. Then as she walked through the shop, she lifted her voice, still hoarse and screamed, attracting the attention of everyone. She looked back and saw her father following her, his eyes bulging out with anger. He strode briskly and sharply towards her. She quickened her step away from him but as she walked, she repeated her words.

"You hear me, *Papaai?* I said I'd rather die than get married to a monster, who is an *ol-ushuushi like* Oloisudori. Never! Never! If I don't die and I live to be eighty, I will still go to the university. I'll go to Egerton University, *Papaai*, I tell you! I hope you will be there to witness my graduation. But for now, I can as well reveal to you, that I have told your friend Oloisudori what I

think of him. Yes, he is a monster, he is a gangster, he is a bank robber and an extortionist per excellence!"

"Resian!" her father's voice cracked like a whip. "Resian!"

She ignored her father's call, pushed through the outer door of the shop and rushed outside. Her cheek throbbing from her father's blows, her eyes red and swollen from weeping, she walked with an odd dignity down the road that led to Nasila river ignoring the stares and whispers of all those who stood by watching.

Nasila river- cool, smooth and silent - swirled quietly about the boulders that were half submerged in it. It was deep and wide. She stood at its bank for a long time, staring down, into the water. Could the answer to her woes be in that river? Yes, it could be! Just a swift, cold shock as she fell into the water and then there would be peace. Yes, peace all over, from her father, from Oloisudori and from the fact that she had failed to get admission to Egerton University. As the idea floated in her mind, she felt a tap on her shoulder. Shocked, she turned around. It was Olarinkoi.

"What are you doing here at the river side?" he asked with little interest.

"Nothing," Resian said nonchalantly. "I am just relaxing." "Don't be foolish, little girl," Olarinkoi said seriously. "You may not want to tell me what is happening, but I am not foolish and I can put one and one together. Oloisudori's men are now looking for you



everywhere. They have instructions to seize you and take you to Nakuru to be his wife."

"Just leave me," Resian said angrily, "Go tell them to come and find me here."

"Listen, you stupid girl," Olarinkoi said in his caustic language. "If you do not want to marry Oloisudori, I can rescue you the way I rescued you from those vagabonds who had accosted you and your sister. I know where Minik ene Enkoitoi the *Emakererei* lives and where she keeps girls rescued from the situation you are now in. There is no need to despair in life. There is always another chance."

That could be something to consider, Resian thought, new hope rising in her heart. Yes, *it* would be wonderful to be received by the *Emakererei*. And who knows, there could still be a chance to enroll at the Egerton University, through *Emakererei*.

"How could we ever get there?" asked Resian a flicker of hope lighting her heart. "I hear it is very very far from here."

"Yes *it is* far," confirmed Olarinkoi. "But where there is hope things always work out. The *Maa* people say home is never far for one who is still alive."

"Then find the way," she finally told him.

He promised to take her to a family he knew in Nasila where she would spend the night while he organised transport so that they would start off very

early the following day. What she did not know was that no journey was ever predictable.

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Resian was woken up very early the following morning. The kind-hearted old woman who accommodated her for the night cooked porridge. She served the scalding, hot and sugarless porridge in a big yellow enamel mug. Resian shook the mug gently to cool the porridge and downed it soon for she was very hungry having missed lunch and supper the previous day.

When an old battered and rattling ramshackle of a pick-up hooted outside the old woman's house, Resian rushed out eagerly, followed by the old woman. They were greeted cheerfully by Olarinkoi and the driver. Olarinkoi told Resian to climb onto the back of the pick-up while he sat with the driver in the front cabin. The old woman looked at Resian sitting there at the back of the pick-up and had pity on her knowing how windy and dusty such a ride would be. She asked the men to wait for a while as she went back into her house. She came out with a *leso* and an old blanket which she handed to Resian, asking her to cover her head with the *leso* and wrap her body with the blanket to keep herself warm and shield herself from the wind and dust. And truly, those two items proved to be invaluable to her, not only during the gruelling journey but even thereafter.

