

A SMOOTH – ROUGH ROAD

Journeying on a Smooth Rough Road

Nsiimire Osbert and Asingwire Richard Rich

Abstract: *A smooth rough road Journey on a smooth rough road.*

The gun is a god.

It has many, big believers and followers.

Its power flows in man's blood

To make him forget death.

Man will always face its wrath.

Keyword: Love, Journey, smooth, rough

A SMOOTH – ROUGH ROAD

Journeying on a Smooth Rough Road

By

Nsiimire Osbert

And

Asingwire Richard Rich

Dedication

This book is dedicated to our untiring gallant mothers

Balambura Grace; she is a star!

Manzi Jovlet, a mother who's fights like a wounded lion!

All the women and countries

That have been, are devastated and marred with wars.

Who are the troubleshooters?

The gun is a god.

It has many, big believers

And followers.

Its power flows in man's blood

To make him forget death.

Man will always face its wrath.

NOBWIL, 2022

This is fiction. If there is a name or an event similar to what you have ever experienced in life, it is purely coincidental.

CHAPTER ONE

It was incredible! Past or present, and if one would grope into the future, man had absolutely failed to come to terms with the truth, reality and what was concrete. The abstract was his bed of roses. Man had a grain or a seed in him that was dormant. Any opportunity availed him would let the dormancy break to germination. It was the seed of evil, jealous, meanness and hypocrisy. It was a small seed; however, with the passage of time in every citizen's journey, there was a realization that it was a mustard seed. Man's possessiveness reflected in 'my' and the ironical 'ours' was becoming deadly cancerous. My wife, my army or boys, my country, my oil, my land, my house, our church, our school, were common utterances that had grown a waspy sting. Soon or later there was going to develop the Napoleonic thinking of 'my world'!

As Mujaaji's wife was cleaning the house, she saw a stick leaning against the wall in the corner next to the bed, where they rested their heads. Was it an era of sticks or canes and, therefore, corporal punishments? It was a small-sized stick like the herdsmen use to control cattle. It used not to be there. When she threw eyes at it, she became suspicious and many conflicting thoughts ran through her mind. She came closer, picked it, and felt it in his hand by shaking it. It was hard like granite. The tree species where this stick was cut was called 'buttocks cracker'. It could kill a big tropical cobra. 'What is this stick doing here?' she soliloquized. When you see a stick that caned your co-wife, throw it over the fence or hedge,' she thought. And she continued, 'I don't know what the next night or tomorrow may bring. Let me throw it away; I'll tell him that it was, maybe, misplaced by children. I've to emancipate myself and other women,' she concluded. The woman's reasoning indicated that she was a Homo Faber.

She had just finished cleaning when she saw her neighbour coming to check on her.

'Good morning Mrs. Mujaaji,' greeted Korugambo.

'Good morning Koru,' she responded. 'Take a seat.'

'Thank you.'

'Not at all.'

She rushed into the house and brought her a mug of cold porridge. Korugambo took a long swig that almost sent the level of the drink to mug-bottom level, where the dregs could be seen like mud in the river bed that has been exposed by the long drought.

‘Do you know what,’ she said in low tone next to a whisper.

‘No,’ said Mujaaji’s wife anxiously.

‘Your sweetheart beat up your co-wife the day before yesterday.’

‘What?’

‘Yes.’

Before she uttered another word, they saw Mujaaji approaching them. The two women kept mum, pretending to be very busy.

Mujaaji’s second wife lived in another village. There was a mass of water that separated the two villages. The presence of boats made it easier to cross to the other side. Mujaaji alternated paying biological visits to his wives. It was sometimes hard to tell what was happening in each other’s homestead. However, Korugambo was a mouthpiece through which the news swung like a pendulum across the villages.

After a short while, Koru excused herself, and left.

A stranger dressed in a white robe, fastened with a blue string appeared to Mujaaji and his wife. He held a small stick in his armpit. Possibly, if he had a Holy book in his hand, he would be called a Prophet or a Pastor or a Reverend. The couple welcomed him in their home; they listened to him.

Peace be with you people of earth and God. Time has come for you to be strangers in your homes and, in your country. You’ll look at your next door person, you’ll not understand him or her; you’ll not know your neighbour and your neighbour will not know you; it’ll be the same for children and their parents, rulers and the ruled. The road where you’ll be journeying will be a rough one, less travelled. There are two passages; it’ll be hard for you to choose which one to take as you lapse into limbo. Every burden and disease will come; however, there’ll come a

man, with a clown on his head. He will claim he has all the powers to offer all the solutions to the problems therein in the society. You'll all believe. His heart will be the hardest book to read. Few will graduate.

MAY GOD BLESS YOU

The humble, down-to-earth man removed his stick from the armpit, waved it as a sign of peace, and left.

Seven months later, Mujaaji and his two wives migrated to deeper caves of the forested areas of western DR Congo. One wondered if they had gone to join their cousins to walk leisurely and jump from tree to tree. Mujaaji had passed that stage; even he had surpassed the Neanderthal Man. The primitiveness displayed was not expected of the present man. The actions and deeds expected of everyone were believed to be very refined. It was contrary to what man desired from civilization.

The year was nineteen eight six. Before this period, the people claimed that they had tasted bad times. The tall, strong black man, otherwise known as Mujaaji, could neither say it was the sweetest of time nor could he say it was an era of freedom of expression and development. The period was not a bed of roses. Man and woman had no time to take a stool and sit. There was no time to sleep. As a result there was conscription, hard labour, slashing, whacking and caning. There was land grabbing and eviction, enslavement both at home and abroad. As a result people had experienced depopulation, fatigue, and frustration which bred too much resentment towards the well-cultured man, so promising and well-educated together with their henchmen. The blessed people were raised in a good environment and setting, and the cursed their dwelling was in humid catastrophic climate prevailing in the Dark Continent. The tall, intellectual man was smartly dressed, and so was his brain. He was hard working in nature and had known the importance of natural and human resources. He was full of vision of liberation and development. He had the power to visualize the past, the present and the future. In sooth, he very well understood and appreciated that the world was small; and it was narrowing every now and then. It was of great importance to ally with some top leaders of the Dark Continent to carry out conscription of the innocent natives so that they would defend their

interests in political, economic, social and, at least, religious fronts. The Black Creature had had an upper hand in the actions of absurdity. This was far back in the seventeenth century when slaves were sold to North Africa, the Middle East and America. This continued up to the Twentieth Century which culminated to uprisings and stiff resistances that wafted and swept the Black continent. A case in point was the Maji Maji rebellion, Mau Mau rebellion, Nyangire rebellion, Nama Herero and other stiff African Resistances. The era gave birth to resistors like Kabalega, Mwanga and Dedan Kimathi. Those were the turbulent years that left behind scathing scars, which scars had induced the new breed to slide into the bush to come back with fruits of refined freedom, liberty and democracy. The scars oscillated from the past to the present. It will resonate to the future. Life had two sides; it was a coin. There was the smooth and the rough road which characterized the two sides of life. Alongside the resistors were collaborators who betrayed their brothers, sisters, parents, relatives and friends.

The interior was forested. It was the home of dangerous wild animals, like lions, leopards, jackals, anacondas that threatened the lives of the new comers. The roads and waters had to be cleared to open the ways and passages into the interior of this fertile woman so that she would produce raw materials to feed the hungry and voluptuous industries that manufactured goods like mirrors, clothes, agricultural implements, pesticides... The mosquitoes in addition to the wild animals like pigs were a menace. Diseases were rampant. Some Mujaajis had become ninjas so tough that their mind was full of resistance, which made them to be termed as resistors at a later time in comparison with collaborators who betrayed and sold their brothers into slavery!

It was claimed that the people of the past had nothing to show in Jesus's name, in Allah's name save for the small gods that lived in giant trees that more or less looked like baobabs. It was further said that the gods had their dwellings in big rocks, which were shaped in cave-like structures, some having semblance of early architectural churches of the West.

There was thick vegetation, rivers with thick and big volumes of water, tall and short mountains, which were intact and proud of their virginity. No kind of virility could break and penetrate this virginity not until the desire to build schools and churches, extensive farming and industrialization flared up like fire in the dry westerly, blowing from Congo, which had just lost

their moisture-laden power over the luxuriant forests behind mountain Ruwenzori. By the time they crossed the giant mountain that heaved with snowflakes, they would be the leeward woman of Kalahari Desert, with nothing to display to the bridegroom's burning fire in the loins with nothing to quench it. Oh, what a bad night! Who would keep such a night in his memories! If it were kept, it would be a miserable and disappointing one. Ssshew!

Katabago village and her neighbours lived in peace and tranquility. They put much importance to sharing, team work, which strengthened the bond and the unity of the natives; it created a sense of belonging. This was a trait that trickled from the old folk to the young. Their wives and children were also too close. This radiated so sweet an atmosphere that made all the newcomers wonder how the daily living of this rustic and rural life was better than they had ever experienced. There was no single eve that would pass by without a neighbour coming to check on his or her people, especially old men; it was called the exchanging of visits, a custom that was critically observed. There were twenty old men in this village. These were: Old man, Mihigo, Rwakuburya, Rwankosa, Ntare, Rwamubende and Mbogo to mention few. These were some of the prominent old men in the village. They were all octogenarians.

'The world has wonders!' said Mihingo, looking at a distance.

'Which wonders? Wonders ended with the Son of God,' Ntare chipped in.

'Wonders didn't end with Jesus. The son of man is also making miracles,' interjected Rwakuburya.

'What miracles?' asked Rwamubende, frowning slightly.

'More wonders are yet to come; this is just the beginning,' said Mbogo, scratching his beard like all the secrets lay in it.

'I don't mind listening to these wonders. The years I have lived here, I haven't seen and heard any,' Rwankosa said, laughing a long cackling laugh.

No sooner had they plunged into the sensitive conversation than Old Man appeared from the bend. Mihigo raised his head to look at him. 'You're welcome,' said Mihigo enthusiastically.

‘*Asante, Bwana,*’ said Old Man, pulling his smoking pipe from his long coat. ‘Doodu,’ called Old Man, with aloud voice of command. Fetch me a glowing splint. I want to wash problems away from me,’ he said, smiling a wan smile.

Doodu rushed quickly to the kitchen, picked a smoking, glowing splint and handed it over to Old Man.

‘Thank you, young lad. May you produce many children in the near future. I have many granddaughters; which one do you love?’ asked Old Man curiously.

Doodu was consumed up by silence; he looked down, feeling shy. The idea of marrying and producing children did not make him comfortable because whenever, together with his young boys and girls, they were told by the catechist that it was sinful for men and women to sleep together. They were told and given teachings about heaven and hell. They were further told about purgatory, where people would go after death, where they would burn in the hottest fire, hotter than the blast furnace that refined gold and iron.

The old man took a seat. It was the wooden chair that had a leaning support. He manufactured clouds as they conversed on the wonders of the world, which had circulated all around the globe-from Europe to Africa, from Africa to America, then India and the Far East.

The sun was heading home, so was the cattle, sheep and goats together with their shepherds. Women and children were returning home, carrying firewood and farm implements. The night was saying goodbye to the day. The alternating day and night were themselves something of wonder and miracles. Mihigo’s wife, Kigatire, brought the candle inside the house; she ushered them to come in. The white moth danced around the candle light. Did it know that it was the last dance?

Maybe. Maybe not. Finally, the hot fire from the candle terminated the moth’s life; the fire had brought peace to the insect- peace in its real sense, not as the world knew it. Kigatire summoned the children to come to lift the old people’s seats from outside to the house. It was essential to get sheltered away from the cold that had come with the night and other circumstances the villagers were experiencing.

* * * * *

CHAPTER TWO

The inhabitants of Katabago and the surrounding villages went to school to learn nothing, but cooperation and living together. Mihigo's visitors pulled their stools closer to one another for a discourse. He beamed with happiness because of hosting the natives. In modern times it would be madness to host the natives and call them visitors and treat them as visitors. To a modernist, a visitor had to be coming from far, from a town or city. He or she would alert the host of the coming. The visit had nothing to do with coming empty handed or headed! Kigatire was busy cooking. She was preparing a special meal for the old men, who were the think tanks of their village and beyond.

'Between digging and making friends, choose making friends,' said Mihigo, and added: *'The solitary walker dies alone. Life without a friend is death without a witness.'* 'Wonders are many. Many Africans are complaining about the white man who brings mirrors, jewelry, embroidered invitation cards and packed foods like tinned fish, beef, snakes, squirrels, bears, mongoose and many other delicacies in exchange for gold, silver, copper and other minerals, in addition to cotton, ivory, coffee and other superb agricultural products.'

The conversation was interrupted by roaring and thunderous laughter.

'Really? Are you sure that the white man brings here tinned mongoose and squirrels?' questioned Ntare.

'This is cheating of the highest order. And this habit is trickling in the hearts of blacks!' Mbogo said, with a tone of worry and disappointment. They're becoming cheats. 'A butcher kills one goat to add there two dogs and one baboon!' they laughed again. Anyway this was business-money making... It was survival for the fittest.

'Hmmm! Why is it that the black man and woman are not thankful? The white man brought us education and religion that brought us nearer to God.' 'And what of science and medicine? The disease can be treated within a week compared to traditional herbs which have

caused many losses of lives and money. Wild animals, snakes, mosquitoes are no longer a threat as things used to be in the past,' Rwankosa illustrated and explained.

Ntare nodded his head and said: 'this's true, son of my mother.'

'Look at how common the barbaric acts were, especially in the village of Kanyungusi, Nyakishenyi, and Muramba. The birth of twins was seen as an abomination- a curse to the land. What about throwing girls who conceived before marriage to produce bastards? These were thrown down the precipice at the place called Aheibanga.' 'And what is more, it was the brother who killed the sister by pushing her down into the abyss of thousands of meters, killing two people! This was, and is, barbaric, uncivilized and uncultured deeds which were done away with by the coming of the white man on the scene,' he concluded with a sense of hope, spiritual rejuvenation and rebirth.

Ntare, what you say is nude truth. If I can ask: If Europeans were cheating us with their cheap and hopeless products, and we really know it, why is it that even in this present age, time and era, women still carry mirrors and cosmetics in their handbags, keep them in their rooms and wear the hair shaved from the dead? This shows how valuable these products are,' he said.

Your questions hold water and have a grain of wheat!' 'Hahaha, the white man brought education, medicine, God, trade and self-independence or self-governance. The issue is: what are we doing with these? Whose fault is it? The White man or the black man?' 'If you get hold of a stick which beat your co-wife, throw it over the fence. And when the snake has bitten you, you fear its hole,' said Mbogo, with strong hand gestures and serious countenance. 'Let us do away with the white man's ways-throw mirrors away and cosmetics.' He continued to say: 'young girls and women have bleached their beautiful faces, bleached down like there is no tomorrow. The flesh is no longer there. There are only peeling off veins that have remained standing like an electric pole at the side of the road that no longer supplies electricity to sons of Adam in the game of two without a referee and a winner.'

'Aha!' said Old Man and murmured.' 'Do you know the reason why homes, marriages are no more?'

‘Cosmetics pull and consume the human flesh, leaving the woman bony like *Sanga* cattle in a long drought spell experienced by Masaka dry corridor. You touch, you squeeze, and hit but it is like flogging a dead horse,’ said Mihigo, with countenance of disappointment.

Kigatire’s last born, Mr. Bean, as they called him, entered into the house carrying a jug of warm water and a basin to help the oldies wash their hands. Had not the white man taught the black man the art of washing hands to expel diseases away? Dr. David Livingstone and other explorers suffered here in the Dark Continent. And one wonders if they did not do a wonderful job fit enough to go into the books of history, or World Guinness Book of Records in the essence of the considerate and refined hearts they had for Africans.

‘Mr. Bean, you no longer come to check on me, why?’ asked Old Man. Silence. ‘Sugarcanes are now as tall as the trees of Bwindi impenetrable forest.’ added Old Man.

Mr. Bean smiled a bit, shyly. Deeper in the heart of the lad, he had registered irreparable loss.

‘I no longer like men.’ Mr. Bean commented.

‘Why? Do you mean you’re no longer my friend?’

‘Yes.’

‘Why? Please tell me,’ pleaded Old Man.

‘My English teacher told me a story about men.’

‘Which one?’

‘**Why the New Moon is Slim**’. When the new moon is coming from west, it is coming from visiting his dad.’

‘Oh, that small crescent moon?’

‘Yes, Grandpa.’

‘Aha! What about it?’

‘The dad starves him. He doesn’t give him food. This is the reason why he’s small. But when the moon is coming from east, he is chubby, plump, and happy. This is the reason why he gives us enough light.’

‘Oh, Mr. Bean, are you saying that fathers don’t feed their children?’

‘Yes, and this is child abuse.’

‘We’re going to eat meat now. Who has bought it? Am I not inviting you to a party of tall, tropical sugarcane?’

‘My father.’

‘Don’t you think your teacher lied to you? Was she a he or a she?’

‘No, Papa. She’s a woman. Teachers don’t lie like hips.’

‘Oh, ok! I’ll tell the fact when you come for your toothbrushes,’ concluded Old Man, wondering how the young kid who has not yet discarded the umbilical cord knew about the not lying of hips!

Mr. Bean was through with the business of doing the right thing to the visitors typical of African hospitality, especially among the Bakiga of western Uganda. Old Man was surprised, shocked and perplexed. To his chagrin, the rest of the group was in the same boat.

‘You may pretend like the proverbial baboon. The baboon sat on the stone and gave it a fart but the stone pretended not to have smelt it. You old folk feign like you haven’t followed my conversation with the young one,’ said Old Man.

They burst out into laughter.

‘I’ve come to believe that teachers are doing a good job in our schools,’ Rwamubende said. ‘Did you hear how the young boy reasoned?’ ‘Pertaining to child care, fathers leave a lot to be desired.’

‘Yes,’ replied Rwankosa.

‘Then, why is it that the government has ignored the teachers for long? This has led to constant strikes. This may have a serious consequence in the future in the job market as well as morality of the future fathers and mothers,’ Rwamubende argued.

‘This is true. Look,’ signalled Mbogo to them. ‘Teachers of today are no longer respected compared with teachers in the neighbouring countries and the teachers of 1960s.’

‘Oh, Paul is doing well. Peter isn’t! This is to rob Peter to pay Paul. There’s brain drain here.’ Ntare joined in, in a pensive mood.

‘Teachers are now a laughing stock. Do you take time to observe Nzabandora’s son, teacher Mulera?’ asked Mbogo, distorting his lips and wrinkling his face. The toes peep through his shoes; they aren’t shined, and the clothes are not pressed. When he buys goods from the neighbours’ shops, he doesn’t pay in time and sometimes the debt burden is lifted from him. The wife and children are a miserable sight. They’re a symbol of poverty. I didn’t graduate but I am better than him.’

Life was a journey. No one knew where and how it evolved and where she would end. It would always be a journey, where there were roads less travelled and, in some other instances frequently trodden. Sometimes the villagers would have their spirits low, sometimes high. The sun shone, throwing sharp shafts of rays that hit the earth like a bomb or tornado, leaving it with gaps and holes or cracks. The people of God and their animals broke their legs in the crevices. They suffered from thirst and crops took the biggest share of suffering from the scorching bulb of God. Rivers dried. The grass got scalded as if they had faced the grass- scotched policy of Russians in retaliation to Napoleon Bonaparte’s ambitions to conquer the world. The geography students came from the surrounding schools to learn the features to know how they were formed. They, together with their teachers, visited many places in the district like river Ishasha to watch and study about the ox-bow features that formed in the river. A rider along the Kanyantorogo-Kayonza road had many chances of seeing God’s wonders of creation. The road snaked to Bwindi impenetrable forest towards the border, and the other one snaked to Mpungu, then Rubanda to Kabale district. Elephants and gorillas trudging in the middle of the road were flowery sights to the eyes. The time spent parking at close range looking at God’s creatures was

not wastage of time. If it were a waste, then tourists would not traverse oceans and seas to come here to make use of their money and time. The villagers always prayed for peace and stability though there was nothing to gain from Tourism. The recent killings had caused an alarm and fear in the hearts of the natives and the tourists.

The new Ishasha Dam was also constructed. This stimulated and aroused the curiosity of students in the district to grab the opportunity to learn more unlike in the past when the existence of the geographical features were shadowed from their knowledge and sight, as if they had never existed. The students would have their trips to far places like Murchison falls, Kasese, the seat of Queen Elizabeth National Park and Jinja, where it was claimed it was the source of the River Nile, the home of Beer making known as Nile Breweries, forgetting that such geographical features were just in their mouths- a stone throw to get all the knowledge that one needed at his disposal, or fingertips.

‘Excuse me sir,’ ‘we have the dam here. I can see poles and wires but we hardly see lights in our district. We sleep in darkness. Where do these wires head to?’ inquired Kacencema. The senior four students frowned and wallowed in misgivings.

‘Why don’t you do what has brought you and leave the matters of planning to the Ministry of Planning,’ answered the teacher, with a tone of furiousness.

Was this an era of not asking questions? One of the workers in the Public Service had been expelled from his job because of asking questions pertaining to accountability. The devil was at his best of work. He had converted the hearts of men and women; melted their minds, and like snow melting from the top of mountain Rwenzori down the valleys of Bujuku and Nyamwamba to create floods that would in turn sweep away the human race.

Darkness engulfed the natives of Kanungu. The electricity they got was sourced from Jinja Electric Power Station. To the inhabitants’ disappointment, the power was on and off. They would spend a week and so without seeing the artificial sun shining in their homes, schools, shops and hospitals. Load shedding and blackouts were the companions at the table. This, at one time had prompted a demonstration which was crashed by serious, well-equipped men and women.

The unfortunate ones died in operating rooms in a bid to restore lives. Children and wives broke utensils in the homes due to darkness. ‘Those who walk in dark stumble and fall,’ said Old Man. The seekers and deliverers of knowledge missed preparations at school. Who cared when for the fish when water dried up? The business community made losses. The students sometimes threatened to strike, but they were constantly warned and threatened that they would be teargassed, or be taken to *Nalu*, shortened for Nalufenya, the center for torture. Who would lose if they lost their lives? Of course their parents, relatives and in-laws; the mothers would suckle their bras. It was said that some student demonstrators of Makerere lost their lives during such demos in a bid to express their holy discontent, feelings, opinions and disappointments, considering the maladministration they were subjected to. Education and its former glory had waned and dwindled because of mixing up systems. Politics had married other institutions and the pregnancy could not let the mother move.

The villagers lamented of the departure of the white man. However, there was no means of bringing back the white man because they hunted him down like wild animals, claiming that he was a thug, a vagabond, an ogre, vampire and monster that had come to Africa to swallow and devour everything on the continent that their sight would fall on. Had God not given them their resources? Then why did they rash to, and scramble for every single thing on the Dark Continent to grab? If anything the Black man was more of a grabber than a saver in comparison to the white man!

The Blacks staged stiff and protracted wars. They wanted freedom of speech; they wanted their rights granted and respected. The Black man hated conscription; they wanted to regain their fertile land grabbed by the colonizers. They agitated for self-rule- independence. Africans yearned and longed for that time when they would be free from torture, exploitation, oppression and suppression. The desire was reflected in African resistors and rebellions like Maji maji, Nama- Herero, Mau Mau and Chimulenga rebellions. Looking through the lenses, this was not a simple task; it was a rough road to attain their freedom against great expectation of a smooth road. How true would the prophecy be fulfilled that the political, economic, social and religious conditions would improve? It was a mystery. No one, not even the strongest prophet

would foretell the outcomes of the struggle for freedom and emancipation. Was it a dream, disillusionment and fantasy?

‘A good wife comes from God. It is a gift whose source is the creator,’ said Old Man. Kigatire was a blessing to Mihigo, her children, and the community. She was soft-spoken, with good disposition. She was humble. In form and structure, she was tall, plump, with chocolate complexion. She walked gaily and held herself gracefully. She was the apple of every villager’s eye; the whole community admired her. She was hard working, welcoming and hospitable. She was a woman of few words, and yet an advisor and counsellor to all the village women in matters pertaining to family. She was the head of the village Mothers Union. The men, women, and children yearned to be in her presence and company. They liked her more than Korugambo, a humble devil and a wife to Mr. ‘Nalufenya’. They had nick-named him so because his wife tortured them with rumors. The husband was the scapegoat. Korugambo was more or less a bad village journalist, and even in the villages beyond. Every incident that happened in the villages would be in her know and reach. She narrated the happenings like she was on the scene at the juncture of occurrence! Who fought, who made love, with who, where, how and when, who cooked what, or hosted who in his home, she had the grasp of every piece of the news. As a result she had caused commotion, hullabaloo, resentment, hatred, fights, and cases amidst the natives. Mr. Nalufenya suffered beyond imagination because of his wife. At one time, he regretted and whimpered because of the misery Korugambo had caused him. The man lost respect among his people. He no longer touched food because of the circumstances surrounding him. Everyone in the village shunned away from his home. Despite being a nice man, he was not chanced to have a good wife. The good thing was that everyone understood his predicament. They sympathized with him. They were always there for him in the time of trouble caused by the wife.

The old men ate to their fill; and the state of affairs seemed to haunt and gnaw on their mind like a ghost and cancer. They seemed to be looking at a vast distance, an indication that they were thoughtful.

It was April. It was a wet month. It was almost clocking eleven, beckoning midnight when Kamahanga arrived. It was drizzling. The sky was not as rude and gloomy as she had been

in the previous days. She was not pregnant with clouds, which signalled that it was not going to rain cats and dogs. Nevertheless, the drizzles were substantial to wet a man. Kamahanga did not mind because he was not salt; therefore, he was not going to dissolve. After all, it was believed by the inhabitants that this was luck, for it was really a blessing to wallow in the sperms of the Almighty. Whenever it drizzled or rained, God was having sweet and flowery time with his wife.

The rain was treasured; it was the source of life. The vegetation became luxuriant and grew like God was weaving it. Wild animals and domestic animals got what to eat- fruits, leaves and grass. The rivers were jovial, for they were filled with water to the brim and, as they raced to the lakes and seas, they would be singing together with rocks and stones, frogs and other water creatures, which made a fascinating excruciating symphony, and carrying some other crying creations like politicians leading the voters to the unknown, dark, deep turbulent sea of suffering.

Kamahanga called from a distance before reaching the door to give it a knock.

‘Yeimwe mweee,’ he bellowed.

‘Wangi,’ replied Mr. Bean, opening the door for the visitor.

‘How do you do, my lad,’ Kamahanga greeted him, tickling the young boy in the armpit.

Mr. Bean jerked back womanishly- a woman, when touched on the breast- and smiled. Whenever men would be approaching a neighbour’s home, they would make a loud call, and they would even teach their male children to do so, because it was expected of men to be gentle, manly, and observe morals. As women got absorbed in the chores, they would be oblivious of men’s best dish, served at the long night’s table, covered with sheets and a blanket. The extravagant posture would render them prone to the devouring eye of the visiting Adam. Therefore, the visitors signalled women to sit properly to avoid embarrassment and psychological disturbance or trauma caused by the luscious eye of man. It was an abomination to see a woman when you were not at the night’s table.

Kamahanga did not expect to find the powerful men in Mihigo’s house. If only he knew, he regretted; he would have come earlier to share the wisdom of the grey-haired men.

‘You’re welcome, Mr. Kamahanga,’ said the head of the house.

‘It’s my pleasure, sir,’ replied Kamahanga, with a beaming face.

‘How’s the mother of your children?’ inquired Rwamubende.

‘Yozofinah is fine. There’s no problem so far.’

‘Thanks be to Allah,’ said Mbogo.

‘No news is good news.’ Ntare added.

No sooner had Kamahanga ensconced in his seat than Kigatire entered into the house, carrying a smoking kettle of tea, cups and sweet bananas. It was as if she knew he was coming and that the rain would do havoc on him, sending waves of coldness into him! He was shivering like a newly born kid of a goat in the early hours of the day.

In spite of Kamahanga’s state of coldness, he threw the house into fits and hysteric bombs of laughter.

‘I wonder what I would have done if I met a skirt in such state of coldness. This is real winter. My magic stick has shrivelled to the size of a new born baby. And as you know, there is no shop around where I would buy ‘Self’ to start the engine of flesh even if I had dollars and pounds next to my skin. And how would I extract honey from the magic pot?’

The house was for some time drifted on the sea waves of excitement to the extent that Old Man fell off from his seat. The children who had been silent in the vicinity, eavesdropping the conversation of the old, burst into laughter too, and ran far away from the the house to dispel the combustion of laughter, which was dangerous to their ribs and hi-cup health problems.

* * * * *

CHAPTER THREE

Korugambo, Kigatire, Yozofinah and Namata were some of the women who interacted most of the times. They discussed and shared many issues concerning marriage, family or home, sex and sexuality. The challenges of families ranged from social, political, and economic. The problems were not new to that very generation. Those who lived in the past faced them too; and possibly, the future generation would face the same challenges. The difference, through experience, was the magnitude of each problem.

Namata was a good wife to make a home. However, her husband was devilish. The wife and the children had never tasted peace and love that a woman and children deserve from a husband. The warmth of the bed, the soft touch, the rhythm of the music of creation was all a myth to her. Likewise Namata's children were never cuddled. They never heard the sweet word of care, encouragement and hope from the head of the house. He was a leopard. The fall of pin would even incite reaction like they had touched on its tail! The father was hardly at home to share quality time with the children and their mother. The only thing that was known to them was coldness, chidings and torment hurled at them by the dad.

Old Man once said, 'A good wife will never get a perfect and real man, not even half perfect. The same is true of a good husband. This puts in the picture of the story of Amos and Gomer. Possibly God does it because He wants one to improve the other.'

Oh! Where was the improvement? 'Patience pains but it pays'. There was room for improvement and a ray of hope that bad people would change, as they waited the second coming of Jesus Christ.

Kamahanga arrived late at Mihigo's home. Maybe he did not know that the old granaries of knowledge had their rendezvous there; or he had been so much engaged in work back at home. All in all, he had a mission to accomplish at Mihigo's home. He was his wife's emissary; he had brought good news to Mihigo's wife, Kigatire. Yozofinah had a burning desire to meet Kigatire with a view to tackle Korugambo's problem, which had become a Sphinx to the villagers. Who would solve this puzzle or mystery of rumourmongering? Some homes were in shambles. Men fought with men, boys with boys, girls with girls, boys with girls, and men with

women. The villages were engulfed and covered with a dark cloud of hate, malice, turmoil and commotion. It was in shambles.

As the old men of the village were warming up to say goodnight to Mzee Mihigo's family, they called Kigatire and thanked her for the good meal and the wonderful work she was doing to care for the family. In spite of the fact that Mihigo was in his early 80s, Rwamubende had this to say, 'Mihigo looks twenty years young than his age. This's a universal indicator that you're doing a good job.'

Kigatire knelt down and spoke with a smile of contentment and genuineness, 'Thank you, sir, for appreciating.'

'You're welcome, mother of our children.'

They stood up and left. Kamahanga stayed behind, pulled a letter from his hip pocket.

'It's from my wife.'

'Thank you, sir.' 'Send my sweet greetings to her and the children. I hope the young ones are back on holiday, aren't they?'

'Yes, they're. They arrived yesterday evening.'

'All right, I'll get time to come and check on them.'

'Thank you, we'll be glad to receive you.'

Kigatire closed the door. The visitors were swallowed by the stomach of the darkness. The darkness, as a pregnant woman, trudged slowly to deliver them to their homes.

