

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, pours tea into it and hands 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 Nkoitoi, *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 breath 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.

"*Yeiyoy*, 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 Nkoitoi, 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 enchashurr - 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 *yeiyobotorr'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, "*Yeiyoy*, 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, *Yeiyoye* can manage on her own. Isn't it *Yeiyoye*?"

"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 *Yeiyō-kiti* that they would go and help her plaster her kitchen, she would better be there to represent her. Resian said their *Yeiyō-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 *Yeiyō* 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 *Yeiyō* and *Taiyō* 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 *intoye 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 not 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 *morán* 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."