Resian was in very high spirits when the journey began. The air was crisp and refreshing. The notion that she was outsmarting Oloisudori and her father from what

they must have thought was an inescapable situation, made her exceedingly happy. A feel-good sensation pervaded her heart and she regarded the journey as an exciting adventure. She began to whistle and hum some cowboy tunes earlier learnt in school, and that added excitement and cheerfulness to her spirit now that she was travelling to meet her role model, the *Emakererei*. She was no longer apprehensive the way she was the night before when she harboured the notion that she was plunging into the unknown.

The farther they drove towards Nasila the drier the land became and the dust was appalling. Instead of fresh green pastures that she looked forward to seeing, her eyes were met by a sprawling limitless stretch of brown bare ground with patches of tawny grass. In the distance were hillocks covered by desiccated bushes of oleleshua and olkinyei and stunted shrubs of olobaai and oltikambu. There was an occasional stand of trees and scattered species of cactus, such as irankaun and isuguro. Save for that scanty vegetation, Resian saw a lonely and nearly desolate land that stretched to as far as her eyes could see. Truly, reality had come to mock her cherished imagination.

And it was unbearably hot! Despite the fact that she was seated at the back of the pick-up, she could still feel the heat. The sun beamed down from a clear blue sky with such torrid intensity that the metal bodywork of the vehicle became scaldingly hot to the point of being

unbearable. The heat sapped her strength and the dust and the heated air burned in her throat and lungs. She felt hot, thirsty and very uncomfortable. But the men in the front cabin never for once bothered to look back to see how she was faring.

By five o'clock they were still on the road. The road had by then become so rough that the driver had to stop the vehicle several times to remove boulders that were strewn on the road. Whenever the vehicle stopped the dust settled on Resian in several layers. But dust was a lesser nuisance. Flies and mosquitoes gathered around her eyes and mouth and crawled into her nostrils in search of moisture. The mosquitoes in particular gathered in shrilly droning clouds, attacking all areas of her exposed skin and even biting through her dress. When the vehicle resumed motion the flies and mosquitoes menace lessened as they were blown away by the wind. But the reprieve was only temporary until the vehicle stopped again and the cycle was repeated.

At one point the driver - a short thin man of forty or so with brooding eyes and a twitching mouth - stopped the vehicle glanced at the back and growled a rude remark at Resian. Like Olarinkoi, he seemed callous and irritated for reasons she did not understand.

"You, woman," the driver called rudely, "would you want to stretch your legs?"

Resian nodded silently and gathered the skirts of her dress, then stepped over the side of the pick-up

slowly, placing her foot carefully on the wheel, then lifted the other foot over the side of the vehicle and stepped down to the ground. The men totally ignored her but that did not bother her. What bothered her then was the heat, flies and mosquitoes. The moment she stepped onto the ground, she began to sweat profusely. Her body reeked of sweat and dust. And the sweat attracted mosquitoes that bit her through her dress and raised lumps on her arms and legs which itched constantly.

She walked to the side of the road to a bush. But within seconds she came back running fast screaming at the top of her voice. She sobbingly explained that she had seen a snake. But for reasons she did not understand, instead of sympathising with her, the men were enraged. They bitterly rebuked her for screaming.

Soon it was dark, and the temperature fell rapidly bringing her welcome relief from the stifling heat. But it also brought her a new terror. She feared that a leopard could easily spring from the bushes onto the pick-up and drag her out, especially when the vehicle slowed down as the ruts became impossible to cross at high speed. She, therefore, crouched at the centre of the back of the pick-up, wide eyed, looking from side to side with terror, wondering how far they were yet to travel before reaching the sheep ranch where Minik ene Nkoitoi the *Emakererei*, resided.

She gave thought to that important destination that could change her life entirely. She wondered how

*Emakererei* would receive her. Having seen the manner in which Olarinkoi had behaved towards her since leaving Nasila in the morning, she doubted whether he would be in a position to present her case adequately to the *Emakererei*. How she wished she had a clean set of clothes that she could put on after a shower, to give her confidence to face *Emakererei* and bravely put her case properly to her. But as it were, she thought she now looked like a sow that had been rolling in the dust. She had a layer of dust in her mouth, in her nostrils, in her ears and on her eyelashes.