The first Sunday of the first week in the month of May was the stipulated time when Kigatire and Yozofinah were to meet at the church. Kitariro Church of Uganda was selected because of its religious connotations. This was a place where the church of God stood. The people of God met here to worship, do fellowshiping, praise the Great one, and socialize, for it was said and believed without misgiving that whenever two or three people gathered together, God was amidst them.

It was not Kigatire and Yozofinah's business, solely. Present too, were the Reverend's wife, Mrs. Rwendiga Annah Mary. Namata, despite the travails she had swum through, and which she was still swimming in, attended this special meeting. The center and core of the meeting was Korugambo Rachael's conduct.

According to the village values, customs and ethical standards, the young woman's disposition and moral uprightness had gone beyond boundaries of repair; her manners of living in the community, in harmony with others had failed her, her husband and the villagers.

Kigatire, picking from her pocket the sinews of war offered to buy soft drinks to this team which had come to do blacksmithing. They wanted to pass impure gold in the blast furnace- the strong fire- so that the unbecoming gold would become refined, at least, if not to the world's , or country' s measure of moral standards; it was deemed fit to trim and refine her to the village human moral benchmark.

'Good evening everyone,' Kigatire greeted the team with a beaming face.

'Good evening madam,' answered the team in unison.'

'How are your families? I hope you're doing well, together with your husbands, children, crops and animals,' said Kigatire, with a matter- of- fact voice.

Yes, we are fine,' said Yozofinah. 'We are receiving soft rains, not like the Toronto destructive storms. I hope we'll get bounty harvests in the next month.'

'Indeed! Famine is not gonna hit us. It ain't bad this time. Our village ain't gotta be an Isingiro,' said the Reverend's wife in an American accent, smiling gaily. 'We thank the Lord, the King of everything. Jesus is good all the time.'

'All the time, He is good,' shouted the team chorally like they were in church.

'We're here for a short time, but the time will be very rewarding to our conviction; the time will build us, mould the village, the nation and the world at large,' said Kigatire. She looked and sounded serious and business-like, with too much determination to get right what was wrong.

‘Mukyara Reverend, get us our drinks. The dry throat can’t talk sweetly; what motivates the hands is what is between the small, top stone and what is under the grinding stone,’ said Kigatire. ‘No matter what, the person grinding dust will never be motivated,’ she added.

The Reverend’s wife called his youngest son to bring the crate of soda to where they were sitting. Phew Phew Phew, so the opener and the drink hissed. The bottles tinkled.

‘The purpose of this short meeting is to look into the matters of Mr. Nalufenya’s wife. The village is restless, uncomfortable because of the misuse of the tongue. Rumourmongering has destroyed many homes. It has ruined the relationship between husbands and wives, and the young alike,’ Kigatire paused, looking at the team, direct in their faces.’ She continued: ‘why are the families failing today? Women are no longer behaving like mothers. They wander through the village, sitting in each home, backbiting. Could this be idleness, disorderly and generally suffering from what to do? Gracious Lord! Those who tell you about others will tell others about you! Mothers come home late nowadays. They don’t respect their husbands. We’re are not cooking, washing, and cleaning. The health standards and morals have dwindled. Look at the way mothers and our young daughters dress indecently. They almost step out of their rooms in nudity. Talk about cheating! There is visiting of caves and shrines. We feed our husbands on herbs. When did our husbands become goats to eat herbs?’ she asked with a bitter and disappointed tone of voice. ‘Where’s the love? The husband is the head of the house; the wife is the heart of the home. She is the engine that propels everything in the home. It’s a woman who builds the home. When she builds it, she builds the nation. They say: “Like mother like daughter, and the tigress takes after the mother tigress”. ‘When a child misbehaves, they blame the mother. What a shame! This is very disparaging’ concluded Kigatire.

She looked helpless; the team looked shocked and perplexed. Their faces were sad, and they looked and felt touched. The speech, the introduction was long but the passage of time was not realized since it was a burning issue and a matter of concern.

‘True! There is moral decadence in our society. And I don’t know what is going to happen to us and the young generation. Our children imitate what we do. And they can imitate whatever comes their way. Cultural borrowing, or whichever borrowing you may put in picture,

no matter in what field, is not bad; but let's be mindful of what we imitate. The internet is ruining our society. The internet is important but the disadvantages are far higher than the advantages. Politics is destroying our homes. Is this women emancipation real?' asked the Reverend's wife.

The team, out of their sincere and heartfelt determination, wanted to refine Korugambo- socially and religiously. She was not in the political field but to the look of things, she was also advancing to the arena of politics. Koru had now started lying to the villagers like politicians, who promised heaven on earth. How could one marry heaven with hell? Politicians promised to build bridges where there were no rivers, promised voters that they would feed them on fish when they were living in the desert without a single lake. Could a mean and gourmand person pull out of his pocket to import fish? Ok, perhaps the politicians would import fish from Peru, Norway, Japan and South Africa to feed the voters.

The social situation had changed so much that no one- no one- would trust the neighbour. Who would trust Korugambo, with her venomous tongue? A habit does not live or stand alone. It is accompanied by other habits. As she whisked through the village, she ate the neighbours' food; they would not have programmed her share. Here she was happily devouring the share that would have topped up the children's satisfaction. Her agility facilitated her to visit a substantial number of homes. Korugambo was no 'campuser'. However, her nauseating habit was no different from that of campus guys who walked from room to room, visiting their fellow campus girls and boys to devour the ration the victims would be preparing!

Walking late at night, it was very dangerous for people, especially women. Many women had been grabbed and forced to strip off their garments, commanded to lie on their backs on the bare ground, or grass, face the sky and throw their legs a stride to let the devil- the rapist penetrate or enter into the kingdom of bliss and pleasure. Who could tell that this very woman had survived such incidents because of walking at night? Could they survive disease, unwanted pregnancy, trauma or murder? A woman! A mother, walking in the wee hours of the night, aimlessly!

Korugambo's husband lost respect among his peers. He no longer had a word in front of his fellow men, women and children. The shame was a cloud of mist or fog or dust that had engulfed him; it was a dark cover, or a wet blanket. A good wife, it was believed, was a gift from God. Who had cursed Mr. Nalufenya to meet such a wife, and entered into his life? He received this name from neighbours. His home and wife were a 'Nalufenya' to the villagers. His wife's tongue, acts and deeds tortured, terrorized the neighbours so much that some families had almost decided to sell off their land and other properties to relocate to other villages. A bad child brings abuses to the mother. 'A tiger takes after its mother' so said the elders. The bad deeds of Korugambo directly hit and knocked down the husband like a bull attacking the bull fighter. The innocent man fell down like a poll axed bull. He hardly looked at people in the eyes because of shame. He had been made a eunuch by his wife- absolutely robbed of his manhood during the flowering and ripening season of women, when the moon was high.

Korugambo threw everyone in frenzy, shock and anger. She was the worst cook the world had ever produced. There was no single day she had ever invited her husband to a delicious meal. Sometimes the food was half-cooked; sometimes it was charred, watery sauce without taste, or salty, or without salt, was a common phenomenon. Too many a woman wondered how Mr. Nalufenya had managed to put up with this woman for such a long time. In her tour through the homes of neighbours, she would stretch her arms to touch people's gardens of sugarcane, mangoes, and guavas. She once picked eggs from the hen's nest in Kamahanga's house. The neighbour thought that the eggs had been eaten by Jill the dog, only to learn later from Korugambo's youngest child that they ate seven eggs on Sunday. The eggs had disappeared on that day and they were seven, a number corresponding with the eggs that had gotten lost! She had never reared a hen. 'He who eats like a king does not dig'. Women were not supposed to eat eggs; eggs were for men. Water melon was not for men; it was for women. Men would only eat water melon, if they wanted to become womanizers! And who wanted to be one? Oh, no!

The team that met in the Reverend's house did a good job. Madam Korugambo was cooperative. She did not take much time in skirting around the topic on stake. She listened to the mothers of knowledge.

Kigatire pulled her chair and cleared her voice:

Mrs. Nalufenya, listen to me. A woman is the heart of the family that pumps life into the husband, children, relatives and friends that come into the home. A good, dedicated woman tightens her belt, pulls her skirt and gathers it over her womanhood to take care of the husband. Never raise your voice against your husband. This is a sign of disrespect. Never hate your husband's relatives and friends; welcome them in the house and do the needful to them. Your children are important, how can you ignore what came from your womb? A nagging wife and too judgemental is not a pleasant sight to the husband. Don't be too demanding and materialistic. You're the manager, secretary, and treasurer of the home. A good wife shouldn't talk much to expose the secrets of the home. Stop this habit of loitering in the villages; you're not a journalist. Observe conjugal rights; stop excuses. It's an abomination for a woman to give the husband the back, face the wall, faking sickness, stress, and claims to be a loving helper.

The team nodded their heads in agreement with what the chairperson of the team was saying. Korugambo nodded her head in appreciation of the pieces of advice Mrs. Mihigo offered. The meeting gave a ray of hope; there was a glimmer and a sparkle of light at the end of the tunnel.

Korugambo squirted her eyes, cleared her throat to give the team a word.

‘Thank you, Chairperson and members of the team. I acknowledge your words of advice. I'll settle down and do the needful. I've been tempted by the devil. Forgive me,’ she said, in a low tone, feeling sorry for what has been happening.

The Reverend's wife excused herself and moved out. She pulled her hand set from her small hand bag, dialled to give a call to Mr. Nalufenya, who was not part of the team. She was calling him to rush to the scene of the meeting so that they could pray for Nalufenya's wife, the husband, and the village at large. They wanted peace and love to be restored in this family and the neighbours that had been stepped on the toe, or transgressed.

Forty minutes later, the motor bike parked outside the Reverend's premises. He entered and greeted the team. They were happy for the coincidental coming of this man. This looked like a miracle! The team was not aware that the Reverend's wife had called him on telephone. They

sat, ate and drank. After the meal, the Reverend's wife called the team to attention and, humbling themselves, they prayed:

Lord God, the creator of heaven and earth,

Thanks for the gift of life; you are worth.

We glorify you for the food and drinks that make us live.

Because of you, we thrive.

You made the earth beautiful for us

To share as human beings- all is wondrous!

You created plants, animals, birds and fish.

We misuse them since we are greedy, jealous and selfish.

We are liars; we misuse our tongue;

And everyone has become a rogue.

Come down, Lord; fill our hearts with the Holy Spirit.

Look upon your people, and their plight.

Here are the bed ridden, engulfed in disease.

Painful are the canines, claws of famine, poverty and wars.

Women are raped, children murdered in cold blood every day.

In the tempest and squalor, we wallow and sway.

Unemployment, corruption and embezzlement are an eagle,

Descending to pounce on chicks to gratify its ego.

Lord God, extinguish the libido, appetite and greed

So that we can become as clean as snow and freed

People full of peace and love.

Soften the hearts of leaders; cleanse them to become a dove.

Soften the hearts of husbands to save us from domestic violence.

We are tired of murder, rape and ignorance.

Provide our needs and save us from sky-rocketing taxes

And burning temptations.

We ask your saving Grace to shower on women and men.

AMEN!

The team thanked the Reverend's wife for the good prayer. They dispersed in jovial mood. Their faces beamed with happiness and contentment. It was as if they were from a warm bath. It was the Second Coming of the Son of God. 'The united teeth break the bone'. Old Man had once said. However, the journey of life was tough; sometimes the villagers would register success, sometimes failure!

* * * * *

CHAPTER FOUR

The world of children and the world of adults are two different worlds, different landscapes, flora and fauna and, so is the sky. If you decided to say that the adult's sky was blue that of children was white. If the former was black, the latter was grey.

In the world of adults, they showed that they had ideas, ideals, idiosyncrasies and hardships. They were busy the reason why they had to work day and night like bees. As a result, they were always complaining about time, saying, 'we have little time because we've not done this and that.' When they had plenty of time, they wasted it, either on rumourmongering, planning to commit evil or smoking opium and abusing a drink in the most loved social places. Take an example of Mr. Tigaryoma. The name implied that 'Alcohol will never dry'. The number of times he had ever slept in his couch, was less than the number of times he had slept at the side of the road. Unlike in the past where one would sleep in open air, at the side of the road, or even in the middle of the road and woke up to go home safe and sound- without being harmed- women were worried because:

Firstly, a trailer, a motorcycle, a bicycle, or a vehicle or a cart would run over their dear and loved husbands sleeping in the pot-holed, dusty roads.

Secondly, there were the merciless and remorseless villains, who unzipped these innocent drunkards and cut off their private anatomy- not circumcision, for this custom was a treasured and respected and approved of as it was done in a recommended venue- God knows where they took the parts, and what for?

Again adults thought and said that children did not have a world, problems, ideas, needs, desires, expectations, aspirations and altogether feelings. 'Who doesn't know that sometimes wisdom comes from the mouth of babes?' questioned Old Man as he took time to reflect on life.

But on the outset, you needed to give one a chance or an opportunity if you were a democratic listener or reader so that he would utter one or two words before passing judgement. One might not be an orator, nor had a gift of gab, but lending him an ear was important. Whosoever was bestowed a chance, he would give lots of thanks for the golden opportunity. Most of the leaders, kings, managers had become dictators or 'I speak alone'. It was an era of hermit dictators.

Children had their cosmos, feelings, desires and expectations... Have you ever been a child at any one time in life? If yes, did you ever have challenges in the process of growing up? What were these hiccups and, how did you overcome them?

In the first place, everyone would kindly request any one to save more time, one day, and tell how episodes unfolded in the process of growing up and developing from childhood to adulthood.

To set the ball rolling, the village children were no exception. It was now time for letting the cat out of the bag through the teens and the challenges they faced, but ignored by the adult world. Here he was:-

‘My name is Paddy. I’d like to give my vote of thanks to readers, for having bestowed me the golden chance. I promise I will not let you down, by killing you with boredom. I’ll not be the proverbial man who kills the goose that lays golden eggs. As a child of nine or ten, I had desires. It is now your turn to judge me whether they were pure or impure desires. If they are pure, store them in a clean place, well-covered like food, or computers. If they are impure, purify them by passing them through a sieve- decantation.

I took time to observe men, with beards. One of them I admired most was Shaggy. He was a short, plump man, with a fair complexion. His head was oval, with a prominent forehead. His nose was bulbous and the hair was long and wavy. His eyes were as small as those of a pig. The fact that his cheeks were covered with a forest of hair, it made the eyes smaller than one could imagine it, and I guessed the rest of his body was blanketed with hair- I guessed because I had never undressed him. Possibly, his wife knew better. Still I would not inquire from his best half because this was a PRIVATE affair. Shaggy was a humble, kind-hearted man, and the villagers called him a man of few words. Nonetheless, this was the man we admired most, the type of man I wanted to be. I wanted to be like him, and if God had willed it, I would have been like him. I badly needed his beards because they made him look the real man, too sexy for the world. What was more; he was an apple’s eye of the village women. Shaggy’s beard and Goatee’s beard had some semblance; I liked Goatee and this heightened my liking for Shaggy. Goatee was my father’s he goat.

How was I going to make it? There were two options for me. One was, I thought, to go to the church and pray to God to give me that beard.

The second one was to inquire from my colleagues if there were markets or shops where beards could be sold to be patched or glued on my face as women wore their weaves or nails.

As I was still battling with this thought, another setback that broke the camel's back was when I went with Demus, Precious and Aidajankidoo to graze cows and sheep along the plain through which river Ishasha flows, for it was a dry season. Grass on the hillsides had started to dry up, so the alternative was to move long distances looking for fresh, luxuriant pastures along river Ishasha that snaked sluggishly down to Lake Edward in the far west.

It was midday. The sun was high in the sky. She was at its zenith, and like a king using his position to oppress his subjects, the sun's heat became suppressive and oppressive, forcing us to change to the state of Adam, the first man. At the river, we met another group of boys. We had good time together. We exchanged herdsmen's stories, you know. There were swimming competitions punctuated with football. We had three balls locally made from banana fibres and green polythene paper bags. Compared to my counterparts, I was the youngest boy; the rest were above eighteen.

Time for swimming exercise had come. What heightened my longing was: these were not children like me. They were men, or at least old boys. Concisely and precisely, I admired their second hair. How could I call it? I had no holy word to use, but let the Advanced Learner's Dictionary be my defender, or my lawyer- Pubes.

It dawned on my mind that, Goatee, for this was his name- my father's he-goat- had good, long, swarthy, fur. Oh yes. That fur... This could do the magic. I had one hundred shillings, which had been given me by Aunt when she had visited us last Christmas. It was now June, 2013, and I had saved for a rainy day. It had come. I rushed to the nearest shop, bought a razor blade to shear Goatee's fur which I wanted to use purposely. This would be a miracle. Jesus, at the wedding of Cana changed water into wine. Now it was my turn to change from a child to an adult- a man. This was going to be a miracle indeed.

Next, I went to Charles. The carpenter's workshop was just located in a stone throw. It was early in the morning.

‘Good morning, Charles,’ I said, smiling.

‘Good morning, Paddy,’ he responded, raising his head and fixing a gaze at me. He was busy fixing the bed.

‘Any problem, young man?’ he asked.

‘No,’

‘How’re mum and dad?’

‘Fine.’ ‘But I’ve something to tell you.’

‘What could it be, Paddy?’

‘Could you give me some glue?’

‘What for?’

‘To fix pictures in our classroom. The teacher told us to bring it on Monday, next week.’

‘Fine, you’ll get it, and study hard.’

‘Thank you, friend.’

‘You’re welcome, friend.’

No sooner had I finished the last word than he picked a white plastic tin from his tool box to pack glue in the small tin I had brought with me. ‘Thank God the deal is sealed,’ said I in my heart.

In our village, there were thirty he-goats but twenty-nine had been sold due to the parents’ need of school fees for their children. Parents wanted so much to send their children back to school to get an education. Goatee was the only one remaining. He had the conjugal responsibility to serve all the female goats in the village! Yet, Goatee had emaciated. All the

energy had drained out of him. He could not even mount the shortest she goat. My mother commented that he was sickly. And so soon he was going to kick the bucket. If Goatee passed away without fulfilling my dream, this would be the worst misfortune or disaster to be registered in my life. My father assured mother that Goatee was not ailing. Due to the presence of many she-goats to be served by him, for the rest of the males had been sold and goat slaughter inflicted on them, every neighbour brought their goats for mating. To our chagrin, there reached a time when the in-flow of female goats became too much so that, as soon as they reached in the compound, Goatee, tethered on the mango tree in the middle of the compound, raised his head, stretched his neck to check if it were true that what he had seen was a female. After confirmation, he would tussle out with the rope to the breaking point and, getting released, would run away for his dear life, for he had been over-sexually exploited leading to emaciation to bone. As Old Man used to say, quoting from the Holy Book, Ecclesiastes 7.18. 'Avoid all extremes.' 'Too much of anything is always bad. Therefore, it should be avoided.'

It was a custom of my mother to wake up early in the morning because she believed that, 'An early bird catches a worm'. Before she washed her face, she went to Goatee's pen to check on him, and if he was faring well. She would open the pen and take him to the basket that contained banana peelings to have his breakfast. His hips were no more, leaving him bony. They had been eroded; only his fur remained. Nevertheless, I had sheared some. After tying him, she touched him like a doctor did to patients. This was the time when she discovered that Goatee's fur had been cut, or trimmed.

'Now, who did it?' asked mother in a monologue and rhetorically.

'*Mwami*,' she shouted on top of her voice.

'Yes, Darling.'

'Goatee's fur is cut!' 'Who, now? These are witch doctors,' she suspected.

'No, sweet heart; take heart. They must be children.' 'We used to do it when we're young,' he added.

'Is it?'

‘Yes.’

‘No, these are witch doctors,’ she said furiously.

I was still in bed. I kept quiet. My mother believed in witchcraft; my father did not. He did not take things further than that. Mother went ahead to narrate the story to the neighbours, especially women who cared to listen about the catastrophe that had befallen Goatee, if not the owners. The other gossipers believed that Goatee’s fur had been cut and taken for purposes of witchcraft, just as private parts of human beings were, due to the high demand by shadowy sellers and buyers!

Having got fur and glue at my disposal, I hid in my room and stacked or fixed it on my loins. I had already helped myself with my mother’s mirror, from her boudoir, to see if the reflection had displayed art and fashion I really badly needed. Yes, it had worked! A real man! A perfect and grown up man, it was me!

Time seemed not to move, but she had given me leave for not bathing. I thought bathing was going to distort my craft. Seven days without cleaning my body prompted my sister, Cosy, to report to mother that I no longer observed hygiene.

One fateful evening, mother summoned me to answer charges as to why I had desisted from bathing.

‘Paddy.’

‘Please, Mum.’

‘What’s not happening?’ ‘Tell me,’ she added, with a serious, high tone of disappointment.

‘Nothing.’

‘Nothing?’

She called Cosy, and ordered her to bring a full basin of water immediately. She was an agile, no nonsense woman. She jumped like a cat wanting to catch a mouse and pounced on me,

giving a hard grip. She was a Police woman administering a robot grip on a city demonstrator. She stripped me naked.

I was a Noah Webster the lexicographer. She was Webster's wife. She was surprised. Yes, we were surprised. The rest were shocked. 'The days of a thief are forty,' said mother. She now realized where Goatee's fur had gone and, who the witch was. She attracted my father to see the spectacle which was very arresting, and attracted the rest of family members to come and witness the bizarre and grotesque that turned to pantomime.

She ordered for a cane to enter into the business of correcting, or call it flogging. Was she going to flog a dead horse? She never wanted to spare the rod and spoil the child. My father said, 'No, children have their desires and great expectations.' 'Pardon him. This is part of growing up.'

My father's words were the ransom that culminated to my redemption from the grip of pincers of the disciplinarian. Darkness melted into light. I was waiting for a new day to come. This gave me a ray of hope, for I got saved from torture.

* * * * *

CHAPTER FIVE

Listen! Listen to this! Whenever the people of Katabago wanted to leave for a long journey, they would go to Old Man's home so that he would pray for, and bless them. They believed in him as a man who bestowed luck, especially those who had long journeys.

Diverting from the main road from Kabale- Kanungu- Kihiihi road, on the left you would not regret having done so; neither would you feel bad because of the roughness of the road. It was not saying that travelling on a rough road gave a pleasing experience, considering your comfort as well as your car, or bicycle but, for the time being, the state of these roads was to be put in the hands of the Knowing One.

Kamuhanda and Karungi, though young, had started travelling on smooth rough roads. As soon as you crossed River Mitano that divided Kanungu and Rukungiri Districts and headed for Rukungiri town, the road was rough. Leave the town behind and head for Ntungamo, to speak the truth, you would not be thinking about Ntungamo, but the city and its *swagger!*

You were diverting. Where were you going? Among the Bakiga people the art of conversation was highly respected. It was like getting an education; a conversation where the elderly were the teachers and the young were the learners. On the side of learners- the young- the listening skill had to be sharpened in order to comprehend the message which would be communicated by the elders.

'He who listens to an elder becomes wise and a child who is always willing to run an elder's errand will always defecate a big mound of shit,' said Old Man, smiling. Mr. Kamahanga's home was few miles off the road. It would take a speedy driver- whom the inhabitants called 'pilot' not because they did not know the difference between a driver and pilot; what the reason was, they knew better. It would take fifteen minutes to reach Katabago village. If one looked at the scenery, it was an apple of his eyes. It was a beauteous landscape to the natives and the visitors though the natives never took time to reflect on this natural beauty. Many said God must have spent a little more time on this village during the time of creation.

The scattered, small, round- topped hills welcomed the eye. The mixture of tall trees and short grass added a mark. As wind blew to and from, it made the trees and grass sway to its tune like school children dancing calypso. The twittering of birds made it more musical. The small roads and paths that connected the scattered homes were well cleared to make comfortable entry into their homes. The natives were charming and welcoming, and their innocence could easily be read on their faces as if they were a book. Their shelters were a mixture of corrugated iron sheets and grass-thatched houses, a blend that created a marriage of modernity and tradition. It would be a shame, if not funny, to ask a dog if she liked meat! The gardens of cassava, Irish potatoes, sweet potatoes, banana plantations, pineapples, yams, cows, and fighting goats as if they had changed this grazing ground to another Somalia, was evident enough that these people were cultivators. This was a sign of hope and peace, not forgetting prosperity. It was these qualities that made this village the most delicious meal for the eye, and sweet charming melodies for the ear to lick.

‘This is the advantage we have over the town dwellers,’ said Old Man, with a matter- of fact- voice.

‘Yes, but they’ve beautiful women and much money,’ retorted Kamahanga, his eyes looking at a distance. You are rustic and this gives a sort of feel that emits the waves of barbarism and uncultured tendencies,’ he added, with a sense of pride.

They immediately broke into fits of laughter after discovering that Yozofinah, Kamahanga’s wife, was in their ear shot as they set the conversation in motion. Old Man gave a cackling laugh; he almost fell off the low stool he was sitting on. The pressure from laughter gave birth to the blown bowel bugle.

‘Beautiful women? Money? What do you mean?’

‘I mean what I mean.’

‘What exactly? All women are the same- beautiful, caring, and considerate- and accommodative. Name them all-hardworking, persistent... If I decide to speak out all the good, superb qualities, I’ll spend the whole day here, and you know ur- ur what it means- Yozofinah’s food, porridge and her charming nature.’

‘No, we’ve enough food as you said earlier, mind less about that,’ said Kamahanga confidently.

‘The energetic, young men and women have left us here helplessly. I don’t know what will come of us,’ said Old Man, sadly.

‘They have to go out and see, taste and feel the pulse of the world. The village is dark, boring... Girls want to make their hair long to look like maize tassels, dress in jeans and trousers, and by just parting a leg, a coin can fall like rain in their handbag,’ said Kamahanga with too much emphasis. ‘They know how to dance. As they gyrate on the floor, holding men loin to loin, chest to chest, and lips to lips, you can really feel how sweet and charming the city is.’ ‘Do village dames know the science of rubbing lips? He asked, with a matter- of- fact voice. ‘It’s as if town women learn this game by book; there is a lot of artistry applied,’ he concluded, smiling.

‘Man, look here! Do you want to tell me that they dress like men because they want to be like men?’ asked Old Man disgustingly. Had Kamahanga’s words raised the dust of ill feelings in his heart? One wondered which direction the wind was blowing to!

‘This is modernity,’ exclaimed Kamahanga. ‘This is what we call the world of fashion which has ushered in the aesthetic appeal in the eyes and hearts of the vibrant, young generation. After all there are now many shows where young women and men meet to exhibit their talent, popularly known as ‘Talent Shows’, in the field of fashion and design: cat walks, and some other comedy shows which are displayed. These fetch lots of money, create employment opportunities, coming up artistes of fame, and celebrities,’ he explained.

‘Modernity on the expense of morals? They almost walk nude. Are they not going to corrupt the minds of the young ones?’ ‘They pierce their nose, eyes, ears, and the navel,’ he added. What’s more they etch marks on their bodies- frightening pictures of land and sea creatures that terrorized the people of the past ages. These include: dragons, crocodiles, lions, eagles, snakes, owls, fish, pigs...these are creatures that portend bad omen. A man who’s ruled by cowardice can’t ‘know’ such a woman wearing such diagrams on her body. They have all types of metals, or call it jewelry on their bodies. They pierce up and down and wear rings as pigs do in the snouts.’

‘When the minds of the old get corrupted, that of the young, innocent juveniles fall suit. But anyway, what is moral here may be immoral and evil there, and what is evil there, may be moral here.’ ‘Corruption in offices, in homes-in all institutions! I wonder how the coming posterity will be, so we’ve to leave everything in the hands of the Great one. Yes, this is it. When evil goes out of proportion, it bursts. People will become new in Jesus,’ said Old Man, with an air of disappointment.

The old man lifted his cup of locally endowed brewed beer to the mouth, took a long swig, emptying the content to the dregs. He wiped his lips with the back of his hand to clean off the half-crashed seeds of sorghum, which was used in the preparation of local beer from bananas, and pulled his long beard as he warmed to bid them a good evening. Yozofinah was busy preparing food. She therefore insisted that Old Man should sit to share the meal with them. This was the custom practised by the rustic or rural folks. They were open-handed. They wore generosity like a Reverend wears the rosary.

‘Two minutes and the food will be ready,’ said the soft-spoken woman, in a low voice.

‘No, thank you,’ said Old Man curtly, and disappeared behind the bend.

Yozofinah was expectant. The new visitor in the family was soon to arrive, and this was to be the second born, the first one being Kamuhanda, whom the villagers had nick-named the ‘Handsome one’. His arrival still held sweet memories in the insiders and outsiders. They had celebrated through dance, eating and drinking. Young men and women would, during this partying time, play ‘Hide and Seek’, as way of keeping the procreation picture and line of continuity and existence. During the celebration of one’s demise, too, ‘Hide and Seek’ would be played as means of strengthening the principle of replacement. The people had to cover the loss of the deceased person.

Oh, life! Life was a puzzle. She would never let man keep away from the edge or precipice of thinking and misgiving. When one person was crying, the other one was jubilating. One person would be sleeping at night; the other one would be travelling. It was raining here; it was a dry spell somewhere. These were the mysteries of life! If the surviving animals had the ability to speak, they would up to today be expressing their heart-felt pain on how they had lost

their relatives to this celebration. The villagers had commented on how Yozofinah had become a 'woman', a 'redeemer', attaching to this the importance, anyway if it were important, of producing a bouncing- baby boy. In the same village, a woman had given birth to ten children- all girls! The last born was named *Boonabaana*, meaning 'they're all children; even a girl is a child'. But no wonder they had named the woman all sorts of names- 'bad omen', 'mother curse', 'family doom', 'severer of the clan', 'useless and good-for-nothing woman'. All in all, life had gone on and on. The essence of life had been living. The party had been talked about by all the villagers. This was Twelve years ago.

* * * * *

CHAPTER SIX

‘In whatever we do we must make sure that the education of children is put on the fore front because the children of today are the men and women of tomorrow,’ Old Man commented.

‘These days children aren’t ours. They’re children of the White man. Schools have become mothers, fathers, uncles and aunts of these children, so they should educate them,’ said Kamahanga with disinterest.

‘I think it’s our duty to join hands together with schools and educate these girls and boys:- psychologically, socially, physically and emotionally,’ exclaimed Kamuhanda’s Grandfather.

‘Yes, educating is ok, but what disturbs me is one thing- only one thing-no more or less. The boys should be sent to school; the girls must stay at home to help their mothers in domestic work. The girls should work in *shamba* as they wait to mature a bit to fetch cows for these boys so that as soon as they get their basic education, the boys can get a servant to pamper the husband and bear children,’ said Tigaryoma, the slender, skinny, shaking man due to the influence of alcohol.

‘And this education should be given even when they’re still in the womb- holistic education, given to them when they’re still in the womb in order to develop into happy and the best type of human beings,’ said Old Man, throwing them into fits of laughter.

They started wondering how a foetus can be given education.

‘What do you mean by giving the foetus education,’ asked another man in his middle life in wonderment.

‘Simple. The physical, psychological, emotional, and social- the well-being of a mother affects the ‘child’ in the womb. A disturbed mother produces a disturbed child. The relationship between the father and the mother matters very much,’ added Old Man.

Old Man had never gone to school but, where he got this science remained a mystery and a puzzle.

Kamuhanda sat himself comfortable at a distance well coiled on the ground as a cobra. He listened to the conversation. They had only recognized he had joined the conversation of the elders, but stealthily. They saw his presence when the mother called him from the kitchen to give a helping hand in the preparation of super. One of the men went ahead to stop him from going there, claiming that cooking, fetching water, grinding cereals, washing and sweeping was women's business. The man insisted that domestic work was for women. He added that men were supposed to defend the home or community in case of an attack, build houses, look after animals, clear bushes and make children when they grew up into men. Whether Kamuhanda understood this concept or idea of making children, no one knew.

'Kamuhanda,' called the argumentative man.

'Yes, sir.'

'You know your identity, don't you?'

'Yes, I do'

'You're a male, aren't you?'

'Yes, I am, sir.'

'Your sister, Karungi, is a female. She wears a dress.'

Silence!

'What do you wear?'

'A pair of shorts.'

'Good, you're a man but, for today, go and see why your mother is calling,' said the man jovially.

Kamahanga's home was a symbol of peace and unity. Communication in his home was flowing like honey- communication between him and the wife, children and neighbours. This made life worth living. The son and the daughter were of good character and personality. They were dignified children and this was as a result of their parental love. They were couples who had neither place nor room for harshness and punishment. They had self-control and the fact that they did not use reprimanding stance, it instilled discipline in their children, a way of taking care of the emotional security of their children. It was none other than the way the couples treated

each other, friends, relatives and neighbours that signalled the signs mentioned the behavioural stability, which signs had started showing in their children.

It was twilight. The sun was sending its waning shafts on the round-topped hills and green vegetation. It was bidding goodbye to the day and welcoming the night. Cows flanked by the herdsmen were heading for their kraals and homes respectively. They were walking sluggishly as a river in her senile stage. The reason was clear. The cows had eaten to their fill. It was as if big footballs were brought and added to their bellies. From cows now to the herdsmen, they trudged not because they were tired but due to the presence of something in their bellies. 'An empty sack can't stand,' said Old Man. It was his principle. However, one could not believe that the food which they had carried themselves with, was the very food that was still supporting their bellies. They had helped themselves from other people's gardens, which the herdsmen or boys had coined as 'improvisation', 'convenience', 'reinforcement', or what they termed as *okutoga* in the local language. It was an abomination, if not a sin, to call it stealing. If they were seen, not 'nabbed', or 'caught' in the act, the seen would be shouted at as a way of scaring them away from their treasured gardens. They invaded gardens like a swarm of locusts, or put in a historical perspective, the process of helping themselves from other people's gardens was 'Maji Maji' or 'Ngoni' invasions. It was worth mentioning that some herd boys did not touch their mother's food, complaining that they were suffering from severe headache due to walking under the scorching sun the whole day, following their animals.

It was December. This was the month when everybody was in their happiest mood because the wet season had ceased; it no longer rained cats and dogs. The old folk, the energetic young boys and girls, were busy pacing up and down as they conversed this and that topic, ranging from serious topics like 'rebel MPS', 'marriage and divorce bill', 'war in Somalia, CAR, Mali, DRC', 'floods in Kasere' and many others like the self-styled name, SEJUSA, which was hitting the waves and, which had made interference and over covered other happenings from hitting the waves, too. The school children had through concoctions of names got a new name 'JESUS' from, SEJUSA. One wondered if Sejusa were a Jesus! The topics stretched to blatant irrelevances about men who dressed like city girls to make a living out of lustful men who had lost their self-control. The village women used to ask if these men could not control the highest

libido that had sprung up on this planet earth; why did not they get a sharp knife to cut off that part of their bodies that was disturbing them so much? Slaughtering dogs to sell, cohabitation, torture, rape, borrowing without returning, telling lies and many other bad habits were a trending phenomenon on the chart inhumanity; the list was endless.

‘Karungi,’ called Yozofinah from the kitchen.

‘Mummy,’ Karungi responded.

‘Kamuhanda,’ she called once again. ‘Hurry, food is ready.’

She wanted the children to prepare evening visitors for supper. With a basin and a jug of water, Karungi knelt down to let the men wash their hands as Kamuhanda ferried food on to the table. The young boy led them in a prayer. All of sudden the chewing and munching sound became the music of the hour at the table. As etiquette demanded, women were not supposed to sit, or mix with men in almost all activities, be it having meals, drinking, and taking part in conversations but, in the city, it was different.

It was Old Man who broke the silence.

‘Look! Women do good work in our homes nowadays, so are in other areas-banking, marketing, transport, defense... they are rather doing well, and this’s promising,’ Old Man commented.

‘You’re ageing, man. Senility is playing on your brain. Promising!’ Yet another man stepped in.

‘Yes, promising and it gives a ray of hope. Develop a woman you’ll develop a nation,’ said Old Man, nodding his head as a sign of approval.

‘There’s nothing dangerous like a woman’s rule,’ said the Drunkard who had just arrived. ‘You wait. If the bill passes through, you’ll become women and you know what it means. Sharing...’

‘What’s wrong with sharing property if you’ve all worked?’ asked Kamuhanda’s Grandfather.

‘Very soon women will be heads of houses and you’ll rot in kitchens or prisons. Look at these women politicians, do they respect their husbands?’ asked the Drunkard, mockingly.

Anyway the men were not interested in the topic; it vanished as it had come. The group of men gave thanks to the cook, bid the family good night and headed for their homes.

The sky was as clear as a crystal. The moon lit the village like it was doing it for the last time. The stars supplemented her and this unity, combined with the unity of villagers, created paradise. If only things could go on like this, it would be none other than total redemption in gained paradise.

Come the New Year, Kamuhanda was going to join Senior Secondary School. What a great joy would he feel! There were many things that made his heart leap high.

Firstly, he had passed in division one- a thing which his father had made a promise that he would take him to a school of his choice in the city. Therefore, the young boy looked forward to joining the new school which he and his sister had heard in stories, which old boys and girls narrated as they came back for end of year long holidays. Like any other person who had feelings, the desire was so strong that one could easily read it on their faces.

Secondly, the knowledge that his parents were going to carry out unique shopping, unique in a sense that it would be different from the former when he was still in primary school. This, indeed, was going to be brand-new clothes in his wardrobe- new uniform, new eats and drinks, big, black or blue or green books if you cared to listen. It would have been better if the children went together, but it was impossible because the girl would stay behind to help her mother in doing work at home like digging, collecting firewood, fetching water, washing and cooking after coming back from the nearby school. To the look of things, the mother wanted Kamuhanda to do his schooling from the newly-established Community School. This would let the boy help them, too, in domestic work as they came back from school; besides this, it was not good for young children to be separated from their dear mother. This notion gave Yozofinah sleepless nights as she nursed her feelings about it. The onus was on her to convince her husband to change his mind and let the boy have his education near home. She knew living in far places would make his only son suffer, especially when it came to feeding and those strangers who

kidnapped young children for sacrifice in order to become billionaires. Why had people forgotten that it was out of working with determination that people accumulated wealth? The concerned people heard of the disappearance of children in Katabago village but the sin-stained demons never raised an eyebrow on the nasty and grim act. They only appeared the time for their five-year term of office expiry!

December was slowly melting into January. The weather was fine. The vegetation, animals and human beings alike basked in the sweet morning and evening sunshine. Goats and sheep would be seen scampering in the fields. They roamed everywhere for there were no crops to be destroyed. Children together with their relatives and friends sat under tree shades to avoid strong rays of the sun, listening to Sunday Rhythms being played on Kanungu Broadcasting Station (KBS) Radio.

There was another kind of entertainment. The elders would get sticks to do some drumming as the young ones danced traditional dance. They were celebrating the bountiful harvest. It was another way of showing the Creator that they were happy, and they had a reason to jubilate. Visiting their relatives and friends was always on agenda, which was another way of pleasing God for His Providence. This was a sign of love, unity and peace. A community which lacked sense of sharing was a doomed one. However, it was always fulfilled by city dwellers that were not heartless and still had the mind to think about their old folk by calling on their loved ones in the village. Such was what Christmas Eve greatly contributed save for the joy and happiness it brought herself with.

It was undoubtedly well-known that in Katabago village, there were homes or families which were stable and, the dysfunctional ones like Nyefuza's. His was characterized by quarrels, disagreements, fights, rejections and hatred between his wife, Namata, and the children. The wife and the children more often than not were expelled from the house and slept under the mango tree few meters from the house. Talking about Nyefuza's home, one would use these words to describe it-absolute chaos and anarchy! The principles of family relationships were not there. People always wondered what their children would learn from their parents; maybe violence, torture, hatred, sorrow, suffering and hatred took the upper hand. There was no attributes like communication, emotional support, no romance, no acts of love, care, feelings for others, no

dedication and self-discipline. Other parents in the village prayed and played with their children. They had quality time with them like story-telling at the fire side, swinging on a swing or hammock, trotting together hand in hand in the fields and paths ways, looking at flowers and birds. In Nyefuza's home, this was rare like water in the desert.

Come to Kamahanga's home! The rule of the game was active listening. There was the art of conversation which had been respected and mastered. This art ranged from friendly, orientative, analytical, investigative conversations unlike tough and autocratic ones which characterized Nyefuza's house. The house lacked trust and freedom. This made travelling in life's journey not smooth but rough in Nyefuza's home. There were so many things desired in the world like money, material things like posh cars, getting an education, but being born of a bad parent and a bad home was the worst misfortune a child could have. Whenever Nyefuza's children received their peers as visitors, at night the father would push them out of the house. Together with their friends, they slept in the chilling air. What a shame! It decomposed the respect of the children and the family at large. The whole experience was traumatic!

* * * * *

CHAPTER SEVEN

‘So we’re going to go,’ said Kamahanga, peering at her sweet heart under his eyebrows.

‘To the city? Wow! And why don’t you let him study from here?’ asked the wife in a low tone.

‘Let him get exposed to the world.’

‘Oh, those distant places, foreigners, poor feeding, traffic jam-accidents!’

‘No, don’t mind; God will take care of the situation.’

‘Ok, we’ll pray for you.’

‘I’ve secured a job in KCCA; I’ve to take my son for company.’

‘It’s ok but I hear it takes tough people to work there.’

‘Am I not tough?’

‘You’re but if you’re not careful those musicians can compose a song or two about you-a song with ill connotations. In addition to that journalist can write something about you...’

‘Yozo, listen. What’s important is to do the right thing, in the right place, in the right time. Sometimes one has to part with laughter just like Simba the dog did,’ the husband cracked the joke, adding, ‘this is the reason why they kicked in the stomach, hit in their heads and their gadgets crashed to dust.’

Isn’t it worth dying for telling the truth? The truth saves.’

‘My sweetheart, truth works in heaven but not here. This’s the reason why the son of God was crucified. The song birds, journalists and whoever tries to put up their noses, they’ll face the worst.’ Silence reigned between the couple as if ice had dropped into their hearts.

The term was opening on Twentieth of January, 2012. There was going to be a fundamental change in the young boy’s life, which he later wrote in his diary under the heading: ‘Kamuhanda’s **‘Metamorphosis’**’.

Kamuhanda was going to join Aga Khan High School. He was not only impressed by the imagination of what the school would be like if he entered there, but the name of the school. As a flower opening its petals in the morning to be seen by curious passing children before the noon

sun sets in, for children were always fascinated by colors, Kamuhanda was confident and hopeful. He was eagerly waiting for this opportunity. Aga Khan, indeed, was a flower! He had heard before from his father that it was a multi-cultural school- a school of diversity, with excellent facilities and services. However, this word was beyond his understanding, but literally what he had fathomed or discerned was Indian, Arab, European and African children. He wondered how these lived together though he did not understand why. Village children were always curious to look at whites or reds, but at a distance. These were tourists who came from different parts of the world: America, Britain, India, Sweden, Bulgaria, Russia, France and Germany to see mountain gorillas, chimps and rare bird species-rare in other places- but not here. The tourists threw sweets and munchies at them. The village children did not scramble for these, having been taught not to be greedy enough to eat food from the hands of strangers. Looked at another angle, it would be a blessing on the side of street children in the city. The tourists, not like today, had good time here. When they looked on social media and television the gruesome pictures of torture and brutality through batoning, kicking, whacking, and dragging humans like logs, they feared to traverse the seas and oceans to see the acts of barbarism that enmeshed the natives, administered by Mujaajithropus group that controlled the Dark Continent.

‘Good morning, Daddy. Good morning, Mummy,’ greeted the young children chorally.

‘Good morning good ones. How did the day break?’ inquired the parents in soft voices.

‘We’re very well.’ answered the children happily.

There was no need for the parents to throw commands here and there. The children knew their schedule very well, without being told from Monday to Monday, or from January to January. Ignorance of one’s duties and responsibilities created a nagging situation. They knew what kind of house chores to begin with, and end with.

There were two days remaining for Kamuhanda to leave for school. This made his heart skip a beat; it gave him restless nights. He was going to leave his age mates, friends in Katabago village to begin a new life. Change was a fact of life. One had to change; or change would change him or her. His father bought him a big suitcase in which his belongings would be packed. The next day early in the morning, they were to start the hectic journey. They had to get

a motor cycle to drop them to Kihiihi Town. The road from Kanungu town via Kambuga was impassable. Further more, the Mitano Bridge which connected Kanungu District and Rukungiri had gotten rotten and finally broke down. It could not tolerate the heavy weight of new and old locomotives or automobiles. They had to take what people termed as ‘Long Distance Route’ which strained people’s pockets let alone draining out their strengths, leaving them lethargic. But who cared anyway? Life would go on.

The road from Kihiihi ran through Nyamirama to Katabushera in Bugangari sub-county, and snaked to Rukungiri Town. The road was jugged and rugged. It was, therefore, dangerous for a pregnant woman to use that route except, if the expectant mother fell in love with pre-mature delivery. For the ill, the rough road would cut short their pain to the everlasting sleep. Life was short but one would not like to lose it to the bad road. Death was compulsory but it greatly mattered how one lost life; the cause had to be looked at, and thought of, lest it would not instantly snatch another dear one.

Katabushera was a name with bad connotation. In the local language, it meant ‘What pours porridge’, *Obushera*, local cold porridge made from millet or sorghum or maize flour. Yeast was added to it to make it taste sweet. The place was steep and slippery. As a result many women, men and children lost their calabashes, pots and jerrycans of the drink to this place. This was not all. Drivers lost their tyres and brake pads because of the steep slope! It was black spot, sometimes called ‘Devil’s Spot’ due to loss of lives at this particular place. This was the road Kamuhanda and his father was going to pass through- the Devil’s Road! If they chanced to pass through the spot and reach Rukungiri, then God’s Kingdom would have come. The road was smooth.

‘You’re welcome,’ said the *Askari* at the gate, with a beaming face.

‘Thank you and it’s a pleasure finding you here,’ replied Kamuhanda.

‘You seem to have come from far.’

‘Yes, Kanungu District, border with DRC.’

‘Kibwetere’s scene?’ asked the Gatekeeper with a mixture of wonder, curiosity and fear.

‘Yes.’

‘Ok! Enter into that office,’ said the well-dressed man in grey Kaki, pointing to the Head teacher’s office.

They had passed through Shoprite to get what they required, Angelina Bookshop and everything was ready. At Aga Khan there was no delays, no registering jam like the traffic jam in the city centre. This was Kampala, a place where some people spit on their finger, pointed it to the sky, saying they would never go back to their fatherland, except if they were horizontal. The word sounded strange- horizontal, meaning dead. Zombie, Oh dear God! Unbelievable! But this was it, nothing more or less. Were these people zonked? Why did they sound out such a comment? Was it out of desperation? May be these were the people, who had nothing to lose; therefore, life was not precious, and it would never be treasured!

The time Kamuhanda and his father spent at the school, one was talking and another was quiet- just watching but pondering about what the next move would be. They summarily went through all the processes, finally entering him into the dormitory. Kamahanga did not believe his eyes when he saw many women in the offices doing their work determinedly-women behind computers-hitting the buttons on the keyboard with such a skill he had never seen before. He now realized the village men were behind the scenes- behind in terms of being informed. Women were capable of doing what men could do, no more stereotyping. The patriarchal stereotyping was no more.

At the dormitory, Kamuhanda was welcomed by one Arab girl, two Indian girls, three Indian boys who carried his things as he followed them like a kid, holding on its mother’s dress for fear of people. The young African boys seemed not to care. The doubting attitude which the boy had towards these other races began to fade from his mind. He realized that people from different ethnic background can live together.

‘My name is Mamdhan. What do they call you?’

‘My name is Kamuhanda.’

‘Welcome to Aga Khan,’ said another slender boy, slightly younger than him.

‘Thank you.’

No sooner had the new entrant settled down than the boys opened their bags to serve him bread and juice. The boys were really charming and inviting. They took him to the bathroom for a shower, and later moved him around the school. It was time for orientation. He saw the pitches where different types of games were played. Some of the games were: volley ball, cricket, basketball, billiards, rugby, and other computer games which he was green about. Was it not an opportunity for him to learn? By joining Aga Khan School, he had hit in the bull's eye! Village boys used to say and believe that: 'Studying in Secondary Schools near Universities like Makerere and Kyambogo was a sure deal of joining there'. They never wanted to join schools that were not in the direction of where the oldest University in the land was! If one did his primary level in Kanungu district, his Ordinary level would be done in Mbarara; then Advanced level would be done in Mpigi, meaning that he or she would be getting nearer to Makerere University. All the villagers knew one University- Makerere! Whenever one would tell them that he was at the University, they knew and understood it was Makerere University. What a misconception! The whole idea was misconstrued as if there were no other institutions! In life, past or present, it was all about believing in something or someone...

Goodbye was the saddest word one would never want to hear. 'Absence makes the heart grow fonder'. But there were two alternatives for Kamuhanda: to insert fingers in the ears not to hear his father saying or bidding him goodbye, or hear it and feel the pinch of loneliness. All in all, this was inevitable. 'To tolerate whatever comes the mortar tolerated the pestle,' said Old man. After few hours of his father's departure, he no longer got haunted. He got absorbed into the new family of school life to socialize.

Kamuhanda was progressing well, academically, physically and socially. He was the students' and teachers' favourite. How this came about, no one had knowledge about it. To the look of things, he was a well-behaved boy. He had been brought up well by his parents and the villagers. For the inhabitants of Katabago village, a child belonged to the community, not parents alone unlike in the city where it was nobody's business. It was this upright and positive upbringing that helped him to cope with the situation without problems; it was not going to be an uphill task for teachers to continue the work started by parents. They were just going to guide and scaffold him.

The climate at school was conducive. Everything that was needed to facilitate learning was there. This gave Kamuhanda and his colleagues hope for a bright future. In the near days, parents would come to visit their children. At a distance, one could hear voices singing. These were rehearsals which could bring into being the songs to entertain parents on the Visitation Day. He would be having a lot of stories to tell his parents and his sister, Karungi and, so would be his friends. He would be glad to hear from his friends back at home. What was more, the holiday itself was going to be fabulous and fantastic because the young would share their school experiences as seen from different perspectives and angles.

Listen! Listen, audience!

One by one the lights of Makerere hill went out. One by one those of Nakulabye, Old Kampala, Gadhafi Road and Kikoni Road went out. Those of Aga Khan were still shining and, forever, they would to produce women and men of tomorrow. As the moths danced around the bulbs, geckos on walls opened their big, round eyes to catch what to put in their bellies. Students opened their eyes to book warm and crack their heads. It was business all round. Life was a journey on smooth and rough road. The academic combatants' future lay here in the books-getting an education. The observer trailed through Gadhafi Road and got swallowed in the stomach of the earth.

'A bird that does not fly to far places knows not where there is a booming harvest'. Many natives, especially those who had relocated to towns and cities had become ignorant and very green about the beauty that lay hidden in the so called remote villages. Villages like Kitariro, Kazuru, Katabago, Kacwampare, Kanyungusi and Nyakabungo, were really beauteous. These were the natural and physical creations of God. They were creations given by the Good One generously to the one that carried and symbolized His image. The onus was now on man and woman to further grace this environment with extraordinary creativity to add on what the Omniscient had made.

The round-topped hills like Kamirankoko, Kirenzi, the M-shaped hills such as Nyakabungo, Katabago and Migyera that faced Mukurwe of Rugyeyo, were a sight to reckon with. As the hills melted into the valleys like a woman waxing in the loving arms of a man, there

was nothing else to do, but to feel the bliss of life. In the roots of these hills, there were rivers and streams with crystal clear water that housed animals like frogs, fish and mudfish.

The vegetation and short grass that accompanied the tall trees that stood along the banks of the rivers looked like the two giants from east and west- two strong men looking directly in each other's face, dripping with cold war. However, the trees and grass were in harmony with the water and the rest of the creatures that had their dwelling here. Whenever the children looked at frogs and birds making love they would feel impatient and jealousy because of the time that crawled along. Time had delayed their growth and development to manhood and womanhood to experience the same kingdom of pleasure. Perched on the branches of these trees and grass, were the birds, prominent of which were the white robin chats. The tunes produced by the birds and the steady, gentle breeze that united with the leaves to produce the sweet whistling sound, the sound of gentle flowing water, and then the blending in of the croaking frogs was deeply symphonic. In their swaying and undulating, they were Jamaicans dancing calypso. The children and women from different parts of the villages had their rendezvous here to join their fellow creatures to orchestrate as below:

To sail on dream on crystal clear rivers

To ride on the holy waves of the river in a calm steady breeze

To work in the service of life, living and, in sooth,

In search of peace, love and truth

To be part of the environment is really part and parcel of life,

Where we forget strife

Oh, calypso, the places you have been

The things you have seen,

The stories you will tell

Oh. Calypso I sing to the world

The men, women, birds and animals that have served you so well

Bless them O God

Let the rivers reach to the sea in harmony

Let us stay here in peace, love displayed in symphony

Oh calypso calypso calypso...

They all sang in unison, jovially, and hilariously in a soul-searching way. They saw this completeness coming from the rhythm of life. Truly, God loved this, and everything was in total perfection!

* * * * *

CHAPTER EIGHT

Oh, life! Waiting for the term to come to a close was like a young man in preparation for receiving a bride- a bride who was coming that very night. The bridegroom and bride would be in the same boat. They would be full of fantasy projections and imaginations, tossing to and fro in the cosmos of their minds. The learners would be in school physically but not mentally. They lost their appetite; the books smelled like the trenches of 4Ks-Katanga, Kavule, Kiwunya and Kikoni. Looking at the nice, tall, blue buildings in the center of Kampala City, no one would ever imagine that such places existed a long side such kind of beauty! The learners longed to go home; they longed for a change. A change was as good as a rest.

Aga khan High school was doing a good job. The school was shaping learners in the right direction; educationally, socially, psychologically, spiritually and emotionally. This was holistic education. The skills were emphasized. Many students from Kamuhanda's village and the neighbouring villages had joined the school because of what Kamuhanda had told them when he went back home on holiday. The non-verbal communication the young boy exuded told it all. The graceful look, walk, facial expression, gestures, and the general conduct of Kamuhanda was a symbol of what the institution was giving them. His accents as he spoke with his peers did the

magic. He spoke in the Queen's accent and, then switched to American accent. The fluency and the grammatical correctness exhibited in the process of speaking were real. Kamuhanda was still in lower classes but he spoke English language like a native of London on a holiday along River Thames, or East End. The flies fell and pissed in his friends' mouths for they were gaping at him in an unconscious way as they listened to him, surprised. 'The institution is doing the needful- to the learner, parent, and the nation; it offers so good an education; it's worth paying for, and very credible. It's accredited!' said Old Man, with a sense and air of contentment. He added, 'A chick that will develop into a cock is spotted at the very day it hatches'. As soon as there's shell shocking and the chick drops on the ground, when one looks between its legs, he or she can see and easily tell how the sharp, standing spike will cock industriously tomorrow.'

It was first May, 2012. Aga Khan was closing the term. Demus, Precious, Aidajankidoo, Paddy and Cosy had already packed their bags. The groups, together with the rest of the students, were at school physically but mentally they were back at home.

'How I long to be back at home now!' said Paddy nostalgically.

'Don't stir and provoke my mind, Paddy.' Precious stepped in, in a frenzy mood.

'I'm almost collapsing because of the thought of going and reaching home. I'd love to see Mum and Dad, Karungi, her mother and Boonabaana,' said Cosy, smiling a forced smile.

'I would like to meet Charles, the carpenter; he is a great friend of mine.' Said Paddy like he was recalling some sweet memories- sweet memories of how he had shaved Goatee sometime back.

'I'm salivating. The mangoes must be yellow ripe, and sugar canes are as tall as the trees in the tropical forest of Bwindi,' Demus said anxiously.

'I no longer eat yellow things like yellow, ripe mangoes, yellow bananas!' commented Aidajankidoo, twisting his lips that made his cheek move up and down, in a mocking manner.

'Are we not going to travel in a yellow bus?' asked Demus.

'No, we'll travel on the blue one- BABY COACH.'

‘Let us travel on SAVANNAH. It has been on the road for a long time, so the driver is experienced.’

‘It has been on the road for a long time, meaning that it’s old, exhausted and worn out. To say more, the driver is old and his yellow overall is as old as those dressed by a scarecrow, standing in the garden where the crop was harvested long time ago. BABY COACH is swift, has a new engine, new body, new seats, charging system, curtains, and windows can be closed and opened easily.’

‘But there’re too many stories about the state of affairs in the country and the last time we travelled on it, a woman from East almost fought with a man from West,’ complained Demus.

‘That’s sensitizing the masses about the state of affairs in the country- political, social, economic and educational,’ Aidajankidoo reminded him.

‘On BABY COACH, the crew gives excellent and executive modern services, and this’s what every traveller-human being deserves.’ The charges are fair on top of that; the other buses over tax the passengers, and there’s over loading; they’re slow; they the run at the speed of a snail and sometimes stop in the way before dropping the passengers to their destinations,’ he added with too much resentment.

‘Aidajankidoo, remember that many traffic officers have been deployed on the roads; therefore, the problem of over-speeding and over-loading is no more.’

‘Demus, you must be in Dreamland; you must be day-dreaming! Do you know why the driver parks a little distance from smart Corps dressed in white? White symbolizes holiness. The driver alights and orchestrates like he’s shaking hands with the dressed to kill officer, and immediately comes back to his steering wheel, without the white angel checking what’s going inside the bus.’

‘Man eateth where he worketh,’ answered Demus, smiling like a boy and a girl standing at the side of the road as the girl chewed a blade of grass.

‘And today unlike in the past years, punching a fist in the mouth or what the country men have baptized ‘*Kintu kidogo*’ has been modernized. The officer just comes and peeps in like he’s

checking and inspecting from the door step, sometimes through the window and, there after the driver steps on the accelerator and the deal is cracked or sealed.’ The young boy paused a bit and, ‘later the ‘gift’ hits in the handset- ti tiii, and the message is delivered. Is it a message? Yes. A loaf of bread is now on the table...’

‘Oh, is this a plague, cancer, or the weevil in the bean?’ asked Demus.

‘Yes, it is. The situation is worsening and most of the people have already caught this disease. The rotting of the fish begins from the head. What’s important today is to act smart. One has just to learn the skill of doing it!’

‘Then, who’ll save us?’

‘The Saviour- Jesus Christ!’

‘For how long shall we wait?’

‘It can be tomorrow, next week, or next month, or next year; this is what we call “The Second Coming”.’

The boarding of the bus was a serious matter of contention among the school boys in as much as which one was in picture for deliverance to the Promised Land where they would enjoy their holiday. It was now Yellow versus Blue. Finally, BABY COACH scored like Messi!

‘East west home is best,’ said Paddy, without hiding his excitement.

The mouse crosses your path when you have no stick; you never know what lurks ahead,’ said Precious, focusing at a long distance; an indication that he was wrapped in a deep thought. He was nursing something in his psyche.

‘I’ve a burning desire to see Mr. Bean, Karungi, Shaggy, the bearded man, Mr. Tigaryoma and generally our beautiful village,’ said Cosy in a hilarious way.

They carried their school bags and accompanied themselves with the new technology. As they ensconced themselves in their seats, adjusted the tweeters in their ears, they were now ready for the journey back home.

They were shaking their heads like a blue lizard, climbing the mud-wall of a poor man's hut. Others were swaying their heads as a tree in a slow, blowing wind. They moved along with tunes playing on their handsets. Technology, like politics, has come with advantages and disadvantages. Today everything has been privatized and the world has become so mean that individualism is raging like a sea tide determined to swallow up immigrants crossing from Africa to Europe at Lampedusa.

You would only know the lyric one was listening to when your seatmate crooned along with the hit. The young boys and girls had a mastery of modern music. It was as if they were the ones who had brought the song into being; it was **Your Song** by Rita Ora.

I woke up with a fear this morning

But I can taste you on the tip of my tongue

Alarm without no warning

You're by my side and we've got smoke in our lungs

Last night we were up, kissing in the back of the cab...

The driver of BABY COACH was time conscious. He was always on time. The dandy man, in a pair of blue jeans and a blue, stripped shirt, and hanging his blue overall on his right arm, he opened the bus door with the left hand and jumped into the bus and perched on the driver's seat like a bird. He turned the key in its hole, stepped on the crutch and then engaged in the gear and stepped on the accelerator. The engine raved and moaned like a whore in love. The vibrations that emanated from the machine- engine -created waves or current that rushed to the buttocks of the travellers. This was more than a stimulus, working seriously on the bodies of sons and daughters of Adam and Eve. Those who had soft and loose hearts were thrown into the mellowing world of imaginations and fantasies to trigger the night memories, especially to those who had ever visited Loveland.

The white man's machine on its eight rubber feet, glided out of the Bus Park in Kisenyi, said bye bye to Ham Towers and city dwellers by smoking and ejecting clouds of carbon. He started honking and headed for Natete- Kyengera, throwing an eye at the road that snaked to

Bunyoro Kingdom on the right and, then heading for Mpigi. The bus turned left and disappeared from the view behind the bend. The city hawkers shouted: Bakiga Bakiga Bakiga of sorghum, *Omukiga ainami*, a sexual connotation and derogatory phrase, meaning that Omukiga is ‘facing down’ and that he does not ‘stand’. *Yayenda ayimukye*. If he wants, let him stand up- if he wishes...

‘At long last! The unwanted guest is thanked when he goes. Finally, the holiday is here!’ said Aidajankidoo with a sigh of relief. The sleep of happiness descended on them. The passengers drifted into slumber to let the controller and the Controller do their jobs.

* * * * *

CHAPTER NINE

Traveling from the city to Rukungiri was a smooth journey. ‘Life is a coin; she has two sides,’ stated Old Man. This was his way of talking. The comfort and warmth experienced on the bus was very charming and rewarding. On a certain occasion the people of God would sink into a state of oblivion. And all of a sudden a wave of thoughts would reverberate back into their minds. Would there be a moment when the rough side of life would strike like lightening without rain and thunder? Listening to music and sliding on the well-tarmacked road had nothing to with time. Moving and covering long distances was like a sweet dream so quick and short like a wink. Many people bypassed their destinations because of the luxury and pleasure derived from the journey. They really appreciated the hard labour of their grandfathers and fathers because the tax they paid was not wastage of time.

‘Hey guys! Wake up and read that sign post,’ shouted Aidajankidoo on top of his voice in excitement, waking up his peers from their peaceful slumber.

St. Karoli Lwanga Nursing School,’ Cosy read the sign post aloud, sounding out the syllables of the words like kids in a nursery school. They were magnetized by the feeling of

reaching near their birthplace. This acted as an activator to release them from the ill-consuming nostalgia and homesickness experienced for the whole term.

In a twinkling of an eye, Demus read the words scribbled on yet another sign post. IMMACULATE HEART GIRLS' SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL- NYAKIBALE, RUKUNGIRI They gazed at the place; the buildings were in front of them. This was Rukugiri Town! They cheered, laughed and gamboled like kids of a goat as if they were not on a bus. The driver pressed on the horn. It trumpeted the triumphant entry into Rukungiri Town. The booming music from Sonko's Electronic Shop and Rubarara Disco Sounds invited them from their long time of absence. The driver, to show his expertise, opened and stretched his palm, placed it on the steering wheel, rolled the steering wheel a bit to cut the bend and headed for Rukungiri Police Station. He then did the braking to slow down the speed, turned left and slopped down to the Bus Park.