She was thus musing when the vehicle suddenly slowed down, turned and began to labour as it passed through a rough terrain. It creaked, rattled and swayed from side to side as it was driven over uneven ground. But she thought they had at last arrived at their destination. That diversion excited her and her heartbeats increased with anticipation and expectation.

Suddenly, the beam of the vehicle's light brought into view a small mud-plastered house with a rusty tin roof. Around the house was a thorn fence and beside the house was a small wooden gate that was shut. The vehicle slowed down and stopped in front of the gate. The two men conversed in low tones for a few minutes in the front cabin, and then Olarinkoi opened the door and came out. He walked round to the back of the vehicle and shot back the tower bolts that held the tailgate and lowered it. He pulled out two bags, one of

maize flour and the other of sugar, and lifted a couple of large cartons and placed them on the bags that were already on the ground.

"What are you still doing on the back of the vehicle?" he asked Resian rudely. "Alight quickly, the driver doesn't have the whole night to wait." The moment she alighted, the pick-up reversed turned and was driven off. Within a few seconds they were left in pitch darkness and no sound was audible save for their breathing and the gentle rippling sound as the wind rustled dried leaves. The stillness was eerie and frightening.

Olarinkoi removed a torch from his pocket, beamed it to the gate and began to walk towards it without talking to Resian. He took a bunch of keys from his pocket, selected one and inserted into a dangling padlock and opened it. Resian still stood where she was left in the darkness, feeling sick from hunger and nauseated from the lurching and the rattling of the pick-up. Already, a swarm of mosquitoes was gathering around her and a cold wind that was blowing towards her made her shiver uncontrollably. "Come on, woman," Olarinkoi growled. "Are you going to stand there until you are dragged away by hyenas?"

"Good Lord!" Resian gasped in shock. She hoped in God's name that what she was imagining was not what was in Olarinkoi's mind. What did she get herself into! Where was she and was Olarinkoi sincere when he said



he was taking her to *Emakererei*? She hoped the house before them belonged to another family friend of Olarinkoi and that they were going to be there only for the night. In the morning, she hoped, they would walk to *Emakererei* place, which she imagined was close by. But it worried her that, other than rebuking her, Olarinkoi had not looked at her nor spoken to her since they left Nasila.

She followed him through the small gate across a small courtyard, to the front of the small house. He inserted another key into a padlock that locked the door. He opened it, left her standing alone and went back outside. In a minute, he came back carrying one of the cartons, shoved the door open with his shoulder and stepped in. Once in, he placed the carton on the floor, fumbled in his pocket, brought out a box of matches and lit a lamp. Resian entered into the room and observed with shock, disgust and utter revulsion, her new surroundings.

The house had two rooms. One was a fireplace whose dead ashes signified desertion. There were two three-legged stools that stood next to the wall and a rough wooden rack that stood at a corner, where unwashed dishes, utensils and pots with dried remains of food, stared back at her. The floor was caked with sheep dung while dirty clothes hung from pegs on the walls.

"Don't stand there staring like a fool," Olarinkoi rebuked her angrily. "Light the fire and let us make some

food. If you want to know, food here is not a right, it is a privilege that comes with conditions."

Resian was numb with shock. For a moment, she did not even seem to hear what Olarinkoi was telling her. She just stood with her mouth agape, her lower lip hanging loose. Like one in a dream, she felt detached as if watching things happening to someone else.

Olarinkoi left her standing in the house and went out to bring in the provisions that he had left outside the gate. He dragged in the two bags, one after the other, then carried in the carton, untied it and rummaged about it fishing out a wrapped item, which turned out to be a piece of meat.

"You, woman, look here!" he shouted at her aggressively. "You can either cook or keep standing stupidly and die of hunger. The choice is yours. Should you choose to cook, here is a piece of meat. The knife is over there. Of course you are not blind you can see the *sufurias*. There is a whole bag of maize meal there and water is in that container. There is paraffin in that can and you can collect firewood from a stack outside the house. Any questions?" Resian did not answer.