The spark and glow that was on the travellers' countenance vanished like Mercury on the eve of opening the container. They were all wrapped and drowned in a sea of thoughts; they were thinking too much. Old Man had once said, 'Fear a man who thinks too much.' The juveniles lost their appetite. They were a sickly dog whose stomach was full of grumbling, its body bony, and sleeping all the day long, without touching the meal of meat only to crawl in the compound to eat blades of grass as a way of medication. They had used this stop over to do some shopping of eats and drinks; however, they hardly touched their snacks. Possibly something was amiss. This was the rough side of life's journey.

The bus driver dived on to his seat. As the engine roared, he did some honking, and in addition to the town dweller's noises, the hitting of metals by mechanics and the blasting music from all corners of the town, the whole place was more of Babel. *Pupupupu pupupupu pupupupu jijijiji jiiii iimuuu* so the engine raved, quivered, trembled, boomed and bellowed, sending clouds of smoke to the nearby boys who were selling chapattis, biscuits, sodas and water stuffed in boxes. The boys wrinkled their faces, fanned their noses saying: *hififi fififi* like they were sensing the toxic, rotten fart of a duck. All in all, this was a king's wind which never smelled!

He drove towards Rwenshama stage, turned right and slopped down to the Diesel filling station to let the machine quench his thirst. 'Energy comes from eating,' Old Man once said. It was as if there was a sinister in every traveller's heart and soul; be it the driver. The bus driver lost his zeal and enthusiasm. The passengers put up ugly faces. Some squirted saliva out and squirmed; and yet others gnashed their teeth.

The white man's machine made few strides and Makobore High School, Kinyasano Girls' School and the big tree opposite the sign post of Makobore High School, were in sight and view. The big, tall tree, which people named 'that which does not dry', made a Stop or Stage for many. This was where travellers would sit and rest as they waited for the means of transport, sheltering themselves from strong radiation, emanating from the rays of the hot tropical sun. The month of May was hot. Goats, poultry and sheep would also come from the neighbourhood to have a nap here to enjoy the gifts of nature provided by God, the Omnipotent.

This was the point now where trouble began. Women and their toddlers, and those people who had poor health and were ailing, got dropped into hot soup. The clouds of dust as large as a thousand blankets put together, formed in the air. The back tyre of the bus fell into the big pothole that was big enough to swallow a big Friesian cow. '*Ai ai ai weee*' the women and the oldies cried, holding their backs. The other travellers blew the dust away with their hands and handkerchiefs. They closed the window glasses in vain. It was hot and hell inside the bus. They were coughing and choking. Perhaps Tuberculosis (TB) had invaded the travellers.

The bus moaned and groaned and whimpered under the auspices of the ugly and murdering road. Out of his hard work and determination, he crawled towards Rwerere Town. Out of the blue, Old Man jumped out of the bush at the side of the road, dancing the ancient war Kiga dance, spreading his arms like one holding a shield in his left arm and a spear in his right hand-shaking it like one on the front line fighting a war of liberation. No one knew what the old man was dramatizing. Most of the people in the district and beyond knew the grey-haired man. He was respected because of his wisdom, stature, physical appearance- his physic. He was tall, strong, with tight muscles standing on his body. He looked more of a boxer and a wrestler than an ordinary, common peasant living a humble life. He was liked and loved by everybody; he was well-known for his art of story-telling. He was a conversationalist. He had a wealth of

experience, harvested and accumulated from longevity. He had witnessed the Second Big War which had happened between Nineteen thirty-nine and Nineteen forty-five. His father had participated in the First Big War. They were Freedom Fighters; they were servants. They had served the nation and the world tirelessly without being forced. It was out of their will to serve the people. He had been given a gold medal. He remembered this like it was yesterday. After the disastrous war, he had, too, tasted other wars and crises in 60s, 70's and 80s both at home and in the neighbouring countries. What drained energy and strength out of him, was the Rwandan Genocide of Nineteen ninety-four. It was still fresh in his mind and, it had brought him mental aberrations. He was counselor, an adviser, and the village guide. He helped men and women in family or biological matters, political, social and religious issues as well.

He waved two times and the bus stopped. The travellers on the bus shouted: 'Yo yo yo Mzee, our man.' The bus conductor opened the door. Old Man, with the help of his walking stick that supported him, lifted his leg to the bus steps. The bus conductor got hold of his arm, received his walking stick and helped him sit near the bus driver. He further pulled the seatbelt and fastened it across the old man's chest for safe travel. The entire travellers really loved the services. They all appreciated and wished if only all the people and service providers were decent like that; the world would be a better place to live in.

'How are you, Mzee?' greeted the bus driver, smiling.

'I am as you see me, my son,' replied Old Man, trying to make himself comfortable in the seat. The travellers laughed because of the Mzee's response.

'I saw you coming out of the bush. What were you doing there?' asked the bus conductor inquisitively.

'My son, don't you know I was once a freedom fighter?' asked Old Man rhetorically.

The bus bumped into another pothole. The old man and other travellers groaned in pain, touching on their backs again, where the spinal cord ends just near the buttocks. They said the pot of waste was positioned here and that it was going to get broken!

‘I’ll not vote this time round,’ said Old Man angrily. But still if I don’t, other voters especially the youths will do.’ He added, ‘It’s lining at the back of your candidate. What a risk! Should your wife fail to vote for you, will she sleep in your house? Hehehehe!’ Old Man laughed sarcastically.

‘True, Mzee!’ said Aidajankidoo. ‘And others will do because they will be given a packet of salt, a piece of soap, or a kilogram of maize flour and a kilogram of beans. And is there a good reason for Local Council I Elections to be marred by bribery and rigging? If you’re my neighbour or relative and you let me down by shunning away from my back, when it’s time for signing and stamping the loan form or any other document, I’ll also keep my stamp and pen in my cow hide bag. I don’t think there’s neutrality and respect of one’s right in such kind of voting. There’s a sinister behind this method. If resources weren’t available, we would go the school way where cheap materials are provided, and it’s a secret ballot paper. The exercise is dangerous; we’ve to think twice, especially when you consider the recent murders,’ concluded Aidajankidoo.

‘Oh, my son! Look at how the recent famine attacked us in Kibimbiri like locusts- generally in our District and Isingiro District and many other parts of the country. If you’ve a wife and children, will you refuse to accept the offer of salvation in exchange for the vote?’

‘The roads have become worse compared to the past. What’s going on?’ asked Paddy disgustingly.

The old man cackled and said: ‘A politician is a tricky creature- very mysterious. They’re pampers that must be changed. They’ll promise you heaven on earth, to build bridges where there’re no rivers. They’ll pledge to pay school fees for your children, give sponsorships and bursaries in good schools here and abroad. Talk about piped water, building grade one schools, good health centers, land redistribution, improvement of agriculture through providing farm implements like hoes, pangas, sprinklers and, to stimulate your egos, they’ll promise you cultivators like tractors and combine harvesters.’

Old Man, it seemed, had whetted and stimulated the appetite of travellers save for reminding them the state of affairs and gruesome situation that was surrounding them and ahead of them.

‘We’ve faced many problems but the problem of unemployment, mysterious murders and kidnappings are causing and drowning all the citizenry into the deep sea of terror, horror and fear,’ said the driver.

‘Some locations have been deserted and abandoned. A case in point is Kanungu District. Look at this Nengo road! Possibly we’re not part of this country,’ commented a middle-aged woman.

‘Don’t get surprised or shocked when you stroll around the city only to see many roads in a bad state, with many potholes. What’s in the city is what’s in upcountry. Have you seen the poor drainage and heaps of garbage lying in many parts of the city?’ inquired Precious.

Old Man laughed again, adding: ‘The reason is that people are not paying taxes,’ all the travellers laughed.

‘The citizenry pay tax but it’s directed to the stomach of the most high,’ the conductor said.

Demus was doing his Advanced Certificate of Education at Makerere College School. The knowledge he had gained from there, he felt he should share it with the travellers now. He cleared his throat and lectured: big people and rich people don’t pay taxes. They exempt themselves from taxes. They have many tax holidays and the burden of taxes is shouldered by the poor, who keep on struggling in their small businesses without progress. This’s the reason why the richer become richer while the poor become poorer and poorer day by day. It’s not all about hard work and intelligence but theft, exploitation, oppression and suppression. They grab all the resources of the country through tactics like privatization, when actually the businesses are for the people in authority. Why is it that they’re the very people who own many assets, drive expensive cars, have protection, expansive land and farms and do business abroad? When they fall sick, they don’t even get treatment from the very good hospitals they boast about here. Most

of their investments are outside and they keep their treasures in outside Banks,' explained Demus.

The travellers heaved a deep long sigh. Was it a sigh of relief? They were all wrapped in thought. It was as if they had been awakened from their deep sleep after pouring cold water on them. They grinded their teeth with rage after hearing that story; it was disheartening.

'It's easier to lie and dupe people and believe than to advise and tell them the truth. The politicians are vampires and sea ogres that come to power to plunder, sup, suck and kill the ordinary man. They're not here to help and protect the voters. They use all pretexts that it was the white man who made us poor, killed us and, is still following us. But who is enticing him to come and invest from here? Have you seen any leaders staging a rebellion against them like in the past? During the colonial period, it was the chiefs who grabbed their subjects and sold them into slavery. Today it's the leaders who are fuelling modern slavery, wars and the stealing of resources on a grand scale. The Aid donated by the whites is stolen by the black kings and it's used to keep them in power, buying lethal weapons and amassing wealth for their families, relatives and friends,' said Old Man. 'Mrs. 'What-I-Cook-I-Eat' doesn't care about her husband's plate,' added Old Man. 'The whites are far better in heart than the blacks, believe it or not,' concluded Old Man.

Aidajankidoo stood up, scratched his head and hit the wall of the bus with his fist. The travellers thought him mad. He was not mad- very sane. The message or information imbedded in the narratives was more excruciating than child delivery. The politicians were not responsible. An adult was a leader; therefore, he had the duty to care for the dependants as much as himself. 'He who does not want you sacrifices you to death,' said the old man once upon a time.

The country men and women were prayerful. They always said God was Omnipotent, the Good One, the Observer, the Giver... He could not get tired. This was how the believers believed. God was merciful, forgiving, caring and loving- yesterday, today and tomorrow. 'And for how long will He be so, looking at the path his creation had chosen to take? 'What is the use of murdering, oppressing, exploiting and snatching from the poor with the hope that on Sunday you'll go to church and repent?' said Old Man. He continued: 'When you offer yourself to a

Hamite shepherd as a slave, he severs all your relationships with your home; he'll uproot and drive you out of it.'

The world was too much with the people. The heavenly bodies, the waters, plants and animals, the seasons had a relationship. They influenced each other. The existence of objects had a bearing on human lives and so were human beings on objects.

The sky without warning became gloomy. She had seen how the passengers had suffocated under the clouds of dust. Old Man broke the silence that had reigned by taking up and occupying the minds of the people. They were pondering on the bad roads, land grabbing and imprisonment without trial; they were reflecting on vote rigging, kidnappings and women murders which had become a trend.

They started feeling a cold breeze and some sort of darkness that covered the earth. It was Old Man who invited them to the rib-breaking joke that sent everyone to drifting into the realm of laughter. 'God and his wife are preparing to go to bed.' No sooner had he finished uttering the words than the rain started pouring down. It was as if the fountain and source of it was from a big gourd- as big as three countries put together. 'These are fluids of God; He's having good time with his best half to fertilize the earth and neutralize the blemishes of it,' said Old Man, looking like he had not caused the pain to the ribs of travellers through laughter.

The bus crossed River Mitano. He had now the task of climbing the steep lane. Those who had abandoned the Lord through prayer and serving him, remembered Him at this particular moment. The road was now in a state of mire due to heavy, terrible showers. The bus swerved from right to left, then left to right. What made matters worse was the precipice on which the machine was moving. If it could happen for the bus to move and miss the line just an inch off the narrow road, the bus would roll down into the abyss. It was ten kilometers from the road down to the valley where River Mitano flowed and wandered to the lake, and finally to the sea. Women cried and whimpered. They stood up to their feet. They wanted to take off to their heels but they were held by the conductor from shattering the window glasses to save their lives and, of their babies. The bus heaved and groaned. The driver clenched his teeth and held the steering wheel with his two hands, with all his strength he could muster. He displayed his skill and all the

knowledge he acquired from school and, from the world of experience to beat all the odds of weather and the bad road. The worst moment in the history of living was losing life- the life of a loved one, a friend with a known cause, in this case, the bad roads. The thought about the politicians was the only thing that preoccupied the passengers' mind. They no longer thought about home- not even death that had already conquered their bodies, heart and mind. The chest of Abraham was creating a big roof under which all the travellers would rest in peace from the troubles of the world.

Finally, the driver managed to stop; however, people had lost their senses. Their pumps were in their mouths as they were tasting death; the grind stone that did not grind for one person. The babies had fallen off from their mothers' arms and rolled under the bus seats. The luggage on the racks had fallen on the passengers but they did not feel it because they were half-dead due to fear. The driver and the conductor started waking up the people from their coma. In front of them, there was a fleet of cars that had been trapped by mud, too. Down from the valley, came young and old men, with hoes and spades to help the passengers. They left their work of distilling gin from banana juice at the river. They wanted to save lives. They did not behave like MPs, who never cared about people who brought them to power.

The passengers were helped out of the bus. Unfortunately two babies had died on the spot. Two old men had broken their legs. It was a sight of sorrows and sadness. Men and women were exhausted. They had nothing to do, but to pull up their trousers and dresses, gather their momentum to push the vehicles out of the potholes of mud. The business was hectic. As one tall, strong man pushed harder and harder, he passed out wind. The tired passengers forgot their misfortunes to burst into laughter. They sang songs of work like lumber-jacks deep in the forest as they cut timber. *Push push yooo yooo yooo push with all your manhood, with all your womanhood. Woo woo woo haaya, haaya push push puuuush...* They were all surprised when men had paused to wipe beads of sweat that were streaming down their temples, when a woman called Jessica pushed the car out of the pothole alone!

The young, energetic school boys spread a tarpaulin at the side of the road on grass where the place was free of mud. They laid down the two babies which had joined the Lord. Their mothers were at their side crying hopelessly. In their company, were two old men who had

broken their legs and one old woman, who had gotten a fractured arm. They were groaning in untold pain. Most of the passengers had made phone calls to their relatives informing them how they had been caught up in the mud and the accident that had ensued. The bus driver had contacted 999 in vain. He had also signalled SOS to the authority at the Security Headquarter for an emergency but it was not forthcoming.

One hour later, the whitish, yellowish, stripped Pajero Land Cruiser appeared from the bend. Sweet country music was booming and blasting. From quite a short distance, the melodious tune fell in the ears to remind the passengers that some were born to be happy, yet others to live miserable lives- lives without music, without love, without essential necessities of life: food, shelter, water, clothes, and such kind of music. The song ‘Country Roads Take Me Home’ was playing. Music was the food of the soul. Whoever lived a life without music was soulless. This was the type of life that the primitive, poor villagers lived- needy villagers. The struggle between the driver and the mud began there and then. Having lived in the city for some time, Precious, Paddy and Demus stretched their necks like Uganda antelopes to look at the vehicle.

‘It resembles the MP’s car,’ said Precious, suspecting.

‘What does it want in this desolate, impassible place at this time?’ inquired Paddy in a pitiful and worried state.

‘It’s the one, buddy! I know it very well,’ answered Demus in a calm and composure.

‘But the MP has his home in this desert island!’ said Aidajankidoo, shrugging his shoulders.

‘The car has missed the roooooad, Oh my Gooodo!’ shouted Cosy on top of her voice.

‘Cry the beloved country! Uganda *Zaabu* (gold)!’ commented Aidajankidoo in disappointment.

Cosy’s noise had attracted the rest of the travellers. Their eyes were now glued to the rolling vehicle down the slope. ‘That which killed the dog won’t spare the hunter’ said Old Man, groaning in excruciating pain. He was now, together with other old folk, becoming unconscious

at the side of the road. The boys rushed to the point where the car had started its journey to Hades. It rolled and rolled until it hit the big eucalyptus tree that was growing at the bank of river Mitano. The men who had stayed back at the river distilling white gin were the first people to reach on the scene of the fatal and gruesome accident.

‘Ah, what an accident!’ shouted one of the men, calling those who were above them in the road. MP MP MP MP,’ shouted the man in desperation and helplessness.

The driver was stacked between Scylla and Charybdis- between the hammer and the anvil. He was squashed and squeezed between the stirring wheel and the seat. The wife at his side was dead. The baby who remained in her hands was alive!

The unfortunate passengers immediately forgot their catastrophic situation. They were now diverted to the new episode. Demus picked the MP’s phone from dilapidated and ramshackle car and dialled one of the contacts. It was the RDC, Kampala Central District, who picked the call. Time had lost its meaning. The situation was black and bleak. The atmosphere radiated a sombre mood which sent a chill in everyone’s spine. There was no tomorrow. Everyone was now a drunkard’s cockerel. Thirty minutes later they heard an Ambulance vehicle wailing. It was a blessing in disguise. The group that lay on the tarpaulin at the side of the road got a chance of being rushed to the hospital. By the fact that most of the passengers had called home for rescue, the motorcycles came and picked them. It was a nasty experience that touched everybody. All the people on the scene were drowned in the sea of mixed feelings and perplexity. Some said it was an act of God, and yet others said it was humanity’s negligence. To the look of things, there was no rightful judge. Only time and history would tell.

* * * * *

CHAPTER TEN

The passengers' homecoming was rough. No one would say it was a smooth journey; it had claimed lives. The MP and his wife had been claimed by the uninvited visitor. Death was not looked at as a bad thing. What shocked the onlookers was how death dramatized the moment. It was a sad time. She left a couple and two babies lying in state in Kambuga Hospital- breathlessly! The only wings of grasshoppers that were left in the hands of the people were the MP's toddler, the two old men and a woman, who were experiencing excruciating burning pain. The survivors were looking at their eye. Soon or later, the bell would toll.

Finally, the young students with their fellow travellers reached their destinations. The whole village of Katabago was happy to receive their children back home after a long time in school. The city where they schooled was far from home- three hundred and fifty miles. The journey would almost take nine hours, if it chose not to be like Odysseus' wanderings back home to Ithaca.

The unity of the village folks was strong and vibrant. They had already agreed to organize a grand welcome party for the scholars who they knew they were coming. The students who were getting an education near their homes would also meet their brothers and sisters from the city to share issues ranging from education, social, political, cultural as well as religious.

Yozofinah, Namata, Kigatire, Korugambo and other village women woke up as early as **five AM** in the morning to cook. Mr. Tigaryoma, Charles the Carpenter and Abdullah seriously worked on slaughtering. They slaughtered seven goats and twenty hens, ten of which were cockerels that measured five pounds each. At nine in the morning, Kigatire and Yozofinah had an assignment to go to the hospital and check on the ailing Old Man. They were missing him so much, for he was the embodiment of wisdom in the village and beyond. The young and the old missed him so much. Everyone was on his knees praying for his quick recovery and, all that were affected by the lethal accident. The youths spit firewood and fetched water and ran some other errands. The participation of all the village people in such communal adventures was a bond that held them together. This was the opposite of what was happening in the city. The rule of the game in the city was: 'Everybody for himself and God for us all'. The worst thing a

stranger would make was to ask for the direction leading to his or her destination. This was the greatest opportunity for the bad people or con men to fall short of God's glory.

The roads were ugly. And the motorcyclists tried to beat all the odds to drop the two women to the hospital to check on Old Man- to give him words of encouragement, hope and care. Women! Like the Cananite woman who cried to Jesus, 'Son of David! Have mercy on me, Sir!' My daughter has a demon and is in a terrible condition.' The disciples, who said, 'Send her away! She is following us making all this noise!' were no different from the MPs who ignored the pleas of the voters. The roads! They were roads to hell. Old Man and company were in pain. The old man needed physical as well as social support from relatives and friends. Women beg and begged for mercy because at one point they return it. Possibly this was the reason why women were always at the side of Jesus as He walked the sorrowful road. It was an hour's ride. They had packed soft foods and drinks to give to the old man; presumably he could touch and eat little of it. The nurse and another Caucasian one, who was believed to be a new Cuban nurse, were taking care of the old man. The nurse, who was dressed in pinkish uniform, well-pressed and white shoes, was so sweet a sight. The Cuban nurse was dressed in yellowish uniform. On her long silky hair that resembled maize tassels, was a round white badge.

'You're welcome, Mama Mr. Bean,' said the Nurse with a beaming face.

It's my pleasure, Nurse.' said Kigatire, jovially. They put down what they had brought in their handbags and shopping baskets that held Old Man's food and drinks.

'How is the patient?' inquired Yozofinah with too much confidence.

'Mzee has improved tremendously,' answered the Cuban nurse.

The two nurses directed them to the two seats at the side of Old Man's sickbed. They had hardly settled on their seats when Old Man cleared his throat. He raised his head, opened his eyes to gaze at the people he had heard speak in low voices. He recognized the two voices!

'Mzee,' called Kigatire, politely.

'Mama wee.'

‘Oh dear, God is good! You’re still alive!’

‘I’m alive and kicking- still breathing.’ ‘Thanks for your prayers and support,’ Mzee added reflectively. ‘How’s home? How’s your best half and children?’

‘They’re all fine. They wish you a quick recovery.’ answered Yozofinah, with a frozen voice.

The nurse lifted the bed clothes for the two women to see Old Man’s bad leg. They scrutinized it from a distance horrifically before the nurse covered him again. He would soon get out of the plaster.

The two nurses left the room, promising to be back soon. Kigatire served food as Yozifinah opened the drink. They helped the old man sit. He touched food with relish. The coming of the two women had added boost to the drugs he was swallowing. The old man told them that he was going to ask for discharge and go home with the women. The women were seized by laughter because of the passion with which *Mzee* spoke. The longing and desire to go home was too much. He was suffering from homesickness in addition to the broken leg, and now a broken heart! The two mothers assured Old Man that he would be discharged soon. He was a convalescent. The nurses and the old man’s grandchildren were doing a good job.

‘I wonder why, with all this dedication and good work, the nurses and doctors are under paid!’ said Kigatire, holding his chin between the thumb and the forefinger.

‘Did you see how they were working around the clock to save a life when we entered?’ asked Yozofinah, with a tone of disappointment.

‘Yes, I did.’ ‘It all depends on how the head of the family decides to run his home. If the head of the family is greedy, an ogre, he will starve the wife and the children.’

‘The leaders of today no longer care about the country and the people they lead. They plunder all the resources to care for their families and horde the rest in Banks here and abroad,’ said Kigatire.

‘Did you listen to what the man and girl standing at the entrance were saying? That there’s no water in the hospital, drugs and enough personnel.’

‘Yes, I heard. But many doctors and nurses are wandering in the streets looking for jobs. Most of them have left the country to work in USA, South Africa, Kenya, Sweden and other countries. And I hear they’re doing well there and healing people. See how we are dying like flies because of bad roads. Road carnage is too high. Masaka road has become massacre, indeed, and the rest of the parts of the country due to poor infrastructure,’ said Kigatire, in frustration.

‘Where do the taxes we pay go?’ asked Yozofinah.

‘They end up in the politicians’ bellies. Don’t you see how their bellies are D-shaped-protruded like they’re pregnant women?’ the two women and the children laughed.

‘It’s painful to be jealous of yourself- to hate your children and neighbours. Have you seen and heard how the bad road has swallowed up our MP and his wife? It’s so sad an affair!’ said Yozofinah. ‘Politicians are diapers; they have to be changed now and then.’ She added. They organized their belongings, packed them in shopping baskets in a bid to go back home to welcome their children who had just arrived from school, and having survived the accident on bad roads. They cited a short prayer led by the Reverend’s wife who had just joined them to check on the old man.

Father in Heaven, Lord of Lords,

We thank you without end for journey mercies,

And for this day and the rest of the days of our lives.

Heal the sick, console the poor and clean the roads.

We are drained and exhausted like birds flying over vast seas.

We shall reach you when we are empty shells.

With your syringe, inject in us care, love and good deeds.

We trust you with our security and families.

In God's name, we pray as always.

AMEN

They said goodbye to the patient and left. The motorcyclists were waiting for them at the hospital gate. The charges on the services were exorbitant, for now everyone had learnt how to squeeze a penny out of the client whenever chance knocked. This was what they had termed it 'GET RICH QUICK THROUGH OVER-TAXATION'. These were the hard times where everyone fought to survive and eked for a living amidst the plenty! As they rode down River Kiruruma, they saw a young man and a woman in the trench, bleeding profusely. The motorcycle was leaning against the road pavement, its engine roaring. One of the riders called the nearby inhabitants to help them to the hospital. As the politicians were busy enjoying themselves in the city and outside the country, the roads were busy claiming lives.

The dead bodies of the fallen MP and wife and the two innocent children were ferried from hospital to their ancestral homes for burial. Yes, they needed to rest in peace in their everlasting abode. The bitter memories would never fade or wane from the natives' mind. The rustic folk had tolerated the prevailing condition like a sheep shivering under the power of the dagger as the butcher led it to the slaughter house. It would follow lowly and humbly, for the ultimate dwelling was heaven. 'To tolerate whatever comes, the mortar tolerated the pestle' said Old Man when the bus got stuck in the mud.

The sin-stained demons and the Almighty's enemies were in the city enjoying life to the bliss, scheming- not planning- how they would expand their kingdom of affluence and everlasting rule. For how long would the voters pray to God, wait for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ to show up and die for them for the second time? Why didn't they try to die in order to bring liberation and freedom? 'God helps those who help themselves. A man who can't stand the sight of a dictator is a butcher who can't stand the sight of meat. The present is not a reflection of the future; the past was wasted for nothing!' narrated Old man once. The words of the old man kept echoing even in silence. He was the Solomon of the village. Panic had gripped the whole District like a crocodile to a victim after they received the news of the old man's accident. He was dearly missed in the village socially, but they still had hope of his survival.

The Black kings of Africa were the kings of the jungle in the eyes of the world. The Races that lived beyond the seas to the look of things feared the roar of the lions from Egypt to South Africa and from the Horn of Africa to the West Coast of Africa. Walking on the dusty roads, one would meet tourists on heavy green vehicles going to Bwindi impenetrable forest to look at mountain Gorillas- to look at their silver fur, the Virungas of South West Uganda, the lava-dammed lakes, and the tall, tropical trees of different species that towered the sky like the tall buildings of New York. The buttress roots were shaped as the arches of the Roman houses that showed the architectural skills of the Romans. It was in these well-modelled roots that housed and sheltered all the clans and tribes of animals. Whenever travellers were caught up by the falling sperms of God in the center of this forest, they would shelter themselves under the buttress roots. Husband and wife or girlfriend and boyfriend would have a look at the Garden of Eden if they willed.

Tourists would be seen carrying notebooks and pens, jotting one word or two. They carried super cameras to take pictures of the scenery. During their rest in some of their hotel rooms, they would watch and listen to the news- local, national and international broadcasts. They had good time and bad time; they experienced smooth rough time as well as roads. However, when it came to praising Africa and the kings of the jungle, they would not point a finger or raise the eyebrow to expose the work of the demons. Were they using road transport or air transport? Did they see the bad roads? Did they hear about free and fair elections? What about the kidnappings? Why did they keep on coming? Were they collaborating with the ogres and vampires? Such actions and deeds banked many questions in the minds of the people. Some of the tourists met their fate here. Journalist were battered, cameras shattered but they were always approached and convinced to portray a good picture of the Pearl of Africa. It seemed the minds of all the people had been opiumized and marijuanized by the tricky politicians. This was what people termed as politicization and indoctrination of the highest order. Old Man told of the story of the politicians, where they did go to a certain far island where they dug roots of a certain tree called the **'Devil's Porridge'** which were dried under the sun, ground to make a fine, soft flour, which they mixed with bottled water to give to the voters on rallies and some other gatherings to change their mind! It was said the journey on water took a month. On air, it took seventeen hours. The story was very gripping and yet frightening. The world housed so many

shocking things which were beyond man's ken. It was said many executives no longer took drinks from gatherings and meetings for fear of their lives. They moved along with their packed food and drinks. This was mistrust at its pinnacle!

* * * * *

CHAPTER ELEVEN

The morning sun, with her artistic yellowish pens, wrote on the paper earth. The intense, green grass was pregnant with crystal clear droplets of tears of water. The glistening and sparkling reflection that emanated from the dew was a siren and beckoned the passersby to stop, stoop, and like a chameleon doing his technical lashing at a fly, pulled their tongues out to suckle the droplets of dew to cleanse and wash the interior of their bodies as white as snow.

However, the hurrying of the people who stomped in different directions which was a struggle against time could not let them do it. No one, no one knew where each person was heading to, to do what, or what was going on in each other's mind and body. This was the secret of life; not until one shared with the other, or saw each other in the act; it was always hard to tell which was which.

The month of May melted and waned into June. This was the change of time. There was change of seasons too. Men and women talked about change of these, change of hearts, change of fashions. There was one thing that never or did not want to change- change of leadership- the list was endless. The art of politics had also metamorphosed into the dirtiest game of the time. Politics meant nothing but propagating divisionism, materialism and individualism. The -isms had taken the upper hand. Politics had developed colours. It was only those who had vision and were actually smartest that would survive the catastrophic heat and destructive waves of the era.

The deceased- a woman and children- had to be laid to rest. They were still young; they had a longing to live more years to see light and listen to music and rule for six or seven terms, or rule for life. Nevertheless, no one alive would think and say that they were somewhere regretting having left the earth early. The trios in demise lived in the same vicinity. It was a black

gloomy day. The natives were wrapped in dirty linen of sombre thoughts and looks. They had no one to console them. They were beyond consolation and repair. Women blubbered, whimpered, wailed and, others wept and cried. To one's chagrin, the men who had never shed tears on such occasions laboured and struggled to withhold tears in vain. The cow and the seven dogs and two cats that were there shed tears too. The birds perched on a branch in the nearby tree and twittered the dirge song. Nature was too much with the mourners. Nature in unison with the sympathizers formed a symphony. Generasi, the religious woman was resourceful to the village and yonder. She was treasured by many, with the exception of the few who were jealous like politicians and did not love religion or God.

She had a sweet, melodious voice. Too many a people had nick-named her the brown robin chart. She loved God and neighbours. She would wake up early at five, light her kerosene lamp to brave the coldness to go to the church to pray. There were many bad people ranging from those who strangled travellers to hijackers, but she never feared this. The God of Abraham, Jacob, Isaac, Elijah was her shield of protection. The church was as big as politicians' houses. No wonder Generasi would sweep it, dig around it and cut the bushes alone. She was not a world material but heaven. By the virtue of her talents, she was the one leading the Church Choir, church weddings and other occasions connected to the church. She never asked a penny like the voters who demanded a packet of salt, a piece of soap, a panga and a hoe, and a glass of white Kasese gin or Tyson gin or Boxer gin which it was said gave men the power to box the opponent at night. The politicians would offer these in addition to promises of sponsoring the poor men's children to get an education in good schools. They also promised those who really had the burning desire to go abroad the processing of visas and getting them highly paying jobs in Far East countries, United States of America, and in the Arctic regions.

'There aren't many people here,' commented Abdullah.

'Famine and unemployment have hit us like hailstones. Families wake up early to go faraway places to look for what to eat. School fees are now cancer. It increases now and then; there's no single source of income. The little we labour for is spent on illness and exorbitant taxes. Clinics have become too expensive. There's no single seed of medicine in hospitals,' said Shaggy with a tone of hopelessness.

‘It’s now technical- know- who. Who knows you? Where do you come from? Whose son or daughter are you? How heavy is your pocket?’ said Mr. Tigaryoma, holding his packet of gin to the mouth.

‘These are stories you must not tell here. Don’t remind me of the last visit to the hospital to deliver Boonabaana. I brought her to this world on floor. By God’s Grace, she is now an old girl; she can cook for visitors now. She washes for me and she does some other domestic work for us,’ narrated Mrs. Kamahanga, with an air of contentment.

The prevailing conditions drifted them from the realm of sorrow and loss to the itching hard times; life was dingier than one could imagine- more dismal than in the 60s or 70s.

Generasi led the Church Choir. She brought the song and then joined by a group of other singers and the rest of the mourners thus:

You human being who is still breathing

Abandon the things of the world

Because they are all useless and dust.

The body you feed well

And dress well and do your hair well

When time comes, it will perish

Without taking anything from this world...

The people that came to pay the last respects to the deceased were just a handful; however, they were dedicated people, so loving and caring. The blind and the deaf could see and hear this. The way they cooperated to work together to give a respectable sendoff was really touching and yet impressing. Their sorrowful singing drifted in air to reach at those who were across the valley and then like the morning mist, rose up towards God’s realm. This was the day that explained the meaning of life, the meaning of love and friends. The reasons for attending the burial were displayed on the slate of man’s heart. Everything that happened did so for a reason.

During the time of existence, people worked as hard as a bee. Whether the rationale was known or not, people had to work hard.

It was always hard to measure how important Old Man was. He was a sage, a guru and a don. He did not receive modern learning but he had a blend of intelligence, wisdom and common sense- sense and sensibility that surpassed human understanding. Those who had ever or had rubbed shoulders with him knew how his head was a fountain of knowledge, peace, love and care.

The old man shared a lot with the folk. ‘Man and woman must labour when they’re still on earth. This’s paving the way for heaven,’ Old Man said once upon time. ‘Those who’ll come to bury you must eat and drink. They must sit and sleep. Loving your mother so much doesn’t mean that after throwing crumbs of soil on her, you’ll sleep on the grave no matter how brave, loving and caring you might be. At least one has to grow flowers in the compound so that they can please the eyes of the mourners and console them. Next, the flowers can act as a wreath. Whereas the rich import expensive flowers from China, the poor can pull the beautiful, fresh growing flowers from the compound and send off the deceased,’ concluded Old Man. The old man was an entertainer- a source of pleasure to sooth the hearts of men. He narrated, ‘There must be four walls where your relatives and friends can shelter from wind and cold. A goat or two, one hen, a small garden of cassava and sweet potatoes and boiled water to drink can do a fair job to the standards of the lower levels of living.’

Some villagers took Old Man’s narratives for granted but, on certain occasions they made people emerge from the state of oblivion to see the sublime and truism that dwelt in Old Man’s granary of knowledge.

The woman, two babies and the MP who passed away on the same day, were not buried on the same day. Between the rich man and the poor man, there was a gulf. Only a lunatic would equate a rat to a cat! ‘He who doesn’t have wisdom praises his,’ said Old Man at the poor man’s wedding some time back. And ‘A widow never despises the small size of a man. The trios have had a chance to reach their real home. This world you see isn’t our home. They’re now at rest.’

The MP and his wife's bodies were embalmed. This was the science provision that gave license to the corpses to last for long. The baby was fine save for the natural pain of losing a parent which it could not feel now. At a later stage he would feel and taste what it meant to be an orphan- a double orphan! The MP's sister-in-law would take care of the baby; they had milk and food to feed the child.

The day important people were transported to their ancestral land was the day Old Man was discharged from the hospital. He was on clutches. The old man's words always held water. 'A cripple is better than a tomb.' The burial delayed because most of the MPs were in their city constituencies and abroad constituencies. The stakeholders had to take time to wait for important people to come so as to give the burial meaning and substantial contribution. Most of the government officials had gone on holiday in Hawaii, Havana, Miami, Ibiza... In a month's time, very important people- VIP- , relatives and friends would be ready to give a sendoff to their brother and sister.

'Today I have realized that the poor man's address is a rich man,' said Mr. Tigaryoma, sipping on a packet of white gin popularly known by the locals as *Karanga*, which means roasting with the intention of making something dry. The bodies of men and women were as dry as a bone because of taking *Karanga*; they were emaciated and slim. They were bony like cattle in a long dry spell. Some had become yellowish in complexion like bean plants that lacked nitrogen. The cheek bones protruded and elongated as an old warthog's teeth, or coastal tombolos of Mafia islands.

'I knew this long time ago as far as in 1939, during the Second World War. A rich man is a god on earth. He can buy you with his money; he can grab your land as well as your family to become his slaves. A rich man doesn't lose a case in Courts of Law,' Old Man said, bathing his eyes at how the MP and his wife's sendoff had been prepared and arranged.

'Why is it that there were few people at the kids' and woman's burial,' inquired Mr. Tigaryoma, sipping at his manly drink.

Old Man pulled his clutches, rested one on the chair and requested the child next to him to lift his leg to rest it on one of the clutches. 'What do poor people have and why do you expect

them to receive and have when they have nothing? Instead the small things they have, is taken away from them.’ Old Man was now surrounded by a crowd of mourners who wanted to hear the sweet sorrow stories that radiated from the old horse’s mouth.

‘You can see there’s a fleet of cars- of different make and brand- expensive cars that make every woman long to have a man that drives one. Look at the tents and decorations, chairs, music system and how the people are dressed. They’re dressed to kill and they look spick and span.’ said Shaggy, the well-endowed bearded man.

‘Listen! How many cows, goats, and hens have they slaughtered? A hundred cows, two hundred goats, seven thousand hens,’ said Abdullah. ‘And seven cows have been donated by Big Papa and Big Mama from their farm.’

‘Whenever you see people at the burial, know that they’ve reasons for coming. Do you still remember the other beautiful, brown woman who stole the casket’s cover cloth at the soldier’s burial, who had died in Somalia?’ asked Old Man. Talk about witch craft, stealing utensils and food, love making, eating and drinking and dancing. Some come to learn. Others come to tour and see the place- look at the house, gardens and if possible destroy the gardens like baboons. There’s also rumour-mongering. Those who’re haters of the deceased want to confirm whether the person has really died. When the person is still ill, they can’t give out a penny to take the victim to Murago Hospital, or buy a hen so that the sickly can sip at hot soup to clear his throat and chest; but they’ll squeeze and pull out every penny they have next to their skin to buy a gold coffin, or flowers imported from Holland or China, on top of shedding crocodile tears. Didn’t Dolly Parton sing: “If Tear Drops Were Pennies and heartaches were gold...” Do you see those clothes on the couple’s coffins? They were imported from Italy, one of the leading countries in the world in the production of nice and fashionable clothes and cloth,’ concluded the old man.

‘When we compare the feelings and emotions portrayed at the trios’ burial and this one, the former mourners had intense, deeper and touched feelings. Here you can see that few are concerned; the rest are happy sipping at their coca cola, or mineral water or a beer or nibbling at a piece of cow pie. Moreover, you can see that those gorgeous, glittering ladies have brought

with them their Yoghurt, Mango and Orange juices, Strawberry juice and Ribena drink. They're just praising the Lord for the gift of life. The aura portrayed is, "enjoy life here while it still lasts" and in Heaven we'll praise the Great One.' said Nyefuza.

The dirge songs drifted in the air leading to the mourners' ears. The reminder of it was for birds that perched on trees standing in compound, and the flowers that festooned the compound. If death were fair, he would have considered the thought of not snatching these people at this particular moment- it was too early for them to go. Just a moment God!

There were four renowned preachers: two from Kenya and the other two from Nigeria. The home preachers gave an opportunity to international men of God to lead the occasion. The sendoff was colourful. The people swayed their bodies along with the soft, soul touching music. Songs from the powerful, talented artistic Jim Reeves played:

This world is not my home

Am just passing through

My treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue

The saviour beckons me from heaven's open the door

And I can't feel at home in this world anymore...

The VIPs, including Papa and Mama, arrived in seven Helicopters. This was unheard of. Most of the villagers had never seen these exceptionally crafted machines of the white man. This was a blessing to the villagers and most of them swore that they would keep on voting for the father of the kingdom *paka last* because of this. They raised their heads and looked at the helicopters as they flew and hovered around in the air before perching on the ground. The picture of the living birds came into their minds, giving birth to the vivid and sweetest comparison between the birds in the bush and airplanes.

'The White man must have borrowed the knowledge of making an aero plane from these birds you see in the forest,' said Shaggy, holding his chin in the cup of his hand, his elbow planted on his thigh.

‘Yes, Mr. Tigaryoma.’ retorted. ‘Don’t you see that the dynamics and mechanisms used by airplanes are the same as those of birds- wings, shape,’ he added.

‘The White man is clever. We’ve failed to learn from him. We want him to do everything for us like we’re children. We’ve too much loved free things and as a result we’ve become slaves and we’ll be slaves until mountains Rwenzururu and Mgahinga meet,’ said Old Man. ‘And on top of that we’re jealous, selfish, greedy and myopic. Are you seeing how we’re butchering and killing our brothers during elections, and what happened at *Omusinga’s* palace, Kasese? We’re murderous and this is imbedded in our colour and blood,’ adding, one can’t argue that even whites are killing each other. Yes, they do because they have reached that stage. An African forgets easily,’ concluded the old man, with a sense of hopelessness.

‘What amuses me more than annoying is, at the end of the day the Black man heaps blames on the White man, saying that all Africa’s problems emanate from the White man’s actions and deeds back in the colonial period. We got our independence. We’re now in control of our resources. Do you know that at least we should all be equal at the time of death? Look! How many people came to bury the woman and two kids?’ asked Mr. Tigaryoma, beating on his forehead as he swallowed his spirit with rage. He looked more disturbed than before. He gnashed his teeth and cried one tear like a wounded buffalo. Mr. Tigaryoma was a teacher but because of the circumstances that were prevailing at the time and surrounding the profession, the profession had become nothing to him. He was now absorbed in the bottle. However, whoever listened to him realized that he still had good ideas; the white stuff had not yet eroded his brain to the lower valleys of thinking together with his glass mates.

‘True. There’s a big difference between the Black rulers and the ruled Blacks. There is sizzling and boiling nepotism, tribalism, divisionism, religious differences, class stratification, divide and rule, exploitation, individualism and many other evils that have marred our society,’ said Rwamubende.

‘How do you compare the number of people that buried the trios, contributions, preachers, speeches, food and drinks, seats, and the coffin? Can you see that that coffin is made of a blend of precious minerals that give it its luster and glitter? Don’t you know that that’s how

the MP and his wife will be glittering in the eyes of God?’ suggested Mr., Tigaryomama, looking at the ground wrapped in thought.

They all laughed, forgetting the loss.

‘God doesn’t segregate like we do here. Whether you’re black or white, rich or poor, or buried in a mat and rugs, or a coffin made of gold, death levels us all; and by the time we reach God, we’re like indeed gold that has been passed through the blast furnace,’ said Rwamubende. It had now become a soft-heated conversation amidst the mourners.

‘These politicians you see are diapers. They are ogres, betrayers and never trust them. Meet them at the church one day. The way they dress, talk, walk and donate looks and sounds Godly. Do you know that what they donate is what they steal from the masses? And the so called Christian supporters clap their hands to develop blisters. Politicians are a small stone in a walker’s shoe and a bunch of idiotic and rotten thieves. Who bewitched us didn’t bathe!’ said Old Man, spitting on the ground in disgust.

Most of the mourners’ mouths were half open because of what they were seeing, ranging from dressing, and all the modernized things they were seeing to grace the occasion. A handful of VIPs who travelled by road were the ones who did not arrive on time. They got stuck in the way because of bad roads. One of the cars in the fleet had danced in the mire and rolled seven times before it was stopped by the banana suckers a certain farmer had heaped in the field below the murderous road for planting. They came late. ‘Oh, better late than never,’ the old man had once said. When they started Mass, the news dropped in that a terrible and fatal accident had happened seven miles after Karuma, leaving no passenger alive. It was a dark period of mourning. What was left for mothers was to suckle the bras instead of children. All the folks wondered when the dark era would end as they waited for the Second Coming of the King of Kings to liberate the suffering servants of God from the wilderness and the wild beasts dressed in the sheep’s clothing, calling themselves, shepherds, liberators, bringers of peace and freedom fighters. Many observers were wondering how, when and why the Pearl of Africa had changed into the formless, wilderness den of evils! The double edged devils were a curse and tormentors of body and soul. Old Man had some few days back dreamt that the Holy Spirit was soon

descending into the souls of the oppressed. Like the dry bones in the valley, they would stand up to shake and crash the devils to pulp.

* * * * *

CHAPTER TWELVE

Nature was too close to the people- nature that embodied everything in an intertwined manner, a bond that surprised or shocked many who cared about sense and sensibility, observation and interviewing. As the burial commenced, for there were many important people to give flowery eulogies. The common man and chiefs of lower rank had minimal chances to come up to air their pain, sorrow and loss.

Change was a fact of life. And those who waged war on change were either prepared to fight and secure Pyrrhic victory, or they were bound to lose absolutely. The speeches that were delivered by politicians threw and left many mourners in burial doldrums. The occasion experienced a tremendous metamorphosis from eulogia speeches to political blatant irrelevancies that shattered the medulla oblongata of every being present, whether he or she was dichotomized under Mujaajinthropus or Neanderthal man. They seemed to inhabit the catastrophic valleys that through scientific microscopic examination of the carbon fossils of the ancient man, the archeologists would possibly give the exactness of thinking of the present man. The occasion had elapsed into politics where everything sounded like Napoleonic campaign of conquering the whole world, or Hitler's campaign to terminate the Jews. They were canvassing for votes which would help them scoop another term of office.

The yellow bird which the inhabitants called Tobacco bird- a small bird with a long beak she inserted into flowers to suck nectar juice- dived in the air and perched on the yellow bus that was parked in the compound. Had it come to mourn for the deceased? Yes, because nature was too close to the people. The children who were playing in the compound tried to thwart the little bird but it could not fly away. It chirruped and chirruped its sweet sorrow melody. It was announcing and saying: adieu, fare thee well, or goodbye to the deceased, interceding for them, and paving the way for them to the creator.

The representative of all the nation leaders stood up from his embroidered, kingly chair to give a speech.

Government officials, who are here, staunch cadres, security organisms-ROAR from the audience- Dignified Ladies and Gentlemen and the village voters of our Party.

I warn you to always vote for our party because it pulled you from the pit. You were not eating salt, your children had never tasted Universal Primary Education (UPE) but because they have had basic education they can now read sign posts as they wander around look for work, say to graze animals, or hawking in big towns. You can now sleep, snow unlike in the past years when you were ruled by the gun.

We now have cemented roads but most of you don't have shoes. It will burn your feet so don't cry for many such roads.

We have taught you how to eat a balanced diet. This is the reason why you no longer die like house flies. Each house hold has been given a pig to improve your GDP. Many women died in labour because in the past they had nothing in their compound- not even a cat or dog or an avocado tree. They also delay to go to the hospital. How can you fail to pay one hundred fifty dollars you men when you have arms and legs? You spend all the time drinking, gambling and betting.. This is why we passed the Bill on idle and disorderly. This is the reason why we tax you. You will work hard. No one is your servant. You have to work for yourself to improve yourself and your family. Fight for your ideas and beliefs. Do you believe in conquering the world, becoming a tycoon or billionaire? Yes, you must work hard like Bushmen and kill the game to feed your family. Fight for your aspirations and beliefs.

In the next Budget, we shall put aside money to work on your feeder roads. Work hard and buy cars. Make sure that you always vote for your Party. Don't change. To change is to commit suicide. An old child is smeared with Vasaline, adding on to what he has done for himself, isn't it?

Security is tight. You look at those Mambas. Those are war vehicles to protect you. Are you not sleeping comfortably? We even sent for others from the Far East countries.

We have supplied you mosquito nets. Malaria is now history. However, I hear that you use the nets for trapping mudfish, to scare birds from your gardens and as window and door curtains. Are you mad? Do you know how much the authority bought them? We shall be taxing you for that in future. Check up!

The mourners started humming, yawning, clapping, whistling and stamping their feet. ‘Keep quiet!’ ‘This’s the reason why we closed Social Media. Keep silent please. Don’t you see the security we have? Work hard and export to improve your lives,’ he said rudely and mechanically.

The DJ played just bits of two numbers as an interlude to restore the gathering’s calmness and coolness:

One was ‘**Kyarenga Maama**’ by Bobi Wine and ‘**Take My Hand, Precious Lord**’ by Jim Reeves.

Take My Hand

Precious Lord

Lead me home ...

Silence reigned again.

We have lost a brave man, a combatant and a belligerent. We shall never get a replacement in our Party. He has been a good mobilizer but God has taken him to serve him in heaven because he was too hard working to be on earth.

The gathering pursed their lips.

Lastly, we have given the family five million shillings. It is in this yellow envelope. His children are going to school for nothing- nothing without paying a single coin. I think you can see the advantage of loving the party more than yourself or your parent.

Thank you for coming and listening to me. The programme for replacement will be worked on soon.

For God and My Country.

The politicians talked about progress, development, education, health and wealth creation, and on top of everything security which was the back bone of every good standards of living that have ever existed. They further elaborated on the sharp and strong vision that would see all the tragic road drama, terrorism, poverty and famine that had developed jaws and wings crashed and pounded to pulp. In few years every house hold would be having a factory producing one thing or two, like drinks, packed food and meat, jewelry and many others to export to European countries, and these would not be taxed in order to increase export revenue and, generally Growth Domestic product which would create Africa a first world continent. In fifty years' time Africa would be having uncountable nuclear plants and many industries manufacturing lethal weapons, tear gas, locomotives and other lucrative machines that would fetch much money for the continent.

The preachers did not try to elucidate the point of living now and the hereafter. They read few verses from the Holy Book, sang Tedium and categorically told the mourners that the MP and his wife had already manufactured and worked for their place in heaven, looking at how they were donating to God in the church, public places especially during the time nearing the election and big days like Christmas and Easter. They also talked about the good views they were giving to build the nation.

Job 14:1-5

We are all born weak and helpless.

All lead the same short, troubled life.

We grow and wither as quickly as flowers;

We disappear like shadows.

Will you even look at me, God, or put me on trial and judge me?

Nothing clean can ever come from anything as unclean as human beings.

The length of their lives is decided before hand- the number of months they will live.

It was time for VIPs to leave. The Police Band Played. Papa and Mama and the retinue left first. The way for them was cleared. They entered into their Helicopter. The pilot tried to fly it in vain. It tried to take off from the ground but things did not work. The engineer worked on it but its naughtiness did not clear. Without wasting time, they abandoned it perched in the MPs compound. They boarded another one for they were seven in number and left. It was rumoured that Papa was going to send for expatriates from China or North Korea to work on the white man's machine.

‘As human beings, we lapse into a state of oblivion, where we plunge into deep fantasy and imagination like one in sleep, dreaming of the world of honey and milk- a world without pain and suffering,’ exclaimed Mihigo, with his elbow planted on his knee and his chin resting in the cup of his palm. Looking around everyone, especially the old, they were seated in the same posture engrossed in sorrow and misery.

‘Yes, when we eat, drink and pick on the fruits of the Garden of Eden, we forget everything. We forget the poor, the hungry, and the sick. We forget those who need help and who helped us at one point on the journey of our lives.’ Rwamubende stepped in with a tone of sadness and pity. ‘Wasn’t this a blunder? What a communication!’ added Rwamubende in utter helplessness, disappointment and shock.

‘Didn’t you hear the reading? That we’re born of woman! Yes, our life is short. We bloom and then we wither and die like flowers,’ said Rwakuburya.

‘Then, why do we waste our time fighting endless wars, kidnapping, grabbing land from the poor and committing sins and crimes against humanity?’ asked Old Man.

‘Do you know that Papa has land as big as seven districts put together? Do you know that he has herds of cattle, and when put on arm’s distance take, you can fill the fuel tank to the brim of a Pajero vehicle, and ride and ride until the full tank runs empty under terrible thirst before reaching the end of the line of cows? Hmmm!’ hummed Rwankosa in disappointment.

‘You’re behind like a coat! Did you know that he has many businesses in, and outside the country? He’s a serious investor.’ Ntare reminded them.

‘But why should one accumulate all that? As long as I’ve a small piece where I can be buried, that’s enough...’ said Mbogo.

‘Don’t be idiotic, Mbogo! When the poor and the rich go to church, who’s given a seat, introduced and sit at the high table? It’ll be done on earth as it’s in heaven. Even the poor will be rejected in the kingdom of God!’ said Ntare. ‘Listen! See where the VIPs have been and are seated, why didn’t you seat there? Don’t you have blood like them? Simple: they’re filthy rich and they’re rich because you’re a cow and they milk you. You’re over taxed; you vote them into power! This’s the absurdity of life.’ concluded Ntare.

‘Look at the MP’s house. Who, in the whole constituency, has such a bungalow? Does Rwamukwega have even a small hut- *Mama ingia pole*, where he can lay his ribs? He has no wife. Do you think the sheep stepped on him? No, his ‘self’ sparks like that of a new imported Toyota V8 car from Japan. Poverty can step on manhood and grind it to pulp or dust to be blown by wind.’ said Rwamubende. They all laughed; possibly they had forgotten their problems as well as the loss.

‘Today is no past. Tell me or show me a woman who yearns to fall in, and be in love with a poor man and I will milk my dog! A woman loves four things on a man: the stick of manhood that drives the coldness away, a car, money and outings. Can you buy chicken and chips, pizza, ice cream and buy a drink like King Fisher or Red Wine or Bull to push down roasted meat? A woman wants a romantic guy, a guy to *jam jam* and *bum bum* her, period. No money no love. *Pesa ni sabuni ya roho*. If you do this as a man, leave the rest to a woman; she can pull down all the stars on to your bed; pull all the flowers from the gardens of the world and use them to decorate your bed. If you’re not a sharp and wise man to go to the market to buy a sharpening pill or stone to sharpen the magic stick or sword that murders softly, chances to mess around with your relationship are high.’ said Old Man, throwing the big crowd that had gathered around them into fits of laughter.

‘The MP’s land stretches miles and miles, hills and valleys. Look at his plantations and farms. How many cars are parked in his compound; and where do his children go for school? Grade one school! Can you imagine a pupil pays school fees equivalent to tuition paid by a University student? After their children get an education, they’re assured of good jobs- highly paying jobs. He who has, will be added more and those who have little, even the little they have will be snatched away from them,’ said Rwamubende, with a tinge of sadness in his heart and soul.

In the time of re-election, whether God’s creation did get time to ponder about life or not, one could not stop wondering how the village of Katabago was blessed. Some discerned blessings in prosperity whereby they looked at the wealth they had amassed- the cattle, wives and children. The acres of land and cars owned could not be left out. The number of degrees in the house mattered a lot. They gave parents and guardians what to talk about in company. It did not matter how material things were got; this did not matter a tinge.

Everyone at the sendoff of the MP and his dear wife had many questions running in their minds. This was reflected in the sombre mood portrayed and reflected on their facial expressions, gestures as they conversed in low tones. The squinting of eyes, the nodding of their heads and sitting postures told it all.

The whole compound was lit. The small, grey, round calabashes hung everywhere inside and outside the house. The rope-like materials supported by small poles and trees ran as far as to the river and in the farm that surrounded the home to the nearby bushes where firewood was collected. It was hard to tell the difference between the night and day. Many villagers were admiring and gazing at how the family had been blessed but Satan, the enemy of man had snatched them without a warning. Lucifer had done her tolling of the bell, and it was now a menace in the ears and minds of the poor villagers. However, looking at how the MP was blessed, the poor villagers were blessed too. To have ten or more old men was a rare thing. The presence of the octogenarians was indeed a blessing- a gift rare to come by in life, considering the short span that had become the order of the day. They had lived to see kings come, kings go. They had seen wars, treachery and betrayal. They had paid taxes- Poll Tax, Native Administrative Tax, African Local Government Tax, Graduated Tax... They had tasted ‘the

goodness of earth', 'Make Uganda Clean' monitored by chiefs...they had seen prisons and imprisonment; however, word from the old passed around that the White man was bad but, for a good reason on his side. The Black man was worst for a worst reason- an ogre that could swallow you alive. This was far back in forty's, fifty's and sixty's. The Black man did this for his orgy and wanton reasons- to mock in the propagation of absurdity and self-indulgence. A Black man was a sadist.

'I wonder why the people of today have been derailed and brain washed. What has gone wrong with this generation?' wondered Rwamubende, pulling out a black and white photograph which the White man had taken in 1950's when he was tussling it out with the Head men and three White men who wanted to correct him by serving twelve strokes of a cane on his buttocks for having slapped in the face and kicked the White man in the stomach when they were at Buhweiju, working in the gold mine. The White man who was the boss had terrorized them with long hours of work, slaps, flogging and little pay. Rwamubende was a short, stout man. In his youthful days, he was tough, sharp and did not entertain nonsense. He had watched how Smith, the White man, was a thorn in the flesh to his fellow workers. The energetic, young mine boy had registered him in his mind. When the fateful day came, for they wondered who had opened for the white dog. He taught the boss a lesson. The attempt to administer the canes culminated to a strike that saw the ushering in of relief, peace and increase of wages.

'The young generation is not assertive; they don't know what they want- what's good and what's bad!' said Rwamubende, pushing his treasured photograph into the long coat.

'Did you hear how they clapped their hands, jeered, and thumped their feet when the ill-gotten politician was addressing the oblivious rally about how the authority was going to increase tax?' asked Ntare. 'And what's more absurd than painful is that those who clap and nod are Ph.D. holders, and other classes of degrees. People, especially the learned, have lost senses and their masculinity and femininity. They have become bootlickers and, therefore, perpetrators of servitude.'

Old Man laughed and rolled on the grass. Everybody turned and looked at him. They thought him a lunatic possibly due to the recent bus accident, which might have caused damage to his head.

‘Those are the learned but not educated. The long stay and sleep in books has stolen their common sense, castrated their brainhood, leaving them empty shells that are beaten by politicians, as if they are drums to call wealth, opulence and prosperity. What does Ph.D. stand for? **‘Permanent Head Damage’** -those are learned people whose taboo is to eat what they have toiled for. They want free things extorted from the poor citizenry. Do you know the reason why every learned person and even those who are half-learned aspire for becoming politicians? They want to receive, touch and feel the sweetness of the yellow envelope. Don’t think that they clap for nothing; they’re not idiots and they know what they’re doing,’ said Old Man, with a cackling laugh.

‘Look at the deceased MP! How was he, and how did he look like before joining politics? Did he have all the properties you see? Farms, rentals in the city, good residential houses and his children go to good schools. Politics can make you shine like gold, like sun flower. He was just a poor Veterinary Doctor, but after climbing ladders, which ladders are made from poor voters, they come back to boast how God urinated in their palms by giving them strength to work hard without pampering hands, legs and the head. Politicians play and work smart,’ said Rwamubende, closing his fists like he was going to punch someone. Finally, he started boxing in the air in a furious mood.

‘Politicians have seriously staged a conspiracy against us; they’ve eaten and licked the bone marrow of the voters but time is coming when the young, the middle aged, the old and those who are already in the grave will unite to consume the devils like fire. It’s such purification that will usher in equity, checks and balances. Freedom will ring and reign from corners of the earth. Everything we need is here. Is there need to traverse seas and oceans looking for jobs, work, women, food, clean air, and God? What is it that is not here? Wake up you wretched of the earth! SAY no to vampires, to ogres and suckers; pull them, uproot them, chop them and castrate them, tie their arms and legs and throw them into Lake Bunyonyi to harvest peace, freedom, abundance and luxuriance,’ said Mbogo, throwing his arms in the air and jumping up in imitation

of the Helicopter that had earlier tried to fly in vain. The helicopter! What did its failure to fly portend? Possibly it was a presage of the end of the politicians' power and their demise. It stood for the end of their reign.

The youth had all gathered around the group of seated old men as if it were the table of the Lord. They had listened to the dirge speeches that lapsed into political, blatant irrelevancies uttered on a political campaigning podium. The funeral rites were now strategic platforms for the politicians where they lured enchanted and swayed the hearts and souls of the poor voters like an enchantress beckoning and enticing sailors to their doom. The old men's conversation appealed to the young, aroused an incredible and unimaginable spirit that showed some propulsion of the young to disappear into the bush with just seven sticks to wage war on the exploiters and haters of humanity- those politicians that hated the visitors and the good things that were coming in one's motherland or home.

As time went by, evils of all kinds were trickling in like it was no man's business. Unemployment growled; it was a lion. Mysterious murders rumbled like thunder and flashed like lightening. Kidnapping became the order of the day. To make matters worse, some started kidnapping themselves! They asked a ransom of millions of money or else they would kill themselves. This was latent suicide! All in all there were many ways of making money. Mothers felt a thorn piercing them down in comparison to the stylus that once wrote words of romance on the paper of love. High way robbery increased geometrically. Poverty sneaked in and, as a thief, stole many lives without any mention from the authority. Corruption was the cancer playing on the human flesh. There was the juxtaposition of a shack and bungalow, the poor and the rich, the weak and the strong, the oppressed and favoured. Part of the human race lost direction; the other part gained it. Hope and love diminished; fear and desperation emerged. Who was behind this? It remained a question of mystery and mythical conjecture through hypothetical speculations. Only the word of God that flowed through the mouth of the neglected sent streaks, flickers of hope and rejuvenation at the end of the tunnel. Tomorrow was a mirage and bleak. The meal of the day was lies spiced with butter and vinegar. Whoever tasted them would not put up the head again, for he would have been thrown and damped in the seven fathom pit!

It was now the third day since the MP and his dear wife were laid to rest. The mourners left one by one. It would not easily be noticed. It would, all of sudden, be noticed that the number of people was reducing. The old folk in the cloak of their frailty accruing from the denudational forces of nature had kept awake and the Virgil alive and promising as they were preparing to leave and check what was going on in their homes, a funny scenario happened.

A tall, slender mad woman stormed the mourners just out of blue. She was slattern, dressed in tatters. Her kinky and curled hair showed that there was some permanent head damage. She held a Bible in her hand. She burst out in loud, hoarse voice: 'Praise God!' She said this, raising the hand that held the Holy Book in the air, jumping up and down, orchestrating like one in the *Imbalu* or *Kiga* dance. The audience kept silent, in surprise and shock. Praise God, she shouted for the second time. This time some people answered: 'Praise Him!'

'You people you have circumcised down but your hearts are not yet circumcised,' said the mad woman.

She cleared her voice, opened the Bible and read them the word of God. She read all the verses. All the people listened! 'Why's it that that they have refused to listen to the politician who was giving a special speech on an important occasion? Isn't this defiance?' asked Ntare.

Ecclesiastes 5:8-20 Life is useless

Don't be surprised when you hear that the government oppresses the poor and denies them justice and their rights. Every official is protected by the one over him, and both are protected by still higher officials.

Even a king depends on the harvest.

If you love money, you will never be satisfied; if you love to be rich, you will never get what you want. It is useless.

The richer you are, the more mouths you must feed. All you gain is the knowledge that you are rich. Workers may or may not have enough to eat, but at least they can get a good night's sleep. The rich, however, have so much that they stay awake worrying.