She silently stared at the man who seemed to have suddenly turned from a person she had known for quite some time, to a beast. On his part, Olarinkoi glared at her and without uttering another word, picked up a knobkerry and a spear from one corner of the room and took two long strides that brought him to the door. He

flung it open with a forceful yank, stepped outside and then pulled it shut with such a loud bang that the rickety doorframe shook precariously. She heard his brisk steps as he strode to the gate. He walked out and locked the gate from outside.

Resian realised fearfully that she had been left all alone in a strange hovel, in the middle of nowhere. She was scared and trembled with fear. She began to imagine that a dangerous animal could be lurking in the dark corners of that shack and could spring on her at any moment tearing her into shreds. Fear sharpened her sense of hearing so that any slight noise such as a rippling sound made by the blowing wind, sent her jumping in despair.

After sometime, she calmed down sufficiently to start reasoning. She wondered what had happened. Had she dropped from a frying pan into the fire? Was Olarinkoi a beast that had been pretending to be a human being while waiting for an opportunity to avail itself so as to spring a surprise on her? Or was the man just playing games with her and would turn up in the morning, asking her to get up and follow him as they resumed their journey to the *Emakererei*'s place? She held onto that latter reasoning and it gave her a flicker of hope. And like a match stick that kindled and lit a fire that spread by leaps and bounds, that hope grew and pervaded her entire heart. Yes, Olarinkoi meant no harm and that was the reason why he left her alone in that

shack while he went elsewhere to find himself a place to sleep.

She wrapped the blanket the old woman had given her around her body, covered her head with the *leso* and sat on one of the stools letting her mind float fleetingly into all kinds of fanciful thoughts. For the first time since leaving her home, she thought of the kind of turmoil her disappearance had created. Her mind focused on her father and she thought how mad he was at her for having disrupted his plans with that monster called Oloisudori. Then she thought of her mother and how sad she was on realising that she had disappeared. She imagined her moving from place to place looking for her desperately. Thoughts of her sister brought tears into her eyes. How she missed her sister Taiyo. Oh sweet loving Taiyo! Always ready to listen, always soothing her anger, stress or anxiety. How she missed her laughter, her argument and her reasoning. She thought of their warm, comfortable bed and wished she were there sleeping next to her sister.

She drifted to sleep. She was asking her sister to move over. Taiyo was a bit reluctant but eventually, she moved and she got into bed beside her although she had not washed her feet. Oh sweet bed it was! The sleep took her to a dreamland where she met the *Emakererei* who promised her all kinds of wonderful things. She promised to take her to Nakuru and have her enroll as a student at the Egerton University. She also promised to

offer her a vocational job. But above all she promised to protect her from anyone threatening her with the pain of FGM. She said it was her right to remain among *intoiye nemengalana*.

Her dream was rudely and violently interrupted by a thunderous bang and a loud roar of laughter. She woke up with a start, jumped up to her feet and stared at the door with wide panic-stricken eyes. For a moment she could not figure out her surroundings and called out the name of her sister Taiyo. She was terrified. The door flung open and Olarinkoi staggered in. He was stone drunk. Resian stared at him unblinkingly as he walked towards her and she backed off terrified, squeezing herself flatly against the wall. He followed her there and got hold of her shoulders and shook her violently glaring at her with his glittering eyes.

"You silly thing," he thundered angrily. "I tell you to prepare food and you refuse to do so, eh? Today you will know who is the owner of this home. If you are still in doubt, let me tell you frankly that from today on you are my wife, hear that, eh? You are my wife. For a long time you have been sneering at me, showing how highly educated you are. Today we shall see how educated your body is! Yes, we shall see!"

He got hold of her hand and began dragging her into the other room. At first she did not understand his intention until he began unfastening her buttons with his rough trembling hands. Then the truth came, and with it,

terror and panic. She tried to get away from him, but he held her effortlessly as he brutally continued fumbling with her dress, trying to loosen it. She screamed as loudly as she could while she pushed him away and thrashed frantically about. But that did not deter him and he totally ignored her screams holding her more firmly with his strong arms. Against her loud protest, he tore her garments and began to push her towards the bed.