Here is a terrible thing I have seen in the world: people save up their money for a time when they may need it., and then lose it all in some unlucky deal and end up with nothing left to pass on to their children. We leave this world just as we entered it- with nothing. In spite of all our work there is nothing we can take with us. It isn't right! We go just as we came. We labour, trying to catch the wind, and what do we get? We have to live our lives in darkness and grief, worried, angry, and sick.

This is what I have found out: the best thing one can do is to eat and drink and enjoy what he has worked for during the short life that God has given him; this is man's fate. If God gives man wealth and property and let enjoy them, he should be grateful and enjoy what he has worked for. It is a gift from God. Since God has allowed him to be happy, he will not worry too much about how short life is.

The congregation had not gathered around the mad woman. They wondered whether she was a lunatic or not. As she came to the end of the reading, she shouted again: 'Praise Hiiiiim.' In chorus they shouted: 'Praise Hiiiiim'.

'You rich people, come back to God. You've been terrorizing us with sticks, beating us. Now you're in prison. The helicopters will come for you. The soldiers of lower ranks will come for you. What was written here is being fulfilled. Come back to God before you perish in fire. You sharp shooters, why do you shoot like the arrow of death will shoot you?' asked mad woman as she concluded. She picked her walking stick that had a whisker from the cow's tail, her empty bottles of mineral water and left, heading for where she had come.

It seemed as if the people were hearing the word of God for the first time. The word sank into their hearts. They felt as new people transformed from sin. What was more, the word was from the mouth of the insane woman. 'Even the mad people can speak the truth!' commented Mbogo, absent minded. They loved and desired and yearned for more of the Gospel than the temporal power they were living, like they had never tasted it before! A mad woman! The old folk picked their walking sticks from the ground and walked back home, their heads down.

* * * * *

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

To the natives of Katabago, it was a mystery to tell whether it was the best of time or the worst of time. The passerby or a stranger from another land would tell the difference. The twilight displayed her brilliance over the village as she trolled slowly to her abode to herald the night. In a twinkle of an eye, darkness swallowed the visibility of the charming, rosy scenery of the place that looked natural and calm. The long, thick, straight clouds of smoke that emanated from the hearth lifted up and stood in the air like a pole, pointing into the deep bottom of the night to give pleasure and an assurance to the young, playing children that something to please their bellies was a sure deal. The pestle pounded in the mortar like skilled Ronaldinho pounding the ground to dribble the opponent, and finally giving a pounding kick to the round sheath to dash into the goal posts to give the goalkeeper a spine-breaking shiver. The crickets, happy or not happy with the falling of the night chirped- giving that sharp shrilling sound that pierced the ears of young children that had gathered in Old Man's compound to play. Out of annoyance some children decided to get a hoe and dig the crickets out of their holes to save themselves from the overwhelming, piercing noise which did not please them at all cost. The children now thought that the crickets were the opposition which they had to act on. If the hoe failed to produce positive results, they would still look for a convenient alternative. They would go stealthily to the kitchen to steal from their mothers' boiling water and water gas them.

The crescent moon and the stars began to appear but they looked weak. There was no breeze. The trees were pacific and calm. The inhabitants of the trees were also rehearsing their sleep as they would wake up early in the morning to look for what to put in their Little Mary.

The youths were in the village enjoying their holiday. The month of May was a blessing to them. Under the leadership of Demus and Cosy, they gathered at Kamahanga's home which was a stone's throw from Old Man's home. The heart of the matter was purely social and educational. The youths wanted to welcome back Old Man for having survived the nasty, fatal accident that nearly claimed his life. They wanted to talk about academics and plan accordingly how they would forge their life into a meaningful future, for the economic situation as well as the political atmosphere was grim and bleak.

It was going to be a simple party. They just needed to plan on what to eat and drink. They wanted to punctuate the occasion with dancing. It was going to be a dancing competition between the young and the old. The old, traditional men and women were to compete with the modern, young men and women. They invited four adjudicators:- one woman and three men. On the very occasion they were joined by two other musicians from the city. The four people were from the neighbouring villages. The youth had also invited the Lawyer based in the city and the other man was from The Human Rights Commission Department, Kampala. The party was scheduled to take place within one week from the time of meeting. The Lawyer was the Guest of Honour. Demus and his colleagues had met the two invited guests at Aga Khan School, where they had attended a sensitization Seminar on 'Good Governance and Human Rights Observance in Uganda'. They had rubbed shoulders at Aga Khan School located below Makerere University, and it was the Lawyer who had opened the Seminar by giving the key note word. To everyone's wonder the man from the Human Rights Commission had moved the audience through his insightful discussion on governance. Katabago village youths deemed it fit to invite these resourceful people to come and share, interact with them and the youths in the village who went to different schools in the country to grab a chance of listening to the visitors. They felt it wise to invite the resourceful people to come to see what was transpiring in the village; how it looked like to live and come from rural areas.

'I wonder what has gone wrong with the women and men of this generation. The people of this era are fond of wasting time; time is a resource. You're welcome in your capacities. Cosy is our secretary, Karungi is our treasurer. Boonabaana is our general organizer and we're all participants. As you're aware the meeting is about preparing what to eat and drink and how we're going to compete with the old in dancing competition; it's tradition versus modernity. If you know you're talented in this and that, please you'll come up and take the stage.' said Demus. As the chairperson he said it solemnly as a way of showing them that it was business. They formed many groups; each group apportioned itself a task- fetching water, collecting firewood and splitting it, cooking, and decorating the place where they would sit together with their visitors.

'We must be economical; it's bad to be wasteful. "Waste not, want not",' said Cosy, adding: 'We mustn't behave extravagantly like MPs who demand this and that but there's no

sign and show of satisfaction. And there's no tangible or substantial work for their Constituencies. They've no work! It's wastage of the tax-payers' money. Hmmm, he who eats much is always insatiable. Whenever they pass the ridiculous and oppressive bills into laws, their gifts, salaries and allowances increase geometrically in millions of money,' concluded Cosy, arranging the papers where she was writing the Minutes.

'Abdallah, thank you for coming and we appreciate the good work you're doing in this village and beyond. We've bought a cow and seven goats and seven hens. You'll wake up early in the hens, cut them. We'll start serving visitors at exactly ten o'clock in the morning. At one o'clock, we'll begin dancing competition,' said Demus, hilariously.

'What gifts are we going to give Old Man and our two visitors from the city?' asked Paddy.

'An artefact curved from wood, bearing two spring balances on each side. And on that curved wood, there'll be a book- the constitution,' suggested Karungi, smiling.

'What about his colleague who works in the Human Rights Commission?' inquired Aidajankidoo. 'And their driver shouldn't be left out. Segregation's bad. What has ruined our African countries and their misleaders? They're no longer called leaders...' he advised and commented.

'Precious is a good artist. He can tell us what we can give him,' suggested Mr. Bean. They all laughed because of Mr. Beans' age. He was only thirteen but he had brilliant ideas. They wondered how such an idea had dawned on his mind!

'Hiiiiihhhiiii,' Precious cleared his throat. I'll give him a water colour picture containing a woman carrying firewood, and two babies- one on her back, another one on her right part of the stomach and holding a bundle in her left arm and at the same time pulling a goat,' suggested Precious in a conclusive stance. They all nodded their heads in agreement with the suggestions put forward.

'I'll write them a good poem. Each of them will take a copy,' said Kamuhanda, frowning to show them seriousness. 'But we shouldn't clap our hands like MPs clapping and stamping their feet on the ground as they pass Bills to laws in the House without giving them second

thought. Later they find themselves in fixation, working against their conscience. It's not good to always work on convenience. The situation will be ridiculous,' concluded Kamuhanda.

'Are you forgetting the survivor? What're we going to give Old Man?' asked Cosy, looking at a distance as an examinee being examined.

Boonabaana put up her arm. 'Yes, Boonah,' the chairperson invited her by pointing a finger at her.

'We'll give our Grandpa flowers. Two, I bought him a mink blanket made in Italy because old people need warmth.' Silence reigned and all of sudden they gave a thunderous clap that made two hanging portraits on the wall fall down.

'Our Students Association contributed money to buy a cow from which Old Man will be getting a cup of milk to drink,' said Demus. They clapped their hand again this time making the roof tremble and shake like it was under the power of an earthquake.

The meeting ended with a word from the chairperson who thanked everybody for attending. Mr. Bean led the prayer. They served the drink made from sorghum, spiced with honey. Katabago village was well known for farming bees. The harvested honey was sold to the neighbouring villages and traders from Kampala. The rest of the harvest would be used to spice the local porridge that almost every family prepared to quench thirst and push down food after eating. The locals called this porridge *Enturire*. It was said and believed that the drink was nutritious and a source of energy. As if this was not enough it made women a fountain where the players as they were in the other game, proved magical. The players would not leave the playing field without scoring six serious sexy goals, leaving the players without a referee, soothed and relaxed.

Saturday was not far. All the villagers were invited to attend and so were the people beyond. Like a bridegroom waiting for the bride, the youths looked forward to receiving the day and all that she carried. They looked at it as the dawn beckoning a freshly enticing, new day. It would be a day, not just ordinary but one of transfiguration and transformation and, therefore, extraordinary. Kamuhanda told them he would recite the poem for them:

The united teeth break the bone.

Wisdom is born.

It is not bought from the market.

What is bought from market is a blanket.

A child is not bought;

A child is made at home.

Today it is a shame evil people sell and buy them.

The concerned protectors are quiet and happy.

The shoddy business fetches in a penny.

Power comes from unity of the lowly.

United we stand, divided we fall due to folly.

On this particular hour

Give me chance to tell you that people are power.

Old Man had once said, ‘When a person, old or young calls, it’s best for a callee to respond.’ And he had added: ‘Sometimes wisdom comes from the mouth of babes.’

The Visitors from the city had been invited or called. They answered the call. What was more they walked in the footsteps of the teachings that acted as a model for the young ones.

Matthew 19:14

Let the children come to me and do not stop them,

because the Kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.

The hearts of men and women were now rotten. The city was rotten. The environment was decaying. Looking at the piles of rubbish in the city lying like a sickly dog was too horrible

a sight. Whenever one looked at it and the stench hit the nose like Nagasaki bomb, it was as if one was peering deep into the hearts of men. The disappearance of children was a song. The murders of women were very alarming. Mothers cried but their tears rolled down their cheeks, fell on the ground to sink in the dry, thirsty soil and the rest flowed to rivers, lakes, and finally into seas and oceans. It was too much for the fathers to console the mothers. There was no single authority to say: 'Weep not, child' and there was no single sign of the black sky full of nimbus clouds clearing soon. When the killers of innocent, young angels and perpetrators of child sacrifice were tired of the noise of blubbering women, they turned to them. They murdered them as if they were cockroaches. Through the Papers or Social Media, the Headline would be: WOMAN MURDERED IN THE CITY CENTRE, PRIVATE PARTS SCOOPED OUT, SHELL DROPPED IN THE TRENCH

After one week, another Headline: WOMAN FOUND DEAD, BREASTS, HEAD CHOPPED OFF... in yet another location few miles from the city center. The game would then shift to upcountry: WOMAN KIDNAPPED, SEVEN MILLION DEMANDED AS RANSOM

MAN, BOY KIDNAPPED, TEN MILLION WANTED...

The news was very disturbing; it was more or less of an insurgence. The incident followed after incident giving birth to pain and horror. The acts of execution were a mystery to the citizens. No one knew how and why this was taking place. They were just engulfed in terror and fear, without hope for tomorrow like a drunkard's cockerel. There were many hardships that had heaped on the citizenry to the extent that they had been fixed in so small a space that they had nowhere to turn to. They had already been hit by unemployment, poverty, famine and drought, internal and external wars in the neighbouring countries which had culminated into migration. The incidents gave rise to refugees' camps and Internal Displaced Camps and all the catastrophic occurrences associated with them. More often than not parents, relatives and friends received terrifying pieces of news that their sons and daughters were being butchered and knocked with hammers on the head in the Far East countries. They had gone to look for green pastures. The green pastures had turned to red pastures dripping with blood. The videos showing horrifying pictures of red people chopping black people with unsharpened machetes were a common terrifying sight. Who would hear the cries of the helpless, dying people?

It was Friday evening. The visitors and their driver set off from the city at seven in the evening. Their vehicle, Corolla, had been taken to garage to be tuned to the rhythm of the journey. There was likelihood that the bad roads would make the automobile cough black blood.

‘How long will it take you to drive from here to Kanungu?’ asked the Lawyer, glancing at his wrist watch.

‘It’s seven hours drive if we don’t take a stopover, or less. My worry is one:

What’s it that you’re worried of?’ asked Human Rights man suspiciously.

Masaka,’ said the driver, engaging in a gear.

‘Massacre?’

‘Yes, Masaka! It’s a Black spot where travellers are the sacrificial lambs,’ lamented the driver.

‘People say that’s where those people who go to the lake come back to make the place a shrine where travellers are sacrificed,’ said the driver.

‘Don’t you think some accidents are caused by careless driving like over speeding, overtaking and the poor and dire mechanical conditions of the vehicles? What of drug abuse like smoking opium, cocaine, petrol and spirit? Then there’s calling and receiving of phone calls in addition to poor training in driving skills and overdrinking. What’s your take on that?’ asked the Lawyer.

‘Hahaha, hmmm!’ the driver laughed cacophonously. He added, ‘What does the breathalyzer do?’

‘Remember that machines are used by the people,’ said the Lawyer with a matter- of- fact voice.

The road was really smooth. The two men fell in silence but they were not asleep. They were not tired. They just wanted to give the driver conducive atmosphere to do his job. The

smoothness of the road had become so seductive that the driver, unknowingly, branched off to Kiruhura road which was smoother than the main Mbarara road!

‘Accidents have claimed many lives here. Katabushera is uglier than this place but accidents are not as rampant as here, considering Mityana and Mukono,’ said the Lawyer sorrowfully.

‘But some accidents are politically induced,’ said the driver.

‘Politically induced? What do you mean?’ asked the Lawyer inquisitively.

‘If you handle one’s case in ‘favour’ of the other and he’s a big person...he can do something about you; he can discipline you. You can be knocked down on the road. You’ll have died in an accident which is almost taken as an act of God,’ explained the driver, adding: ‘I was once contacted by a politician who wanted me to knock down his opponent in exchange for three million shillings. I didn’t want to involve myself in such a black act; otherwise the deal would have been sealed. It’s bad to taint your name in such ungodly acts,’ commented the driver.

‘An act of God like you’re struck by lightning? This sounds more cunning than one can imagine,’ said the Lawyer.

They all laughed as the driver reversed back to the main road. The car raced swiftly like the green African snake in green grass. The traffic was not congestive as they had left it in the city. They could see twinkling lights on the stretch of the road that snaked into the unknown. They could also see shooting stars which were so speedy- possibly the evil people who ambushed and murdered their brothers and sisters had learnt the disappearance speed from the meteorites. Investigations were not producing results. The anxious and restless subjects waited and waited as if they were ‘Waiting for Godot’!

It was one O’clock in the morning when they entered Rukungiri Town. They entered into the Bus Park and parked. They wanted to rest for some hours before they would set off to cross Enengo which looked more or less like death. Anything could happen on this precipitous and the deep valley that lay below like sleeping lions. The road was narrow, with sharp bends. Any slight miscalculation, the vehicle would roll two miles down the valley to sink in the Mighty Ekyambu.

The river between the two hills flowed steadily to Lake Edward. The two hills faced each other like two opponents- one dressed in yellow, the other dressed in blue. It was this river that separated Rukungiri District from Kanungu District. Kanungu was now an island, which, if the Democratic Republic of Congo was ambitious and polygamous in nature, he would have grabbed and annexed her from Uganda to make Kanunguians speak Lingala, or Kiswahili. More often than not the observers wondered whether Congo was democratic! The historical curse that had visited her some years back in 1870s was still lingering as the shadows of death scheming to snatch the sons and daughters of Adam and Eve. The road was worse. It was dusty in the dry season and total mire in the wet season. A good observer would just look at the place and say: 'This is an abandoned and deserted District'- a desert island that was more or less infertile- a wasteland so slattern that no colonialist or land grabber would scramble for it, for there was nothing good to whet one's appetite.

The herald of dawn that threw crimson shafts of light and the twittering and chirping of birds in the nearby trees was a siren to wake up the trios to continue their journey into the unknown. They were now going to begin on the rough road. The engine raved and moaned as the car wipers cleaned the wind screen like lovers rubbing together their lips to throw themselves into the kingdom of romanticism.

'Let's set off and have a face-to-face wrestling with the place that swallowed the MP and his best half,' said the driver. "A river cuts through a rock not because of its power, but its persistence". God is with us,' he added.

'Yeah, let's try. There's no way we'd turn down the young ones' request. These're the presidents of tomorrow,' commented the Human Rights Man, putting the hand on his mouth as he yawned. 'We need good roads,' he demanded.

'Most of the youths will die without becoming presidents because whoever grabs power gives himself seven or endless terms. Ten times five is fifty. If one becomes a president when he's fifty, that means he'll rule for other fifty years, totaling up to a century- oh, until death do us apart!' said the Lawyer sarcastically.

‘Yes, power corrupts and the more you taste it the more addicted you become and the more clinging, rude and coercive you become. And the principle will be if you want to rule, you must first kill sons of Brutus,’ said the Lawyer, adjusting his specs on the ridge of his nose.

The covered part of the journey was somehow good but the pot holes made a nuisance of them. The stretch of dusty or muddy road depending on the season, covered roughly thirty miles from the heart of Rukungiri to the border of Uganda and Democratic Republic of Congo. There were now some good miles to drive to reach the village of Katabago.

‘How can a road joining a country to a country be in such a state? A Douane- where Customs Offices are, and the road is impassible! This is impossible! There’s also a big hospital. We’re not far from it. It’s Kambuga Hospital,’ said the driver, braking down to almost a halt for his colleagues to gaze at it. This’s where life is repaired,’ he added.

‘It looks a nice hospital. When was it built?’ asked the Human Rights Man. The driver had offered a lift to a woman who was carrying a sickly baby in the hand and balancing a basket on her head. She was sweating profusely. Her blue sandals were covered with thick, red dust. She looked weary and won out; possibly it was due to the long distance she had trekked from her home. All in all she walked briskly. An on-looker would guess that she was running away from a husband who might have been following her to bring her back home; or she was hurrying to save a life.

When she had heard the sound of the car fall into her ears, she had stepped aside, pivoted her neck to look at the car. Immediately the driver stepped on the brake and the car skidded a bit.

‘Good morning Madam,’ the driver greeted her.

‘Good morning, sir,’ she replied.

‘Where’re you going?’

‘I’ am going to the Hospital. I’ve a sickly child.’

‘You’re alone. Don’t you have children or relatives?’ asked the driver, opening the car door for her.

Despite the recent developments of insecurity the woman had no alternative. She accepted the offer, for the drowning woman had to crutch at the Serpent standing in the water!

‘I’ve seven children. Five of them are school going,’ she said as she settled down.

‘Where’s your husband?’

‘He went to Buganda last month to look for a job. Yesterday I called him on the telephone but he told me that all was not well with him. He stays with a friend and that he’s still roaming the streets to see if he can land on an opportunity.’

‘The kid has breathing difficulties. It’s sweating so much. Worry not, it’ll get better,’ the Lawyer consoled her, adjusting the baby’s shawl. The driver accelerated with a saving act at the back of his mind. In a twinkle of an eye, the driver stopped at the gate of the hospital and they all alighted. The driver helped hold the kid as the woman alighted too. The lawyer and the Human Rights Man pulled wads of notes from their wallets and gave them to the woman. She knelt down as a sign of respect to thank them. ‘When was this nice hospital built,’ asked the Human Rights Man again.

‘It was built in 1960s during Dr. Milton Obote’s Regime,’ explained the woman. ‘It was a hospital then,’ commented the woman nostalgically.

‘God bless you richly,’ thanked the woman, smiling. Firstly the Good Samaritans had saved her from the stinking poverty. Secondly the woman would now talk confidently when she entered into the repairing facility. This was New Uganda where you would not simply talk to an officer...Many women had lost their lives and babies for as less money as one hundred thousand shillings- Twenty-five dollars! How was this equivalent to one’s life? The three men were good-hearted men; they laboured to save the lives of the woman and her baby. Oh, Cry the Beloved Country! It was the land of Devils or Ghosts!

‘Let the Good one bless you. You’ll get well; God’s good,’ they said in chorus.

The trios had not yet entered into the car when a motorcyclist carrying another woman parked a few metres from them.

‘*Wewe, kuja hapa,*’ one of the Policemen called as he gestured with his right hand to supplement the call.

The hooded man left the hooded woman who was holding a baby in her hands to hear why the policeman was calling him.

‘*Kwa sababu gani... Sema yote...* Why are you wearing the hood together with that woman? Do you know that you can be imprisoned? This’s one way of disguising yourself to commit crimes,’ said the Policeman, putting on a gloomy face. ‘You’re a criminal,’ added the Policeman. The policeman left the motorcyclist with other three policemen and went to inspect his motorcycle.

‘The reflector is not well fixed and your motorbike isn’t washed, why?’ asked the policeman in a rude, loud voice. Old Man had once said: ‘Ugandans hate Kiswahili because they think it’s a language of thieves, robbers, and torture.’ He had told the people at drinking joints that whoever wanted to cheat you during the day or night, or to punish you at prisons, he had to use Swahili. Old Man had narrated stories about *gana gana, panda gali, lala chini...*’ All these narratives indicated how fear was instilled in the citizenry as a way of causing psychological and physical torture which made natives hate the language! This was many years ago in 1980s. The habit was still surviving- live and kicking! ‘Look here and listen!’ the Old Man demanded, adding, ‘history repeats itself.’

The Lawyer and his colleagues were listening. He pulled his identity card and showed it to the Policeman as he looked into his face through his specs. ‘How’re you?’ the Lawyer greeted the Policeman.

‘I am all right,’ responded the Policeman, facing down like he was tracing for a dropped coin!

Immediately the Policeman signalled to the motorcyclist to come to where his Motorbike parked. The policeman told the woman to rush the baby to the hospital. The Corp warned the hooded rider to work on his machine before it would drag him to Courts of Law. The victim rode off, thanking God for the coincidence. The rider was a cow and the Milk Man was going to milk it. He had not fed it grass though. The driver followed him both of them leaving the Policeman

covered by the clouds of dust and sorrow. The tree of life did not bear fruits that very day. Possibly the Corp had touched a thigh that induced bad luck that very last night. The Lawyer pierced a finger in the eye of the crocodile, throwing it into the lake of hunger. On this very day, it was survival of Wretched of the Earth.

* * * * *

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

The world ran short of probity; it was as slippery as mudfish in water. There was always a duel between light and darkness. The darkness like kings of Africa was overpowering light. The voters did not, not once, trust their politicians and neither could parents trust and confide in their children. Mistrust was worse than cancer when it came to the relationship between the employer and the employed. Everyone was a stranger in the world. A traveller was ever suspicious about whoever he met and asking for the direction to one's destination was an abomination or a taboo that could lead one to the grave. It was graveyard country. It was better to spend the whole day guessing, tracing and searching for the place you were going to than ask a country man to be swallowed by the earth in seven minutes.

The morning sun was exuberant, and like a sunflower standing in the garden of a farmer, it splashed that golden sparkle that would even entice the most docile bird to come and test the sharpness of her beak to taste and please her gizzard. Kyeijanga was a small town but with many years since its existence. The shops that lay astride the road almost had nothing on the shelves to show. They faced each other as two lovers boiling with passion to mouth. From Kyeijanga, the road snaked to Kihiihi and then Queen Elizabeth National Park. The driver and his colleagues branched from this small town at the left, facing south west and drove deep into Katabago village. They were almost home. They had covered not even a half kilometer when the rougher road displayed its true character. It had rained the previous night. They could not move an inch. If they risked, they would go the way the MP and his wife went; they went with the wind. The world had forgotten them. The people no longer talked about them except when they hit a snag like this one the trio were encountering.

They alighted down the vehicle, stepping in the murky road. Out of the blue, the dirty, poorly dressed young boys surrounded them.

‘Guru moring, Sir,’ greeted one of the slender boys, with black lines running down his face like he had carried a cooking pot of water from the well in that very morning.

‘Good morning to you,’ responded the Lawyer. The seven young boys did not behave like the man who had gone to borrow a he-goat. He did not pronounce what he had come to do and the other neighbour came, shouted out what he wanted. The he-goat was untethered and given to him. When he started pulling it, the other man who had spent two hours seated and taking the sorghum drink, to his chagrin, told the head of the house that he had come to borrow the he-goat! Procrastination!

‘We need a job,’ the young boys said in chorus.

‘Which job?’ asked the Lawyer critically looking at them in the eyes.

‘To pull this vehicle out of the mud.’

‘Why didn’t you go to school?’

‘We’re not school because Headmaster chase us.’

‘Our parents are poor school fees,’ added another squinted boy.

‘Have you ever heard of UPE- Universal Primary Education? And it’s for free.’

‘It’s not free. We go there headmaster hunt us.’ They continued to say, ‘Now we want jobs,’ insisted one of the boys.

‘How much do you want?’

‘One hundred sousand shillingish because we pushed up to where you go,’ said one of the boys in broken English. When an opportunity knocked, even those who were not at threshold level as far as communication in a language was concerned, the victim had to look for means and forge ahead to put a communication across for survival.

‘Do you know where we’re going?’ ‘Do you know where we’re going?’ asked the Lawyer again for emphasis.

‘Where you going distance no *wahala*,’ said the short, dark skinned boy confidently.

‘Or we can *Askari* it until come back,’ suggested another boy. The Lawyer and his colleagues broke into fits of laughter because of the broken English which the school boys termed as ‘speaking buffaloes’. The buffaloes have horns, so speaking buffaloes meant that the speaker would be goring the listeners. The Lawyer pulled out his wallet and gave them ten thousand shillings and said, ‘I would be grateful if I hear that you went back to school.’ They genuflected and said, ‘Thank you, Sir,’ smiling a long killing smile that added more beauty to the faces of poor souls.

The youths of Katabago village were aware of their ugly bad roads. The trios could not make it to the venue on a car. They were in touch with visitors on telephone. Demus and Precious were on the scene. Together with the young boys and many others who had thronged around them, they pulled the car out of the mud. ‘This is what our politicians have done for us. As soon as they get what they want, the city swallows them only to come to solicit for votes to run another sad term!’ cursed Demus.

They laughed. ‘We’ve a plan for them; we’re waiting for them-waiting for them. The hearth is a seducer. When night falls, they’ll come,’ said the muscular man as they pulled. The car was finally towed out and saved from the sin of the mud. They parked in the home of Demus’s friend, jumped on to the motorcycles and headed for the village.

Abdullah was a handsome, slender man with a light skin complexion. He had bushy beards that together with Shaggy, they were the apple of the village children’s eye. The children loved the two men, for they looked attractive, sociable, pious and hardworking. The village juveniles called the two men ‘Prince Charming’. The young children would sit on their laps to stroke the beard. This was the reason why out of desire and longing, Paddy had shaved his father’s he goat- Goatee- in order to look like Shaggy. Children had desires and the fulfillment of the desires facilitated their growth psychologically, socially, spiritually, and emotionally thus making them holistic human beings. Therefore, two decades had elapsed. Paddy never wanted to

hear this because he would feel ashamed of what he did to prompt her mother think that Goatee was shaved by village witches. However, Paddy's father had saved him from his mother's wrath.

The old folk and the young alike always wondered why Abdullah was ever silent and reflective. He was not a happy man. One day Mr. Bean braved the wind of the Abdullah's mood and asked him why he was always in a pensive and sombre mood. He was a man of few words.

'My friend, Abu'- for that was how the children clipped his name.' 'Why are you not happy?' asked Mr. Bean, sorrowfully.

'Young child, you'll know when you grow old.'

'Tell me, I am already old.'

'The world is a good story teller; it's a good teacher. You'll learn more when you grow up.'

Mr. Bean was more puzzled than ever before. He felt deserted on a vast plain of sand on a sea shore.

'Tell me my dear friend. My hen has laid eggs. I'll give you some.' Mr. Bean enticed and seduced him.

'I'll tell you when you complete you Primary Level, ok!'

Mr. Bean was not convinced at all. His great expectations were not met. The questioner left when he was sadder than ever before because he did not understand the secret which lay hidden deep in the subconscious of Abudallah.

Abdallah was a religious man. He observed *Swallah*. From the bottom of his heart, he knew *Allaah Akbar*. Indeed, Allah was the greatest. He performed his prayer genuinely, and with humility. Was he not only surviving on Allah's Grace? He saw this as the greatest and noblest way of expressing his faith. It was the ultimate and surest way of thanking Allah for his endless favours- kindness, mercy, generosity and blessings. These would lead him to Paradise.

He never, not once, missed the prayers. *Fajr, Zuhr, Asr, Magrib* and *Isha*. All the villagers admired him, especially the young children, who constantly requested their Christian parents to let them be like Abdallah.

Abdallah had a secret. He did not have stamina to pour it out. The recent murder of Muslim clerics had disturbed him a lot. Would he, his friends and relatives survive the grisly murders that swept the country? The murders were a mystery to the citizenry, and detectives had absolutely failed to unravel the mystery which had continued to be more of a myth and a riddle. All the efforts to trace the culprits were futile. Every day that passed by all the hopes snowed to nix.

The poverty was raging like sea on a bad weather day. Famine had hit most of the villages. Banana wilt and cassava mosaic had swept off the plantations, leaving nothing but standing yellowish sights of banana leaves and rotten, falling plants. The birds with spiked, well combed 'hair' had stormed the gardens of beans, ate all the green leaf. This was a presage of what was yet to come- over taxation on consumer goods, kidnappings, murder of women and big, important government officials. All the people lived in fear, quandary and hopelessness. They could not tell whether the day would end to call the night which would be the worst of all times. There was something after Abdallah's life, but it was hard for the young child like Mr. Bean to comprehend.

Old Man's compound was spacious. The hedges were well trimmed. The grass was well-levelled. Whoever threw an eye at it would immediately develop the urge to lie on it; it was paradise on earth. There were avocado trees, orange and mango trees growing luxuriantly. The fruits matured and when they were ripe, Old Man would call strong, young boys to come and harvest them for him. In comparison with Old Man's neighbours who had many such trees growing in their compounds, they never harvested ripe fruits from their trees. The fruits were stolen prematurely in spite of the fact that they were tougher and more protective than the old man!

Old Man exuded steadfast love. His generosity was dripping honey, where every villager put the tongue to lick. His home was never empty of people be it morning, noon, evening or

night. He had lost his wife five years back. The widower's sons and daughters were in US and others in Sweden. They spent long time without coming home; however, Old Man had children in his home that jealously loved and protected his property.

Old Man sold his harvest to neighbours who in turn took the fruits to far market places as far as Kabale, Kampala and home Markets like Kihiihi and Butogota. The reminder of the harvest would be shared with the children. They ate to their fill and carried the rest to their parents, sisters and brothers. In addition to this generosity, Old Man told the young stories like WHY THE NOSE MIGRATED as the young ones sat nibbling at mangoes and oranges. The yellowish juice flowed down their mouths and arms to their bellies; the art of children licking it with their tongues to deny the soil from getting its share was a sign of how economical the young ones were. Two, the yellowish juice was extremely sweet! The eating was punctuated and spiced by Old Man's art of conversation through story telling thus:

Once upon a time,

The nose lived just above the buttocks but without shame

The buttocks proved to be the worst neighbour

The world has ever witnessed, not to brag.

It was because of the smelly wind, in sooth,

That the nose was forced to migrate to live above the mouth.

The politicians

Are buttocks and bad magicians.

The children laughed their lungs out, their mangoes falling in dust. Some boys gave long booming farts and the laughter would go on. Some boys warned their peers about how they were misbehaving to break wind soundly in front an elder. One of the boys reminded them about how Mr. Bean made the trouser cough which invited seven strokes of a cane on the buttocks from their teacher.

‘A bird that doesn’t fly far places knows not the presence of bounty harvests’ whereabouts,’ the lawyer soliloquized, standing arms akimbo. ‘Oh, No!’ he cried. Standing in Old Man’s compound, he looked at hills and valleys, luxuriant vegetation and the different species of bird that perched on branches crooning their songs. The monkeys jumped from branch to branch, from twig to twig swinging their long, maroon tails like *Kibooko* squad whacking the opposition for opening their mandibles to spell out the ills of the society. ‘They’re all women or children but they aren’t equal,’ reasoned Old Man some time back. The hills were shaped in such a way that they would attract any land grabber to rush to the scene to do the snatching spree. Some hills were M-shaped, and yet others were W-shaped. Some were conical. Some were flat-topped. Some were erected, sharply pointing at the sky close to the horizon. The place was beautiful. It was in no way comparable to the cities and towns people bragged about when they came back to villages.

The Lawyer looked at the poor folk. He wondered whether there was equality, fraternity and freedom. The trio was horror-struck both in the upper region- the head and the lower central region of creation. The horror wave propelled the downs to the chest that in turn shot the heart towards the throat. This caused some sort of strangling and suffocation that made them gasp for breath. They gave a long deep sigh. Was it a sigh of relief? The journey had its delectability as well as nastiness that touched all the creation.

The electric wires stretched in the air over the huts and temporary houses like roads running to the unknown. The villagers slept in darkness to wake up to the light of the day. Everyone that chanced to look at the faces of these inhabitants knew without being told that they were innocent, generous, and happy with the kind of life they were living in. They knew where their home was. They understood where their best friend’s abode was located. On certain occasions they would hear him beckoning...

‘You’re welcome our visitors,’ said Karungi and Mr. Bean in low tones as their faces beamed.

‘It’s our pleasure to find you here. How’re you and the holiday taking you?’

‘We’re fine and the holiday is fine and smooth; it’s almost over,’ commented Karungi. She ushered the visitors into Old Man’s house to do the rites which no longer existed in towns.

The place was set. There was a sign that a big, solemn occasion was yet to unfold. The old man’s parlour had a woofer sitting on a small stool covered with a blue cloth. Everything in the old man’s sitting room was blue- the ceiling and the walls were painted blue. The visitors loved it; the décor was charming. Judith Babirye’s song YESU BELA NANGE was playing. The visitors looked at the framed portrait of Old Man that hang on the wall and believed that Jesus was really good, for He had kept him all this long, considering the economic and political situation of the time. Next to Old Man’s picture was another picture of a colonel painted in water colour. Both faces on the portrait had no smile but they were nice pictures worth looking at.

Demus was entertaining visitors when the phone rang. He picked it.

‘Hullo.’

‘Hullo, this’s MTN calling from Head Offices, Kampala. Is this Demus?’

‘Yes, this’s Demus.’

‘Congratulations! You’ve won yourself Toyota Haria. Now what you do, load twenty thousand shillings on this number so that we can make arrangements for you as you come to pick it, OK!’

‘How comes I won when I have never participated in your promotions?’

‘I’m in Lusaka, Kilombe. I’ve just arrived here from Katanga; when should I come to pick my car?’ When the caller heard the mention of such city places, he dropped the call! The visitors chuckled and fell back in the sofa.

‘Some weeks back, I received three different calls. One was from the United Nations. They had a juicy job, which they wanted me to occupy. Another call was about recruiting for jobs in the United Arabs Emirates. Then there was again another caller who processes Visas to US and other European countries. The list is endless,’ said Demus in a disgusted manner.

‘Hmm! Those are con men and many people have fallen prey to those fiends,’ warned the Lawyer. Criminality was flourishing at a faster pace than one could imagine. Time had come when a friend or relative or a person you did not know went for a loan in the Bank using your name, signature, and would even get sureties as well mortgaging someone’s house or land which they would bring bankers to take pictures without the knowledge of the real owner! At a later time the owner would see the Bankers on the scene carrying all the evidences. The struggle between the owner and the Bankers would begin. The criminal would disappear in thin air. The victim would lose the house or land. Was the victim big enough to win the case against the Bank? The mortgage would be your house or land! You would just see the Bank calling you that you delayed to pay interest, or parking in your compound to inquire what went wrong. This was modernity in a world that had become religious as it was reflected in the mushrooming churches. Not all the people that carried Bibles were Holy! There were as many tools of cheating and conning as there were sands at the sea shore. What was foretold was on its pinnacle. The seeds of mistrust, hate and jealousy had reached at its climax and propensity. It took someone time, money and horror to trust a people no matter how holy they looked and sounded! Not even a mother could trust her son or daughter!

* * * * *

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

The young, vibrant and energetic youths had erected a big green tent of banana leaves in Old Man’s sweet compound. The trees that grew naturally in the compound were the poles that supported the artifact. It was really cool sitting under the natural shade. They had added embroidery of balloons of different colours that sparkled with far-fetching beauty.

Wonders on earth were many. Some wonders were smooth; others were rough. The smooth ones planted and sowed seeds of joy on God’s creation’s faces. The rough incidents had torn apart and away the hearts of men and women. Out of the blue, the mad woman came in sight, holding her Bible. The visitors sank into fear and terror. They thought the lunatic was going to shower havoc on them. She put her Bible on the mat. It was incredible! Everyone placed

his hand on the mouth in utter shock. With unimaginable force, she pulled down all the yellow balloons and flowers down, trampled on them until they were beyond recognition!

‘Thank God these young children didn’t hire yellow chairs!’ whispered the Reverend in the Lawyer’s ear. Most of the plastic chairs were blue and green.

‘Indeed! It would be a great, terrible loss,’ responded the Lawyer, adjusting his glasses on the ridge of his nose. The gathering fell in total silence; they just heard echoes of silence.

‘Praise God!’ shouted the lunatic on top of her voice, raising the Bible.

Praise Him!’ the gathering shouted. Sparsely as the population was in deserted rural setting, the place was overcrowded. Everyone was wondering where all the people had come from.

‘This reminds me the campaigns that people stage in different parts of the country when politicians are canvassing for votes,’ said Rwamubende, very amazed.

‘I’ve seen here people from far- as far as Kyepatiko, Kibimbiri, Kanyashande, Nshwere, Kinaba and Bugongi,’ said Old Man, smiling a wan smile.

‘How did they get to know it?’ asked Mihigo. Hmm! I am asking what I know best. With this coming of *tekinologia*...hoo, It’s like asking a hyena: “Do you eat meat?” they laughed jovially.

‘Possibly it was announced over the radio,’ said Ntare suggestively.

‘Praise Gooooood!’ shouted the lunatic again. ‘God’s good!’ he added solemnly, raising his Bible high in the air.

‘Ladies and Gentlemen, I honour you. You’re welcome here.’ The crowd shook with laughter. This’s thirty years of frustration, treachery and suffering. When I see yellow, I look at how I’m today. I never wanted to be like this. I was at Makerere in my third year but this’s what Satan did to me,’ said the mad woman emphatically. The congregation was swept off their feet; their hair stood up on their heads. They were all covered by sorrow and pain. ‘Gi’ me what to eat and drink,’ she said sadly.

Kigatire led her behind the house. She served her food and drinks. She ate quietly like she was also thinking about the future. When she had finished eating and drinking, she packed the remaining sodas in her polythene bag. She came to where the crowd was gathering, thanked them and left.

Aidajankidoo was the Master of Ceremonies. He opened the occasion officially by welcoming the visitors, Old Man for having survived the road accident, government officials, religious leaders and the natives for coming to grace the occasion.

‘It’s not my day but the visitors’ and Old Man’s day. Therefore, I’ll not take the center stage to grab their opportunity and time like the present land grabbers. The gist of the occasion is to thank our parents for the struggle they’re going through to educate us and the citizens’ contribution socially, psychologically, spiritually, economically and politically. It takes the whole village to bring up a child. Clap for yourselves, Ladies and Gentlemen,’ concluded the MC.

He passed on the microphone to the old man to give a short word of welcome to the visitors from the city and the natives. Hardly had Old Man dropped a word from the mouth when something strange happened.

No one knew when disappointments would end. Happenings. Occurrences. So shocking! Kidnappings. Murders. Taxes. Threats and social embargoes... In one of the trees that supported the shade, just where the visitors were sitting, above them was the battle ground- another Somalia, South Sudan, Central Africa Republic, or utmost a Syria! Just above the visitors’ head on a tree!

It was a Blue Lizard and a Yellow one; the Monitor lizard was rocked in battle with the other Lizard. Men fought for women, land, offices, or against oppression. Had one of the lizards trampled on the other’s freedom, peace, or had it encroached on its territory? It was a mystery to the onlookers!

The Yellow Monitor Lizard fell and percolated through the banana leaves to fall on the visitors’ table. It disorganized the function. The people dispersed, some falling down. It did three

press ups on the table and then jumped on to the tree. It raced up on the tree to face the belligerent that was up the tree, waiting.

‘I must do something on this Monitor Lizard for disturbing the peace and tranquil of our visitors,’ said the LCI Chairman furiously.

This Yellow Monitor Lizard must be taxed. It must be taxed for falling on the visitors’ table and they must be taxed for fighting. They should have gone to the bush and fight there,’ complained Old Man bitterly. The gathering burst into fits of laughter that pushed them to gasp for breath.

‘And fighting is bad. It should be taxed. Even human beings should be taxed when they fight. Don’t you think this can reduce domestic violence?’ asked Mihigo, pulling his beard; however, it was not as impressive and elegant as Shaggy’s or Abdallah’s.

‘I am afraid, Shaggy and Abdallah will be taxed for their bushy beards,’ Rwamubende chipped in.

‘I’ll run away to Rwanda. Good enough I may be lucky to get a job in their new car factory and escape this scalding and scorching unemployment,’ said Shaggy, smiling using one side of his face.

‘I heard about their launch of the Volkswagen...’ commented Rwakuburya, very impressed.

‘Rwanda may be having her challenges but they’re trying hard to hit CZTL- Corruption Zero Tolerance Line,’ said Rwamubende.

‘Honestly some people have lost shame. She has just emerged from the aftermath of the Genocide. How can they move faster to that beautiful direction and level than the neighbour who has not faced serious upheavals but the politicians are just here sitting, talking and oppressing the citizens in a ridiculous way?’ ‘They’re yapping for protection. Are they criminals? They’re guilty. Why are they crying for their security, not of all the people?’ asked Ntare in a disgusted and perturbed manner.

‘By the way one would think that the country should be having corruptible tendencies because of the problems as a way of survival. MPs are just greedy and selfish. They’ll vomit. When you eat too much, this is what happens. They’re now coming back to regurgitate their throw ups.’ said Rwankosa.

‘It’s just greed that’s driving us to the wrong direction, and some other nasty political motives. We’ve enough resources- human resource but it’s idle, especially the youths and I think it’s because of poor planning of politicians who’re too much focused on their D-shaped bellies,’ commented the Lawyer. There’s breakdown of law and order, breakdown and decaying of institutions and systems. They’ve all been emerged so that the control can be achieved easily. The emerging of systems hinders the smooth running of activities. This’s why the Judiciary, Legislature and the Executive have been combined to avoid misunderstandings when they should be independent,’ concluded the Lawyer.

‘I’ve come to believe that corruption has grooved and penetrated its tap root into the deeper fertile soil of man’s evil mind; it’ll take centuries to uproot it. The problem is that the learned who’re holding offices are the ones taking the lead in corruption, murder, kidnapping, illegal businesses in ivory, cocaine and marijuana and the trade is well protected! Do you think guys are becoming tycoons because they work harder than others? If you believe the answer is yes, then you’re day dreaming,’ said Rwamubende.

‘Look at you! Apart from me who fought in the Second World War, who else in this village of Katabago has ever touched a gun?’ asked Old Man solemnly.

‘No one,’ they answered in unison like they had rehearsed to give the answer together.

‘Then who’re the robbers on Highways, robbers that break into Banks and people’s houses. Who of you knows how to kidnap? When we’re in the Big War, Kidnaps were masterminded by well-trained soldiers called Mafias. A common man can’t kidnap or kill a high profile person- a VIP!’ said Old Man, looking at the listeners in the face.

The congregation was listening attentively to the conversation which had now taken center stage. The listeners nodded their heads as a sign of realization as if they were waking up from slumber. A handful of politicians had emitted light on what was going on, but people had

thought them as Judases who had come to take away their sleep, peace and freedom. It was not until the Lizards were going to be taxed that human beings realized that things had gone out of hand. They were already in the noose of the anaconda which had wrung itself around them. It was now remaining with the work of swallowing, which was as easy as eating ice-cream.

All the visitors that had gathered here were now engrossed in deep thought. Some heaved a heavy, long sigh. Some were pining now. It was as if they had been living in a tunnel, covered with a wet blanket. Everyone discovered that there was need to go to school to learn the art of forgiving. More still, they were a bunch of frustrated, poor citizens. What could a poor person do with knowledge? After all education had gone to the dogs; it had rusted like an iron nail that had lasted thirty decades under gruesome weather of politicians!

Few metres from where the crowd stood, a woman who had come to witness the occasion lay on the grass writhing, trying to push. Immediately a group of women led by Kigatire rushed to the scene and airlifted her in their arms as the helicopter had started air-lifting VIPs from their homes in a mysterious and lurking way. The village young boys and girls would run as fast as their legs could carry them to hide under their parents' beds whenever they heard a helicopter flying over them. Was it coming to kidnap them? No, it was flying on its own way.

The retired village Nurse untied his phone from her *lesu* and called the big hospital to send an Ambulance to transport urgently the expectant mother, for the condition was critical.

'Hullo, hullo, hullo.' No response.

Hullo. This's me, Retired Nurse.' She removed the cell phone from her ear and pressed the button. It was now in the loud speaker.

'Hullo,' continued the Nurse.

'Hullo,' said a deep manly voice from the other side of the line.

'This's me, the Retired Nurse calling from Katabago. Gravida emergency, very critical, an ambulance needed.'

‘We’ve two ambulances. One has left for the city. The other one is totally down, inflated and in bad mechanical condition.’

‘You mean it can’t cover a short distance like this one?’

‘Yes please, the grass has grown to cover the tyres.’

The crowds’ ears were cocked; they were taken aback! ‘How can a big hospital own two Ambulances only, which are in shambles?’ inquired Korugambo, standing straight like a pole.

‘Let’s not waste time quarrelling and pouring complaints on the path when actually it’s the market that cheated you,’ Yozofinah advised the fellow women.

‘I think let’s do it the usual local way,’ suggested Mihigo. The locals had a boat-shaped art craft where they carried the sickly to the hospital. Every village man that paid tax would come to carry the sick on their head, in turns to the hospital to save lives.

‘We’ve a car parked somewhere. Please get a motorcycle and struggle to drive it here,’ whispered the Lawyer in the driver’s ear, pulling a fifty thousand note from his wallet.

When the poor villagers looked at the new note, they stretched their necks like a giraffe to gaze at it. Their pockets were thirsty. Was there hope for them to get it and keep it in their pockets? From the time when cooperative societies collapsed, men and women had totally lost the means of accessing such a big note. It was drought, disease, famine and poverty that they were saving and living with in their lives; these were daily companions that spoke using body language and spoke louder than words.

Two days later, the expectant mother came back, holding in her arms a bouncing baby boy. The baby’s name was Kizza, for he followed the twins in the order of birth! Had it not been the coincidental presence of the visitors from the city, the woman and her baby would have perished in funny circumstances...

* * * * *

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

The cosmic forces rioted. There was disturbance resulting from cold and hot physical nature of the world. The heavenly bodies, air, water and the soil lost stability. The outcome was the boiling of blood, brain, bile and other fluids in human makeup. Global warming increased. Drought, floods, famine, duplicity and double standards shot like poison arrows. Marriages broke down as earthen pots. The borrowers came in a sheep's clothing to do the hit and run in the pocket of their relatives and friends. They did not come back to appreciate save for returning what they had borrowed. Lovers did not actualize the promises and pledges made. It was a period of betrayal and treachery in all forms. Traders tampered with the spring balances; there was no justice. If it were in existence, it was measure for measure and it was the rich that measured and stood the measure.

In the neighbourhood the owls hooted; the hyenas laughed, frogs croaked and foxes howled. There were strange sounds in the world that did not auger well in the ears of the most sophisticated creatures in the circles of creation. There was dire need to look at Neanderthal man and Mujaajithropus with a critical mind's eye as they were displayed on a dichotomous key to carry out clear microscopic exactness in the arena of comparison in order to appreciate the workings of man. Was there feasibility of finding out that the Neanderthal man would be intelligent, cool and of good temperament? Would Mujaajithropus be idiotic, careless and full of tempest in all of his nature and doings, therefore barbaric and rough? These were the ideas man was grappling with, and as result, had found a pretext that the white race hit the black race on the head. That he had driven a six-inch nail in the black man's head, swept everything on the continent, leaving nothing on the scene but poverty, disease and ignorance. The black man said this was too wide a gulf and so deep a fathom. The thread that held everything in all circles of life- cultural, religious, economic, social, psychological and spiritual- were weakened and things had fallen apart forever and ever.

At later years the black man was independent, self-contained and had his rights and freedoms from the East coast of Africa to the West coast of Africa; from the Maghreb region to Port Durban in the south. However, trekking on the vast expanse of land, one would see kings

with sharp, hard, long jaws, with protruded flesh on their cheeks and D-shaped tummies as if they were heavy women soon to deliver jackals.

The occasion was in high gear and fever. No matter what stumbling block that came to stand in the way, whether it meant jumping or crawling, or taking time to walk around the obstacle, they would do it to make it a success.

‘Ladies and gentlemen, I take this opportunity to open this function officially. I therefore call upon the Chairperson Local Council I to come and welcome the visitors majestically. Thank you,’ said Demus, smiling and facing the audience. He looked at them straight in the eyes as he handed over the microphone to him.

A SPEECH DELIVERED BY CHAIRPERSON OF KATABAGO VILLAGE, LCI

The visitors from Kampala, Government Officials, Religious leaders, Ladies and Gentlemen from near and far, I welcome you here in Katabago village. I congratulate you on having braved the tree stumps and stones, kidnappings and murderers, thirst and hunger to reach here. Feel at home and share with us the little we have for these are the hard times economically, socially and politically. We live in fear without hope for tomorrow like a drunkard’s cockerel. We have been hit by drought, famine, inflation, corruption on top of everything and now OTT tax. We no longer get in touch with our relatives; businesses are now paralyzed, love connections have broken down, and sending school tuition is hard because of high charges. Even those who have been running Mobile Money Business have been knocked down and out of the ring.

We have been pushed against the wall by our political brothers. It is very absurd. This time around it isn’t the white man’s invention. Time’s not our ally but God is with us. We’ll cross the sea and get out of Pharaoh’s jaws. This isn’t my day; it’s Old Man’s day and our visitors. Once again welcome to Katabago village. Thank you for checking on us. We’ve been neglected for so long. Today you’ve made us resurrect to life. We’re poor but we can’t fail to host you as long as you stay. You’ll feel comfortable here until you go back to check on your families and work.

God bless me and you in our struggle.

30th June, 2022

Chairperson, Katabago Village, LCI

The gathered people clapped their hands thunderously. The leaves which had started yellowing fell down from their branches because of clapping, stamping, cheering and jeering. The action added on gravity.

‘Disc Jockey, I request you to throw us into an interlude by playing us a song: *Tulikubunkenke ffenero*,’ said the Chairperson.

The DJ adjusted his headsets on his head and ears, and with ambidextrous, artistic finger movements, he applied DJ scratch and laser shots as he mixed and blended the recorded music as if he were reminding freedom fighters the Bush days, Old Man being one among them. Despite the message carried by the song the crowd swayed their heads from side to side like a tree in a light wind.

The MC invited the Human Rights Man to deliver his speech.

A SPEECH DELIVERED BY THE HUMAN RIGHTS MAN

Our respected old men of the village of Katabago, Government Officials, Religious leaders, Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you for coming from all the directions of the country to be with us here.

I thank so much the Youths, their parents and natives for the wonderful welcome you’re giving us. It’s a sign of love and trust. They say: ‘An empty sack cannot stand’. We’re now standing here because of your generosity and open handedness.

I work with Uganda Human Rights Commission (UHRC). Before I briefly talk about our work, I implore you to be faithful and trustworthy citizens, who are peace loving and law abiding. Rights, peace and freedom begin with you. The first person to give you peace is you yourself. It then spreads to other people. Respect yourselves. Do away with violence and hate. Treat others as you would want them treat you.

It's very absurd to realize that Leaders no longer respect themselves. They have been swallowed by greed; they cheat and tell lies to those they lead. When they commit evils, the led now become the scapegoat. They imprison them, torture them and, after the damages are done; this's when the truth comes out that the crimes were done by the leaders! Investigations are not worth and forthcoming. Can you investigate yourself?

I have a humble request. Whereas you run to us to redress your problems, we also need your help and cooperation. Let's work together to get positive results. Be your own journalist and your brothers and sisters. The 'I don't' care attitude' is sending us to doom. Let's stop domestic violence, robbery, fighting, cheating, jealous and malice. Therefore, there will be no way the authority will cheat us!

Allow me one minute highlight the challenges we have in our Department. There is blockage of the right to liberty, mysterious murders, poor working conditions, sexual and gender-based violence. Child labour, limited or no access to health services, gaps in the existing policies, lack of quality education, diseases, especially HIV/AIDS and Cancer, inadequate participation in leadership and lack of clean water, food and a right to life. Wars and refugees problems are weighing heavily on us. Will overstay in power give others a chance of participation in leadership? The problems Africa faces emanate from **OVERSTAYING**. The more you procrastinate, the more you cheat, embezzle and grab. The crimes accumulate. The gallows stand waiting for us.

I have some questions to pose: who has caused the wars? Who spreads the disease, who rapes- animals? Who embezzles? Who tortures, evicts and grabs? Who destroys the environment? Do you know who will torture you, your family, relatives and friends tomorrow? Oh, brothers and sisters, did the torturer know that he will be torturing today in safe houses? Then, will you be torturing tomorrow? If not, who will be torturing? It may be the person you tortured yesterday. Ladies and gentlemen, use the power of your head that God gave. God gave; He finished his work. The remaining work is ours. Be clever like a snake!

Will the blame games, playing double standards help to build us? Will animalistic tendencies like torture, exploitation, closing social media, selfishness and greed help us? We do evils in the

dark but when light comes in the morning, everything is exposed like a heap of dung on the top of the mountain!

Who is right? Leaders? Let them pick a stone and throw it at us, or let's pick it and throw it at them. The last question is how's the stand of your heart? Is it clean?

We need renewal and rejuvenation. We need mind and heart cleansing. We need love and it must flow from north to south; from west to east.

Politicians cheat with a metal, words and the authority entrusted to them. Entrusted to them, Hmmm! By who? Some go ahead and cheat with the Holy Book. God forbid. Some of us are part time people of God, or we don't even part time. Why are we doing this and what does it show? - What is deep in our hearts? How shall we solve our problems when the freedom of expression is taken away from us? The perishing of the human race begins with the death of communication. The world was created from communication- from the word. 'Let there be. Let there be...' This was the word of God that brought the world into existence. Who's he that's stopping people from speaking? This is an ENEMY of the people!

Unity and truth are lacking. This is a serious problem. Let's have one word; let's be one people. ONE WORD, ONE PEOPLE. It is unity and togetherness that will liberate us. Let's beat the enemy down and raise the friendship up. Politicians are the enemies of the people. Enemy number ONE!

Last but not least, spread the word wherever you go and do. Thank you for coming; thank you for hosting us. Keep the fire burning and keep the hope alive.

Thank you so much again for lending me your ears.

Allahu Akubar

20th June, 2022

The speech of the Human Rights Man impressed all the people. Their hearts skipped a beat. It was more of a revelation and cleanser than just mere politicking and verbosity. They realized that they still had a lot to do and a long way to go, especially in the area of fighting

against the enemies of life. The citizenry needed rigorous revamping and methods of working to improve the stinking, oppressive leadership. Many citizens did not know that the doldrums and turbulent times they were in now, was the trickster's plans and schemes drafted by the hypocritical devil long time ago, and now it had started flowering. It was now giving bitter sweet fruits of labour to the Common man. The peaceful sleep they claimed to have brought had turned to nodding sleep or disease.

A SPEECH DELIVERED BY THE LAWYER

The Government Officials, Religious leaders, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good afternoon.

It's a very rewarding day and we should all feel blessed for this kind of meeting. You're charming and welcoming people, which is a rare thing in the present modern world. We're here today to respond to the call of the Youths from this place. They are getting an education in higher institutions of learning in Kampala. I hope our meeting will be educative and an eye opener to all of us who are here and those who are not here. You'll take and spread the message.

I can't absolutely say that every man is over ambitious, if I can go to extremes or covetous, or passionate, but every man you see around you has substantial pride in his composition or make up to feel and hate or resent the least despising. The Over Top Tax (OTT) is so despising that any normal human being under the sun can't stomach it.

Men are much more not prone to, or unwilling to have their weaknesses and their imperfections revealed, or put to light, than their crimes. Men can easily forget the death of their parents, but not contempt from their fellow men through land grabbing, evictions, torture, lack of freedom of expression and tax burdens. The list is endless! A case in point is: never call a man a servant, silly, ignorant, a pig, or even badly brought up in poverty and that he has nothing to eat in his house or awkward; he will loath you more and longer than if you tell him clearly that you think him a villain or a fiend or a scallywag or a dictator. To show you how you would hurt a man's pride by showing the world that he is not moneyed. Never borrow money from the boss in privacy or make any deal in a dark corner, but when there are people. Go straight away; say to him that you need to borrow from him in the presence of others. For the sake of not being

undermined, he will be a lender; likewise let's go straight to the oppressors and tell them enough is enough; we can no longer take more of this. Tell them we need freedom and liberty. We need such and such services- a health facility, a good road, good schools...not armoured vehicles and snipers. Who can miss the target of death? Ah, then those dictators on the negative screen of history would not be here dictating!

The systems are broken. The institutions are not independent. Let's be the Achilles of today to lift ourselves from the present predicament. They have hit hard on the common man, but this should not cripple our stamina, the Hercules and Samson we have in us. Let us groom the inextinguishable and unquenchable tigress that will cleanse the slattern hearts of evil men. Evil men must be checked. This is done by the sinew and physique of our unity and brotherhood to shake off dust from our lives to create conducive future for the coming generation. What's the use of leaving behind a tomorrow for our children that is pitchy, inky and murky? A tomorrow full of nigrification, infuscation and denigration?

Time is not so friendly. I feel blessed to have had this opportunity to meet you in this beauteous village to share what actually is affecting us. Don't fear to raise your voices; we're here to help and show each other the way, especially in issues pertaining to legal matters. When the grabber grabs, don't give him a breast to suckle and a deaf ear. Come, we shall do the needful. We know that there are stumbling blocks and hiccups though. Let not the pain and trauma weigh us down. La luta continua...

Let my thanks go to you all.

God bless you.

June, 2022

A SPEECH DELIVERED BY OLD MAN

Our precious Guests from the city, Government Officials, and Religious leaders- should I call you Ladies and Gentlemen or poor citizens? I am very privileged to welcome you to this colourful and special occasion. My colleague said this is my day. Thank you for dedicating this

day to me. It's my birthday and the fact that I survived the horrific road accident I thank you and Allah for the great contribution to restore my life to normal.

As citizens, we're living and partly living, without hope for tomorrow. Survival is minimal. We live on empty promises. My grandson and our Chairman filled papers for me, telling me that I would be receiving two thousand shillings- half a dollar every month to cater for me. Seven years down the road, I haven't received anything save for hearing about it. If I hadn't planted those ovacado, mango, orange and jack trees, I would be jerking with hunger, scratching myself with teeth like a goat.

I would like to meet the youths after the dancing competition. A learner who wakes up late to go to school is better than the one who doesn't even bother to go there. It's too late but we still have a chance to struggle. I had a dream last night. I heard fainting voices of highly paid workers calling for help. The voices dwindled to echoes of silence. They were calling God to come to their rescue. If they had failed to listen to the cries of those they represent, why are they calling God to help them? God will not listen!

Leadership comes from God. Power comes from God and the people. A king must be rich in order to give his people but not impoverish them. He should protect them, not to torture and murder them. A king should not over tax his subjects nor deny them liberty. He should not listen to rumours and follow sheepishly. If he receives rumours, he should listen, sieve the information and then judge accordingly. He must be wise. He shouldn't bar anyone from reaching him. What is essential is to scrutinize the visitor. Anger should not be his tool and he has to welcome everyone- the young, the old, the poor and the executive. You feed all the dogs, for you don't know which one will hunt and save you. A king must not spare the rod to spare the child. He should get authority from the people in addition to what he has, and when he punishes, no one will blame him; he has to be impartial.

A good king is accountable for his people. There is a contract between the government and her people.

On gifts, a king should receive gifts but he shouldn't devour them; instead he keeps them in granaries. In time of hazards he gives them back to his people, especially in time of famine and other catastrophes.

He shouldn't surround himself with bad advisers, and finally the king shouldn't tamper with the subjects' piece of land and their women.

I am now in my evening and the sun is setting. However, what I see doesn't bring a smile on the mothers' cheeks. United we stand, divided we fall. Many words can't save a mad man from shackles. Wake up you wretched of the earth. I must leave you in peace.

May the good Lord protect you, give you good thoughts and strength; may He keep you focused until we get to Bethlehem safe and sound.

Thank you all. Enjoy!

June, 2022

As the heat of the occasion stood, it was a grand meeting. The preparers had to do some reinforcement in terms of food and drinks. The people kept flowing in. Some came from as far as Kasese, the Central Region, Eastern, Northern Uganda and West Nile. They had not been invited. The message had spread like bush fire in the dry season wind that students from Kanungu District studying at Makerere University and Aga Khan schools had visitors from Human Rights High Commission. This was an indication that the people had a burning desire to listen to these people and get to know and appreciate their Rights which had been abused by some people especially the politicians, who had become a thorn in the flesh.

'This food and drinks will not be enough because we didn't expect such a turn up,' commented Kigatire, looking at them in a thoughtful manner.

'Why didn't the youths tell us about this? Possibly they didn't know,' retorted the Reverend's wife. The village women were quick thinkers. They walked their talk. They were active and agile. They immediately gathered together to forge the way forward to make sure they fed the visitors, for this was a turning point in the social and history of their life.

‘We’re going to go back to houses to make reinforcement. Bring whatever you have. We’ll be grateful, ok!’ suggested Mrs. Nyefuza.

‘That’s a good idea,’ said Mama Boonabaana, nodding her head in appreciation.

How the news spread, no one knew. Demus and Precious were receiving many phone calls from the city business people that they wanted to supply them with drinks like beer, soda and mineral water.

‘But how did these traders in Kampala know that we have a soiree here,’ he asked in a surprised way.

‘I know not who tipped them but with coming of social media you cannot ask how the information flies,’ answered Precious.

‘Even if we wanted those drinks, we wouldn’t buy from them. Do you know them?’

‘No!’ answered Precious.

‘And nowadays it is very complicated to trust business people. Did you hear of a man who sold plastic rice to a certain school? The rice caused stomach upsets and many students were hospitalized!’ warned Demus.