Then desperately she took the last chance of self defence and self-preservation. Mustering all her strength, she thrust his thumb into her mouth; sunk her teeth into the flesh like a ferocious animal and tenaciously held onto it, tugging at it fiercely like a lioness. She could feel the flesh tearing and she tasted the salt of his blood as it filled her mouth but she clung unto the thumb as Olarinkoi howled with pain. He tried to push her away but she held on. He cried out loudly, but she was relentless as she dug deeper and deeper into the flesh, nearly severing the limb. Then suddenly, he hit her so hard on her ribcage with his elbow, knocking the wind out of her. He hit her again on the side of her head and she passed out.

When she regained her consciousness, it came back gradually, like a remote recollection of a distant past incident. She felt as if a haze of tiredness had come over her mind in the form of a fleeting dream; floating like mist blown by a gust of wind.

The first thing she realised was that her mouth tasted bitter, was very dry and her throat was parched. She opened her eyes lazily and looked about and around her. At first she did not know where she was and how long she had been there. She was lying on a makeshift bed that was built into the corner of a room; in a desolate filthy house. The bed was covered with dirty bloody rags. And she was naked. Her head throbbed with an excruciating pain that nearly blinded her. There was a trickle of blood in her nostrils, indicating that she had nosebled.

Slowly by slowly, she began to regain her memory. She gathered fragmented pieces of information that were scattered in her mind and began to piece them together. She recalled the incident with Oloisudori, the quarrel with her father, the trip with Olarinkoi and her struggle with him as he tried to rape her and she had bit his thumb. She could not remember anything beyond that point.

She noticed that someone had removed a rag that covered a hole on the wall above the bed to let in some light from outside. She also noticed that someone had lit the fire and the room was full of smoke that drifted and found its *exit* through that hole above the bed. Her eyes burned with the effect of the smoke and they filled with tears which blinded her as she strained to familiarise herself with her surroundings.

She tried to lift her head but she could not. She tried to move her legs, but they were as heavy as lead. She could hardly turn any of them. She felt an excruciating pain all over her body as if some cruel person had mercilessly pounded her body, limb by limb with a heavy mallet. The attempt to lift her head or move her limbs sapped the little energy left in her body and she fainted, drifting back to unconsciousness.

When she later came to, confused fleeting impressions registered on her awareness. There were sensations of movement, of cold and of heat. And always there was pain, a continuous unending torture and from which there seemed to be no escape. Distorted images moved about her at times, and at other times there was only a cold and lonely darkness. Several moments of consciousness came and went.

There were brief moments when she imagined that Oloisudori had caught up with her. Then there were the longer periods when the fever that gripped her, coupled with the struggle of her body to recover from the massive loss of blood took away her memory. Images of Olarinkoi and Oloisudori merged, becoming one great block of terror like the image of a charging elephant.

In her confused mind, time was warped. Sometimes, a day seemed to stretch for an endless period, while a single twinge of pain jarred her nerves in what appeared to be an eternity. Impressions crowded together



in rapid sequences and periods of light and darkness flickered by in a dizzying swirl.

The first day the lucid memory came, she realised that she was alone in the room and bright sunlight flooded in through the doorway. It was hot in there and she was naked, sweat forming and trickling down her face and the side of her body. That was when she realised that there was someone else in the room apart from her. For a moment, terror returned to haunt her. Was it Olarinkoi who had come back to torture her? She turned her head slowly, and her eyes were met by a kind stare from an old woman.

Their eyes met and held, and Resian recalled faintly the motherly figure that had been nursing her. Was it a dream replayed in her mind from the days of her infancy or was it the fever playing its cruel games in her mind? But she vaguely recalled the presence of an old woman in that room, who resembled her mother or her *Yeiyo-botorr*. She recalled her talking to her kindly asking her how she felt. At times she held her up, giving her drinks of water, or milk, or feeding her; putting bits of *olpurda* dipped in honey into her mouth, or pounded pieces of mutton and *ugali* and urging her to swallow. Yes, she was certain that a woman had been in that room. And now, there she was standing beside the bed.

"Who are you, kind mother?" Resian asked weakly, aware that those were the first words that she had uttered in along time.

"*Kaaji enkabaani*," the old woman answered quietly.

Resian knew *enkabaani* to be a nurse or a person who treated others. So she wondered whether that was her name or her profession. But the old woman would not be drawn to discussing names. She told Resian not to tire herself with unnecessary details. What should be of importance to her, she told her, was to regain her health. When she was back on her feet, she would tell her how long she had been lying on that bed and what happened to her when she was unconscious.

The old lady helped Resian to a sitting position and she braced herself on one arm. She was still very weak, sweat was breaking out and her arm trembled from the effort of holding herself up in a sitting position. But her head was clear. For the first time, she was ravenously hungry. And she ate her full meal unaided.

The following morning, Resian slowly raised herself to a sitting position. Then she lifted her legs one after the other, and with an effort, got out of bed. She fetched the leso that the Nasila old lady had given her and wrapped it around her body. Supporting herself with the walls, she carefully and slowly walked to the fireplace, and again, slowly lowered herself to sit on a stool beside the fire. The old woman was not in the room by then. When she came back, her eyes widened with surprise as she saw Resian sitting by the fire, then a

brilliant smile spread across her face, her teeth gleaming in the morning sunshine.

"*Tagolo*," she said prayerfully and spat on Resian's face.

It took two days before she could get around the vicinity of the house. Even then, she was still weak and terribly emaciated and she could hardly walk except to drag herself haltingly with the assistance of a walking stick. Having entered the house in pitch darkness, the night they arrived she was now eager and quite curious to get out and see how the countryside looked like.

It was late afternoon when she got out of the house. Standing outside, she had a good look at what had been her home for the last several days. A small shabby structure of mud plastered walls and a tin roof that was spotted with pieces of bark where the iron sheet had rotted or fallen off, with a couple of rickety sheds and a tiny structure that served as the toilet, made up all what Olarinkoi called home. It was in the middle of a plain that stretched from the overgrazed hillside down to the winding 'river called *inkiito*, at the bottom of the slope. The light breeze blowing across the hills smelled fresh and clean. It caressed and soothed her haggard face providing the much needed fresh air. In that damned place, it was only the fresh air that gladdened her heart.

As she sat on a log enjoying the cool fresh air, the light deepened as the sun started to set. The sky became a bowl of red which darkened to a thick

combination of deep purplish red colour clouds. Those clouds spread toward the west, flooding all those extensive plains with a tinted crimson glow. Then she saw a few sheep, possibly fifty or so, being driven towards her. They too became tinted with varying shades of red.

The sheep were being shepherded by an old woman. And they seemed to know their home, because when they got nearer the small Olarinkoi's homestead, they ran towards it leaving the old woman behind. The old woman walked directly to where Resian sat and stood before her. Resian looked at her and fear crept through her weak body. Who was she? Was she a witch? She asked herself fearfully as she peered at the ugly woman who stood there glaring at her silently.

Resian could not estimate her age but she thought it was substantial. She must have been tall in her younger days, for she now walked with a stoop. She had bony arms, legs and shoulders and her long flat breasts hung pendulously down her thin ribs. Resian thought some kind of disease must have made most of her hair come out, and what remained on her head was cropped off in uneven patches. She appeared completely toothless and her face was a maze of crevices and wrinkles.

But what frightened Resian most were her eyes, or rather her eye for she was mono-eyed. She had a single, glaring, red-rimmed eye that resembled that of the legendary *enenaunerr*, the monster that was said to

be partly stone and partly human: it was said to devour human beings. When they had visited their uncle's home at Nasila, the old woman story teller would narrate to them those fables that frightened children to obedience. What was before her now was no fable. The old witch was real and the sight was frightening. Resian thought the old woman did not look very strong or healthy, but when she thought of her own health, the old woman could have been ten times stronger than she was in comparison.

"So it is you who chewed my son's hand to near amputation?" the old woman asked in a low rumbling and frightening voice. She sneered at Resian contemptuously and spat on the ground. "What were you guarding so tenaciously and valiantly when I am told you are no yet a woman? Are you not ashamed to be among *intoiye nemengalana* at your age? *Ptu!*"

Resian was shocked by the words of the old woman and she stared at her frightfully, a new hopelessness and helplessness threatening to wreak more havoc to her already wrecked nerves. But the old woman was not finished with her yet.

"I hear your father is stinking rich," she said mocking Resian derogatorily. Then roaring with a demonic derisive laughter, she said disdainfully, "I am also told, you, being his favourite daughter, was always fed in bed with a silver spoon. This is what we have been trying to do to you in the last few days. I don't know

whether we have succeeded We looked for a silver spoon in the whole neighbourhood but we could not find any. I hope the ordinary spoon we have used to feed you does not make you retch!" then she burst out and laughed uproariously.

"Oh my God! What is this?" Resian cried out silently unable to bear any more the detestable, stressful, and disgusting verbiage from the old witch. She found it offensive, repugnant and downright obnoxious. The much she could do was to listen to the old woman as she spewed out her loathsome nastiness and foul grossness.

"Listen to me you daughter of *olkarsis*," she growled like an irate bull, her irritating foul language grating on Resian's nerves. "I hear your father and that *ol-ushuushi* called Oloisudori to whom he had betrothed you and from whom my gallant and valorous *moran* snatched you are combing every bush, every cave and every river bank looking for you, as if you are the only *esiankiki* in the whole world. Anyway let them try for I know they are not going to find you. I am not going to allow it. That fool called Oloisudori does not deserve you. You belong to Olarinkoi, my son. As soon as we clip that erogenous salacity from you that destroys homes, you will become a respected woman worthy to be called ..."

"Stop! I do not want to hear anymore!" Resian said weakly, her heart beginning to palpitate fast and irregularly. "I want to go into the house."

"Before you go in," the old woman continued relentlessly, "listen to me, you have to eat well. Get strong as soon as possible for the trek ahead is long. It is already arranged that you and Olarinkoi will have to move to Tanzania where you will remain until this fuss kicked up by Oloisudori and your father is over. If you like it there you can settle and build your home in that country. I have asked the *enkabaani* to engage the services of *enkamuratani* when you are strong enough to undergo the ritual so that we are done with it soon. It is a pity that we now have to do what Ole Kaelo ought to have done long time ago. Anyway, Maa culture will soon judge him harshly. Now go in for it's becoming chilly."

"O God of all creation!" Resian cried out bitterly and audibly as soon as the cruel ugly old woman left her. "What unending woes these are! *Taba! Kilome sogo!* What have I done to the gods to deserve this kind of punishment?"

Then she recalled the teaching of the Bible, and especially where it narrated the woes of those who went through similar or even worse tribulations, but triumphed at the end. She particularly remembered the wailing lamentations of Job and his railing against injustice, and she thought her problems were nothing compared to those he had suffered. He triumphed because he was stoic, focused and was able to persevere. Olarinkoi and his demonic mother may physically take her to Tanzania,

Olarinkoi may physically take her as his wife, they may even physically circumcise her, but mentally she was going to resist. She was going to refuse to be subdued. Where she could, she was going to physically resist. She resolved to remain focused and she prayed for strength and endurance to be able to bear all those misfortunes.

She had wondered where Olarinkoi was, but she had now learnt from his mother that he was some place, planning more evil. She had also learnt that Oloisudori, the monster, was looking for her. She now wondered who among them was a lesser devil. She did not know what to think about her father. He was like the proverbial pig that was fried using its own lard. She thought he was suffering double tragedy: the loss of his daughter and the loss of his shop and home if they were financed by Oloisudori. She thought of Joseph Parmuat and wondered how he had taken the news of her disappearance. Did he organise another *enkitungatto* comb the forests of Nasila the way he had done when they were accosted by those vagabonds?

She knew her sister Taiyo was inconsolable and so was her mother. But when she thought of her mother, some bitter bile rose in her chest. Yes, although she loved her mother dearly, she had failed her. She so much feared her husband that she was awed to silence by his presence even when injustices were being committed against her own daughter. She now understood a quotation someone mentioned to her once. It said at the



end: what pained one most was not the injustices carried out against one by one's adversaries, but the silence of those who called themselves his or her friends at the time the injustice was being carried out. Her mother's silence pained her beyond words. Although one had to know which side their bread was buttered, she reasoned sadly, there was a time when the bread and the butter were not important. Even the hyena's greed spared its own young ones, she reasoned.

Resian was still sitting on the log outside the tiny homestead when the *enkabaani* returned from her errands. By then the moon had risen and it was high up in the sky. She saw her walk towards her moving slowly as the bright light of the moon that streamed through the few trees subdued the colour of her skin, making her brown complexion seem darker. She carried some luggage on her back that made her stoop a little. On seeing her approaching, Resian's heart leapt with joy. Although she did not even know who she was and why she took care of her, fed her and nursed her, she had come to regard her as the only connection she had to the sane world. She had promised to give an account of what had happened to her, what was happening and what was in the offing. She was very eager to know all that so that she could plan her next move. She knew she was still weak but she was grateful that she was steadily and progressively regaining her strength.

"Oh, poor thing!" the *enkabaani* exclaimed concernedly on seeing Resian. "You are still sitting outside this late? Oh my God! The mosquitoes must have sucked your veins dry! Come now. Let me help you to stand."

The *enkabaani* helped Resian to walk back into the house. She made her sit at the fireplace as she lit the fire and made her some tea. They were taking the tea as the old woman prepared supper, when Resian asked who the mono-eyed old woman was.

"She is the mother of the man who assaulted you," the *enkabaani* explained coolly. "She is also a feared and respected *enkoiboni*. Most likely you have only heard of a male holder of that position called *oloiboni*. Female ones are there too but very rare. This particular one is famous for her prediction and prophecies that always nearly come true.

Take your case for instance, she had made a prophesy long before your father Ole Kaelo, moved to Nasila. She said your father would relocate to Nasila and bring along with him his *intoiye nemengalana*. Then she said her son Olarinkoi would move to that home, live with the Kaelo family for some time and eventually bring one of his daughters to his home to be circumcised and given to him as a wife. So when you came, it was not a surprise to us who had heard the prediction. It was bound to happen. What was not in the prediction was what Olarinkoi tried to do with you. Rape was not part of

the programme. For his disobedience and defiance, he was rebuked, scolded and reprimanded by his mother. He is now in a hide-out somewhere in the bush recuperating from that wound you inflicted upon him with that vicious bite."

"Where do you come in?" a shocked and flabbergasted Resian asked, her eyes wide with disbelief.

"You see, if it were not for Olarinkoi's drunken stupidity," *enkabaani* explained nonchalantly, "you would have been circumcised the following day. The *enkamuratani* was ready and I was to take over from her and nurse you during your recuperation. My role was going to end after your shaving and handing over to your husband. The *enkamuratani* and I are paid handsomely to carry out our instructions."

"What is going to happen now?" asked Resian, stunned and frightened by the outrageous explanation.

"I don't really know," the old woman said, "Now that Olarinkoi had bungled the job by dipping his dirty finger into the porridge before it was dished out to him, he will have to suffer the consequences. The whole thing has aborted and the *enkoiboni* will have to go back to her pebbles to chart out new directions."

"Meanwhile?" Resian asked her heart in her mouth with fright.

"To speak the truth young lady," the old nurse said sympathetically, "the twelve days I have nursed you have made me come to love you as my own child. You

are courageous both physically and mentally. In the first five days after the assault, I did not think you were going to live. You were very weak and you had lost a lot of blood through that nose-bleeding. But you fought on. You had a will to live. Even now I believe you have a will to go places. I don't know what *enkoiboni* has predicted but, I am willing to help you do what you intend to do or go where you want to go once you are back onto your feet, with or without *enkoiboni's* predictions."

That was music in Resian's ears! A surge of renewed energy spurted in her veins. She suddenly fell to her knees and hugged the legs of the old woman, washing them with her tears.

"My own God given mother!" she sobbed. "May God bless you."