‘Those are common occurrences in our society. I hear there’re some malicious people who do poison food and drinks to silence their enemies or rivals; and to make matters worse the poisoning is done during the time of packing!’

‘What?’

‘This is the reason why people have resorted to self-service. Others go ahead and pack their own food and drinks when they are going for meetings, seminars or workshops. The kind of poison they use isn’t the same as rat poison; it doesn’t kill instantly; it destroys the victim in a slow motion. It can even take five years or so for the victim to perish. They say there’s also poison that the killers put in the office or any room, or envelopes and some other places so that when the victim inhales it, he or she dies with time,’ concluded Precious.

‘Then where are we heading to?’

‘God knows!’ said Demus conclusively, Precious told the business man on telephone that they had already bought them, and that they should wait for another chance.

* * * * *

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

The month of June fused into July. Oh, how time flew! How the years go by! Every day or Month or year had its own things and happenings. God’s creatures kept wondering why. Some could ask: ‘why me?’ The old man had once said: ‘When you grow old, you see a lot’. And, ‘He who has an anus can’t swear that he will never suffer from dysentery.’ On top of this the bushes were infested with many leopards. Sometimes a finger or a toe would stray to touch their anals. This brewed consequences. Mistrust grew day by day. Time had lost its meaning and credibility.

As the party was still going on, for it had been extended to last for seven days, something strange happened. ‘On a bad morning, the unfortunate one meets a yellow dog,’ Old Man used to tell people. They would laugh at him. Some people went ahead to call him a clown or a comedian. However, they were soon to see how clownish and comedic he was. You could not understand something not until you experienced it- good or nasty, its goodness or nastiness would be felt in the heart, body and soul. ‘If you want to know how sweet a yellow banana is, put it in the mouth,’ said Old Man as he took tea at his birthday party.

‘Do you want to tell me that you haven’t been around?’ asked Ntare.

‘Yes, I have. It’s now an hour since I left. I had gone to the Big Hospital to check on Shaggy’s son. He has been hospitalized. He tried to call me but the call couldn’t go through. And do you know what? In Kambuga men who do phone repair have hit a jack pot today,’ narrated Rwamubende, cackling.

‘What do you mean? A jack pot?’ questioned Ntare inquisitively as other colleagues were also listening attentively to hear what would come out of his mouth.

‘As people made phone calls in vain, they thought their handsets had gone faulty so they had to take them to mechanics,’ he said rubbing his hands like he was washing. ‘They did so because little did they know that the handsets had been tampered with, blocked because of the new OTT tax thing.’

‘What’s OTT and what’s it all about?’ asked Kamuhanda.

‘It’s social media tax. Every phone user has to pay 200= per day to access it- to access internet. But why is it that they’re so quick to lock users’ phones. What could be the implication? Whenever there’s an emergency, they take long to respond, why so quick on this one?’ wondered Rwamubende.

‘But we buy airtime. Isn’t that double taxation if not triple taxation?’ asked Rwankosa, in shock, adding: ‘There must be hidden agenda especially when it comes to MPs’ continued increase on the funding of their luxury and good life. They’re high lifers.’

‘So you mean what the politicians were discussing has come to roost?’ asked Aidajankidoo.

‘Those are betrayers. Do you still trust them, looking at how they keep on increasing their salaries and allowances as those they represent die of disease, hunger, poverty and fatal road accidents?’ asked Rwamubende confidently, for he had known the trend of the situation.

‘If you can look keenly at the whole setting and scheme, can you be hoodwinked that it’s all about increasing income tax base to improve the conditions of the people. Do you know anything concerned with the collected taxes- its accountability? What’s there to show in our impoverished villages? Good roads, clean water, good schools, good housing, good hospitals? There’s no value for money. Have you tried to look at the beds in the Big Hospital? They’re suffering from pot holes that can swallow a big he-goat as people are suffering from malaria and cancer. We’re doomed. The voters are very unfortunate; we’re born to suffer under the heavy weight of politicians,’ said Old Man, rolling his eyes at a terrific speed in their sockets.’

‘Most of the businesses are going to go with the wind because of this taxation,’ said the Human Rights Man. ‘And this’s intended to impoverish, suppress people’s voice, oppress and

trample on the rights of man and woman. How can you cut off communication in so short a time? They're killing people's freedom of speech,' he concluded.

'Ehh, ehh, ayayaya!' ululated Mbogo, jumping up in the air like demonstrators. Is your memory still working well, people of God? Do you still recall what happened up here in Kanungu? The Restoration of Ten commandments? How, how?' he said, stammering. 'How did things begin? The followers were stopped from communicating by sewing their lips. They perished; it's still haunting us. And now communication has been cut off? I sleep with my mother, Keishamaza!' he said, spitting on his fore finger, then cutting his throat and pointing it to the sky as a swearing statement of anger.

'We're finished. This is a doomed nation,' retorted Rwakuburya.

'And my friend in the city has just sent me a message that Makerere University students have been taken to the coolers because of protesting against the Over the Top Tax (OTT) just near the House as they were going to present their views to the Speaker. The message says they were grabbed, thrown on pick up vehicle and whisked to the main Police Station,' Precious informed the congregation.

Hehehe, this's what they call rumormongering on social media. Is it a rumour or the truth? Shame upon them! We're going to demonstrate until the Son of God comes back. We're going to become part time Christians or put Christianity at the side and protest against oppression and slavery. Hoo! Those greedy, malicious and devilish MPs- we're waiting for them. They're as frightened as Macbeth before the ghost of Banquo,' prostrated Rwamubende.

The gathering became frustrated and very disturbed. Some mourned and pined. It was as if cold water had been splashed on them. They became moody and lost the jovial mood. They were in a rowdy state. All along the Lawyer was silent, wrapped in thought. He emerged in a state of oblivion and said: 'It'll be challenged in Courts of Law. Some Mafias may think that they have raped Mother Earth but the law is here and whereas people go, the nation is here to stay. This is political machination and motives!' said the Lawyer. The news was so disturbing that the Lawyer and the Human Rights Man requested the host to go as early as possible to put off fire before it gutted the nation. They gave the Youths and Old Man a valuable gift from their

purse and told them that they will share a lot in the course of time to save the human race, for the Ogres were ready to swallow the new baby from the womb.

Life was a journey. It was smooth; it was rough. All the same people were happy and life moved on. Some joined politics and became rich. Others like Gypsies wandered the globe looking for employment. Yet others became poorer and poorer as they were fed on lies of a good tomorrow full of prosperity. Those who had sharp vision had already changed to first class people through the tax payers' money. Some were born, some got married. Others died and they were soon forgotten and the killers were never known. Those who were not good Christians blamed God to be the one responsible for this. The nation was engulfed in a state of terror and fear, which was political, economic, social and psychological. This grew day by day as hope sank into the bottomless pit dug by politicians, who were brought on board by the voters. Politicians were like the crow that was sent to assess the situation only to stay there eating, drinking and sitting on warm, well-cautioned sofas, sleeping in executive lodges only to come back after the expiry of five year term to mock suffering citizens, drowned into destitution.

The memories of Excise Tax and Head Tax were still fresh in minds of men and women. Every good listener that was still living had a story to tell.

The village octogenarians were very resourceful. The fact that they had experienced longevity which was an extraordinary gift from the creator, the young were lucky. Doodu, Mr. Bean and their sisters listened to their mother's narratives at the fire side. It was not fiction.

'My children, you were born yesterday but if a person says: 'Go and pay Head Tax' you know that he's your arch enemy. Pass fire wherever he passes.' Kigatire narrated the story to her children with fresh memories like it was yesterday. She continued: 'The methods of collection were coarse, crude and barbaric. After its collection, it was hard to tell what it was used for. If the lakes and rivers had the mouths to speak, they would tell you how many men drowned in there. Most of the widows you see in this village their husbands drowned in river Ishasha. Others drowned into Lakes Victoria, Kyoga, Kwana, Albert to be the food for crocodiles...

‘Mummy, how did they drown into the water?’ asked Mr. Bean as he snuggled closer to her mother to listen for more. ‘And if I were old by then I would marry those women.’ The sisters laughed.

‘You’re proving to be a fool, my son. Was it a good experience? Nevertheless, the mother knew those were thoughts of young children, for he was twelve. Women were more or less like widows because the men wouldn’t sleep in the houses. The tax collectors would come and storm us at night, armed to the teeth. If you had no money in the house, which of course was not there like it is today, their arms would be tied behind them with sisal ropes or ropes made from fishing nets and would be flanked by *Askaris* to *Gombolola* prison until the tax was cleared. They didn’t give them food. It was the wife to carry food every day to save the prisoner from hunger,’

‘Was my dad imprisoned too?’ asked Mr. Bean. As a child, he thought that his father was untouchable and extendible. He thought him a Ninja. The sisters kept quiet, listening and pushing firewood into the fire to keep it alive and strong.

‘Not once, not twice. We were badly off then. We would cook early so that the men would eat and, at around Seven thirty, they would carry their mats and blankets to sleep in the cold open air on the top of that hill where you graze cows and goats and collect firewood,’ she demonstrated by pointing a finger to the direction of the hill. It was not until the voice of a saviour shouted loudest that the tax was scraped off. Did we die because the tax was scraped off? No, life improved and became better but because history repeats itself, it has now resurfaced in form of OTT tax- God forbid!’ The mother evoked God to intervene. ‘However, we should put money where we see. Head Tax bred drowning and sleeping in the open air. We’re widows in the existence of our husbands. It was not until a voice was heard say: “Liberate my people”, that relief reigned.’

It was no wonder that what the young ones heard of, and saw, they thought that it was happening for the first time in the history of creation of the world. It was through the eyes of elders and books of history that they realized that the events were recurrent. The story of the king and the queen was now here for the second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh time! The

only difference was the former was white while the latter was as black as a devil in the night. The devil had white teeth and whenever it laughed, the milk teeth would hide the devilish traits and characteristics that hoodwinked and covered the eyes of voters. The sharp light rays that were emitted by the yellowish- sun envelope blinded the voters. Due to blindness, they were now falling in the abyss because they had no one to lead them, but a Serpent.

In sooth, the voters were tired of –isms- Phariseism, Machiavellianism, Charlatanism, Communism, Capitalism and Individualism. The politicians' cajolery, flattery and jugglery were too much. The citizens who had all along thought that they were in utopia woke up from oblivion to realize that they were inhabitants of Hades.

The Youths of Katabago village yearned for change to the zenith. Day and night, they dreamed of going out to, at least, enjoy themselves, and have peace of mind. They started changing their names to, for example: Preciousnov, Patricknov, Bahatinov. There were a variety of names: Bagaale changed to Bagarello, Tom to Tomaino, Vicent to Vicensio; an indication that they had too much passion for relocating to foreign countries in other continents.

'I know why the caged bird sings; I know why people drown in Mediterranean Sea; and I know why we have refugees here...' said Ntare, wearing an air of sadness on his face.

'Hmm! This's what we call the absurdity of life. Look here! Listen! Did you know that politicians make a lot of money from refugees? When they receive fifty refugees, they register one hundred! When the assessors come, they gather relatives and friends for presentation! The difference is pocketed in their rumen,' said Rwamubende confidently. 'You'll never know why some people are filthy rich. Any way they work hard and smart. Be nice if you want to die poor. Mercy is an enemy of business. You must be as remorseless as an MP,' he stated conclusively.

'What! What a f**k!' Kamahanga wondered, for the news threw him in a state of quandary. 'I've known why people drive; why they build mansions with all that go with them- swimming pools, tracking cameras, sauna...'

'To my chagrin, the tycoons will boast that they worked hard and that they bought voters. Do they work harder than us in this village? From Monday to Monday, January to January, we bend, stoop to wrestle a living from dry and hard soils so that we can send our children to school

and get something in our bellies. By the time we come home from gardens we hardly have strength to touch our sweet hearts. See! Their children go to good schools outside the country because of the money they extort from us,' said Rwakuburya as if he was regretting why God brought him into the world. Our children go to poor schools. They walk in rain and bare-footed. This's what the world can do for us,' he lamented.

'Thievery has now shifted from the political arena to educational, health, and other Ministries! If an institution can teach courses that don't exist or if they exist they are not accredited, what else do you want to know? Do you know why we have quack doctors, who are brave enough to administer an operation in the theatre like they're slaughtering a goat? Isn't this playing on one's life? Do we buy life from market? Let's react,' exhorted Nzabandora.

'We've been lenient for a long time. The last straw that will break the camel's back is the OTT and murder of women as if the murderers didn't come from women! We're tired; enough is enough' said Kigatire, raising the hem of her dress, narrowing the V-shaped thighs seen in the silhouette as if she was going to undress. What was going on? Something was cooking.

'In the past, education was organized in such a way that it improved the lives of people. You can see the style politics is arranged and being played; it's intended to cheat people and plunder all the country's resources. Religion has also followed suit. Some years back, helpless people would seek shelter from the house or roof of God. Today it's a path less travelled! The way we love our politicians, we women- this is betrayal. Our MPs are Judases! We must demonstrate if, if something isn't done soon,' said Korugambo hysterically, removing her blouse from her breasts. This was serious indeed! Women had been cool and calm, singing praises; now what had gone wrong? They say a woman betrayed a man in the Garden of Eden; it was now time for a man to betray a woman in the country through misrule and impoverishment.

The occasion which had started on a high note and peaceful socialization was now melting like gee in a hot saucepan on fire.

It was time for the two visitors and their driver to leave for the mission. As they stood up to leave, the Lawyer requested the DJ to play for them at least two numbers.

Precious walked humbly toward the Lawyer and whispered in his ear: 'which ones?'

‘I Cry for Freedom’ by Yvonne Chaka Chaka and **‘I’ll Be There for You’** by Jess Glynne,’ said the Lawyer in a low tone of voice.

The DJ clicked on the buttons and slid the equalizers- Duu duu duu duu I cry for freedom...The crowd jumped out of their seats and jumped up and down, raising their arms in the air. They made an ululation, slapping on their mouths like warriors at war. They swayed their heads, gyrated, booed and stamped their feet on the ground. This was a new beginning.

The Disc Jockey scratched and scratched... Then the second track played. The crowd crooned along with it:

When the tears are rolling down your face

And it feels like yours was the only heart to break

When you come back home and all the lights are out, ooh

And you getting used to no one else being around

Oh, oh, I’ll be there

When you need a little love, I got a little love to share...

Incredible! Mr. Bean came closer to the MC. Demus bent down a bit to listen to the young boy, who whispered in his ear. Scarcely had the boy moved two steps away when the DJ paused. The MC had a communication. He wanted to invite a certain young lady, who, after receiving the microphone introduced herself. Her name was Edible Woman. She hailed from the city. She was wearing a short, white, transparent skirt and a white blouse, embroidered with red laces that stretched to just above her navel. On her feet were grey, high heeled shoes, with a sharp-pointed end made of a glittering- gold metal. The left side of her short hair cut was tinted yellow and the right one was tinted blue. The lines of her eye lashes were black and bold. The eye pencil that worked on them displayed the value for money that purchased it. Just above and below the eyes, there were other two lines in green. The face was brown but the arms and the legs were black, and spotted like a leopard. She had small, sharp breasts. She was figure eight,

tall, with well- curved features. She was a beauty. Some village observers thought her djinn, but others thought her a fashionist and a modernist.

Whereas they still had the contending thoughts, she was going to open the party socially. Who would offer among men to match forward and open the party with her? Men were full of misgiving and, therefore, cowards! Young as he was, Mr. Bean volunteered to do so; he was twelve. Believe me Reader, people have talents. Most of the talents, like natural resources, lie wasted on earth, untapped!

The second track the Lawyer had requested played. She stepped on the stage. Young Mr. Bean, with his arms, cleared the way through the crowd to join her in the arena, saying: ‘Mafia *tatya*’- Mafia does not fear. ‘No matter how risky and dangerous the mission is, Mafia has to brave it,’ he concluded very determined to dance with the strange lady, who also looked like a Mafia. She half-stretched her arms in front of her, with the hands in fists. She bent in slow motion, danced down- *chini* – to tune herself to the height and level of Mr. Bean. Mr. Bean danced the same strokes as the lady. What took the onlookers by surprise was that the queen and king dancers had never met before. They had never made rehearsals. ‘How come they match and rhyme?’ wondered the congregation.

He held her hands. As a pendulum bob, he swung her round, to and fro. Coming closer, they attracted, repelled, gyrated and looked into each other’s eyes, smiling. They danced monkey dance. Mr. Bean was a monkey. Edible Woman was coconut tree. The monkey climbed on to the tree and grasped it with its legs, with spread arms as the tree passed its two branches under his armpit and shook the bums following the rhythm of the hit. The breasts pierced on Mr. Beans chest, pretended pain by jerking back a bit and yet clinging on her. Edible woman stood at ease as Mr. Bean was at attention but his legs had passed though the passage between her legs. They were all leaning backwards, bringing the centre of creation closer, rubbing and shaking their bums, wriggling and wiggling. They sent the crowd into excitement and cheering. They trotted, swung around, stooped, and applying all gymnastic and acrobatic movements and strokes. It was wonderful!

Mr. Bean alighted. They now switched to doggie dance. He was now behind, displaying their strokes, shaking bums. The crowd cheered, jeered booed as they threw money in front of them. The DeeJay did his spinning and played around with the equalizers as he adjusted his headphones on his ears and head. It was fantastic!

‘Where did my son learn how dance?’ asked the mother, taken by surprise.

‘Never say that my dog doesn’t eat eggs or meat,’ replied Namata, laughing.

For a short while, the social time had made them forget their problems- their politicians, social media tax and the new armoured vehicles and snipers to do the watching and the shooting of their enemies...

‘God doesn’t sleep, He can’t eat pancakes. He was the God of Abraham, God of Jacob, God of Moses...’ said Yozofinah, beating her lips. ‘You can watch how we’re gathered here. Do we have soldiers guarding us? Sometimes we feel we must live exaggerated and hyperbolic lives. It’s funny for us human beings to pretend that we’re larger than life!’ concluded Yozo.

* * * * *

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Transparency and accountability was a good game. The talent flowered, bore fruits, and the workers did the harvest. It was at this very occasion; what about in other instances especially in political field? Was there transparency and accountability?

Galatians 6:7-9

Do not deceive yourselves; no one makes a fool of God. People will reap exactly what they sow. If they sow in the field of their natural desires, from it they will gather the harvest of death...

Edible Woman picked the money from the ground. Arm in arm, she walked with Mr. Bean into the house to share the proceeds of the day. The sharers did not complain. It was done in light and equally. The on-lookers wished them well, saying: ‘They deserve it’. And added: ‘Unlike those gormandizers called politicians who eat the poor citizens’ sweat to the bone marrow.’

Mr. Bean came and rubbed himself against his mother as a cat does against one’s legs. She felt something but thought it was a cat. When she turned, at her right side was her child. She glanced at him. They looked at each other in the face and smiled. His mother was the treasurer... She was an admirer as she recalled her son’s dancing strokes. It was her first time to see him!

‘Mummy,’ the young, innocent boy whispered in her mother’s ear.

‘Wangi,’ she replied.

‘I’ll use this money to pay my school fees, buy a school bag and other scholastic materials. And I’ll take it tomorrow early in the hens,’ he concluded. The mother laughed this time round because of the phrase “tomorrow in the hens”.

‘Don’t worry, my son. I’ll use my mobile money to send the money to the Head teacher.’

‘No, Mummy! I’ll trek there myself because the charges on mobile money are too high. Many people who deal in Mobile Money Business have carried their small tables and umbrellas back home,’ said the young boy, very worried because of the word mobile money.

‘It’s ok, my dear; let the day break,’ she concluded in a matter-of-fact voice.

The woman who was standing closer to the mother and son tapped Kigatire on the shoulder and said in a low tone: ‘There’s a reason why they’re over taxing us. It has been tough time for Highway robbers and pickpockets. A person would send money from his room or garden as soon as it was got, and there were high chances of a voiding those bad people. Do they want to take us to the olden days when travellers would stack much money on their bodies-socks, pockets and they were susceptible and prone to thieves and hijackers? Possibly this’s a deal being hatched and schemed by them.’

‘True, my sister! Robbery, theft and stealing are going to increase,’ supplemented Kigatire in an appreciative mood for what the woman had said. It was a fact.

‘You see I come from Kyajura- Ishasha. To the look of things, there’s no value for money, and paying the exorbitant tax is a waste of time like a school boy writing a complaint letter on the Head boy. In just a stone throw from our house, there’s a dam; it’s complete but electric wires just pass over our houses. My father passed on last month. He died in darkness to be eaten by rats!’ she said sorrowfully as her eyes saw at a distance. She removed her handkerchief from his purse and rubbed the tears that had been dancing in her eyes.

‘Most of the people here have kept their mobile phones. They’re out of use. It has become very hard to pay for charging, air time, depositing, sending, receiving, withdrawing. When you go to the shop to buy the phone, you pay tax too. This’s beyond human imagination! Where can we run to? Politicians are remorseless and unfeeling. They’re crocodiles; the one time they come here in five years, they kneel down and shed crocodile tears. God in heaven’s watching their piggish behaviour,’ said Namata, regretting why they voted them to power.

‘The politicians are a man who remembers a woman at night when the rod riots and strikes like a terrorist. After fulfilling his mission, a woman is a heap of rubbish at the side of the road in a rotten city,’ said the Reverend’s wife. ‘Sometimes the conversation about those thieves pisses me off; it creates a bitter taste in my mouth at the time of eating,’ she added.

It was evening. The chilly air stream from the nearby Bwindi Impenetrable Forest hit the gathering to remind those who had forgotten to bring with them their coats and hooded jackets.

Nevertheless, the hooded jackets would soon be taxed. There was no way people would hide meat from fire; it was jumping off from the frying pan to directly fall in fire. There was a period of luck; there was a period of curses. All in all, it was journeying on a smooth rough road. This was what life was made of. A collection of all the happenings gave her meaning.

The official part of the occasion was over, successfully. The change of time or seasons symbolized that nothing was static. It was just a matter of time- the best doctor, the best healer, the greatest consoler. There was time for everything.

It was time for the DJ to do something that would drive the coldness that had invaded them. It was time for competition between the old and the young through dancing antics.

The young energetic youths organized and arranged the place where they were going to perform. It was an improvised, temporary theatre. The young sat facing the old. There was enough space between them where the performance was going to be carried out. The astonishing part of this African performance was that it was spontaneous. The performers had not rehearsed, not a single day!

Koru was the leader and others would join in, in the Kiga folksong. They did not have many instruments. They had one drum and a jerrycan that was accompanied by clapping. Men and women made a semi-circle. Korugambo took the lead and drummed as well. Edible Woman took up the jerrycan. Three men and three women came from the side of the old. Three girls and three boys were from the side of the youths. The two musicians, who had joined them from the city, were judges too. The title of the song was: **Twine Abagyenye Bareire** (We've visitors who slept in this home). One two three, start.

Twine abagyenye bareire (leader)

We've visitors who slept in this home

Twine abagyenye (chorus)

We've visitors

Twine abagyenye bareire

We've visitors who slept in this home

Twine abagyenyi

Abagyenyi naboha? (Leader)

Whose visitors are these?

Twine abagyenyi

Abagyenyi naboha?

Twine abagyenyi

Kanabawe, Old Man (leader)

They are yours, Old Man

Twine abagyenyi bareire

Twine abagyenyi

Kakye kakye maawe, kakye kakye maawe

However small it is,

Kawera omukanunga

It supports the stomach

Twine abagyenyi bareire

Twine abagyenyi

Nyowe ngambe noha, nyowe ngambe noha?

Whom should I talk with?

Kanyegambire nanyine'ka

Let me talk with the mother (head of the house or family)

Twine abagyenyi bareire, twine abagyenyi

Twine abagyenyi...

They danced in a pair- a man and a woman, a boy and a girl. The visitors who were not the natives of the place and did not share the same culture with these strong and energetic men and women almost ran away as the dance started. Men and women hit and stamped the ground. The action developed vibrations that sent tremours in the ground. The visitors stood up to take off, thinking that it was an earthquake reading 7.7 on the Richter scale. They were saved by those who were sitting next to them, who explained to them that it was force from their legs that worked on the plates of the earth to produce intense vibrations.

‘Do you know those powerful, yellow vehicles that dig the road?’ asked Edible Woman.

‘Yes,’ replied the man next to her. He continued, ‘They’re called CAT- Caterpillar or Graders.’

‘Aha! Thank you guy! What a freak of a head! I had forgotten,’ exclaimed Edible Woman like she was blaming herself because of falling into a state of oblivion and insensibility.

What amused the viewers were the dance strokes, the tempo and the vigour with which they danced. They raised one leg like a cock, hit the ground and then the other before jumping up, and then down. The woman teased the man by dancing towards him as if to rub their loins together. The man would respond magnetically. As they were just half an inch to come to contact, the woman would jerk, dancing backwards. The man would do the same. They stretched their arms as if to embrace. They exchanged positions as they twisted, writhed and wiggled their bodies like they were boneless.

‘Look at that brown, tall woman,’ said the slender man, pointing a finger at her.

‘Oh, yes! That one,’ said the seatmate, pointing a finger at her, too.

‘Her husband has problems if he’s not a match,’ said the slender man. They laughed, possibly at the back of their minds for roaming in the world of fantasy projections and imaginations.

‘You can’t tell me that such strong and vibrant people should be poor like this. Something must be wrong; something must be a miss! Poor leadership is a curse,’ said one of the musicians from the city.

In the second round, the stage was stormed still by the two groups- the young and the old. The DJ played Lucky Dube’s ‘**A Slave**’

I’m a slave, oh oh oh

A slave...

They danced but there was no life in them- no warmth and zeal. They held each other in arms- loving arms, rubbed lips to lips, chest to chest and loin to loin, but there were no signs of smouldering fire. The veins were Atacama Desert. The bodies were a dry fountain at the road side. There was no hope for the future, for nothing would come out of dryness.

‘I don’t know what’s happening. Could it be the music or?’ chatted the dancing couples.

‘No, the music’s sweet but what’s disturbing you is the message,’ said the lady.

‘Sorry!’ said the man. The hand had strayed down...

‘Don’t you worry; there’re no feelings. I’ve so many ideas running in my mind. Of recent I’ve totally lost focus and morale. The two appetites are all gone,’ said the lady coldly.

The recent 1st July events had paralyzed the nation. The happenings had planted misgivings in the minds of people. They realized that they were ducklings that had to fend for themselves, economically, politically and socially. A wave of realization had dawned on them. The question in their mind was: ‘what next?’

The man looked into the eyes of the lady; the lady did the same. It was a coincidental meeting of ex-lovers, who were feeling the sting of past memories of guilt that seemed like a car beyond repair! This was how the politicians had drowned the Titanic nation!

For the whole night, songs of freedom and liberation were played. Music from Jamaica, South Africa from the likes of Bob Marley, Chaka Chaka, Bobi wine, Ronald Mayinja... hit the air waves to bang the ears of listeners. It was the night of mixed feelings. The working class no longer found it easy to send their old parents, grandparents, relatives and friends some money for upkeep; it was the worst of the time. People's source of income dwindled as that of MPs increased geometrically! This was total madness in the Pearl of Africa.

The villagers and their visitors tried to forget the recent happenings through the social hours. The working of the mind was so complex that memories would keep on coming. No matter how people tried to suppress them, the more the bitter memories forced themselves out to the extent of pressing the victims against the wall of shedding the sickness of the mind through verbal intercourse. The DJ did his best to entertain the people so that they would forget their troubles for a while. A number from Bob Marley boomed. A beautiful girl, dressed in a blue dress and, with chocolate complexion danced towards a gentleman who was dressed in a yellow shirt and cap to request for a dance.

'Excuse me,' 'May I have a dance with you,' requested the lady, smiling.

'It isn't a bad idea and you must pay dance tax before letting you touch me,' said the guy in a yellow cap.

'I'll do that after the dance,' said the lady.

'Terms and conditions apply. You can never trust the weighing scale of a business man, or the words of a politician, who is desperately looking for votes,' replied the guy. Pay instantly,' added the guy, smiling a smile of a guy under chic power, or having been half-shocked by the electric current of love. There was a way boys melted when they were in the presence of dames. The legs and arms weakened. The thoughts wondered as a cloud in the sky on a windy sunny day. The voice would be sweeter; a rare thing in men like rain in the desert and, so was the walking style; the eye contact and generally the body would wax under the influence of fire. The

hair would stand like a porcupine's spikes ready to attack. Finally, the cobra would bulge and would be keen to throw Eve in the Garden of falling and... If any woman felt she wanted to change him, this was the time.

The guy stood up; together they shook their bums. They caressed and held each other in loving arms. They twisted their bodies as an earthworm on a hook, and threw their legs in the air to Bob Marley's rhythm: '**No Woman No Cry**'

No, woman no cry...

... I remember when we used to sit

In the government yard in Trenchtown

Observing the hypocrites

As they would mingle with the good people...

The rulers were the hypocrites; the ruled were the good people. It was absurd!

Everything was gonna be all right. The natives were determined to push on...

* * * * *

CHAPTER NINETEEN

‘Life is a flower in the garden; it blooms and blossoms. It gives wonderful fruits. Then it withers and dies,’ said Old Man as he sat down the youths to give the last word. It was the sixth day. The occasion was coming to an end. ‘You never know, a frog is born with a tail but in few days, it disappears,’ said Old Man. The visitors from different corners of the country graced the event. No one knew how they had come to learn about the event. However, the aroma of the occasion had attracted them. The musicians from Kampala, from Kasese showed too much seriousness mixed with zest and determination. It remained enigma to the inhabitants of Katabago how it had dawned on the people’s mind to give such a nice attendance.

It was eleven in the morning. The visitors had just finished taking their breakfast. They heard a booming sound in the sky.

‘Not all the people you see behind the bars are criminals. Most of them are innocent. The fact that you’re a suspect doesn’t mean that you can’t be tortured. Take cover for your safety,’ said Old Man, warning the visitors. The gathering could be considered as a suspect. The helicopter released small cans that burst before falling down, releasing cloudy, white smoke more or less of mist experienced on the hills of Kabale in the morning, or in wet season. The visitors scattered and disappeared in thin air. The helicopter zoomed west, dived and returned to hover around the very rendezvous. The place was empty. It released five more cans, circled many times before it flew eastwards. Later in the evening when the sun was closing her petals to give the nocturnal their turn for surveillance, there appeared strange men in plain clothes. Some were wearing strong, hobnailed shoes that rose above their ankles. They looked like detectives. It was rumoured that they had come to disperse the illegal meeting.

The last day for the get-together meeting was Sunday. It was not far. The youths were to meet Old Man in his compound before they would prepare to go back to their Campuses. In Katabago village, there were eight University students who were making final touches on their studies. Preparations, therefore, were highly needed to finish their courses and wait for graduation in January, 2019.

Nine o'clock sharp saw the meeting of the Youths in Old Man's compound. The old man was gay and elated. He wore his Sunday best, a white kimono, which was solemnly pressed. He had his brim heart on his head. On feet, he wore well-crafted wooden sandals, which were a rare brand like the breasts of a hen, or the horns of a dog. They were locally made in the 1940s; however, the industry had since then died. When the young looked at the sandals in comparison to their modern shoes and sandals, they became surprised, considering the creativity and the knowledge people had during that time.

'Oh, I wonder how far these people would have reached, if they had continued making and improving on curving and blacksmithing products from trees and minerals!' said Aidajankidoo, eyeing and admiring Old Man's sandals.

'The white man's imported products have killed our creativity in manufacturing. Almost all the products, especially domestic materials are imported from China,' Said Demus, in a disinterested way.

'No wonder we can't even manufacture a safety pin or a needle, and every day we brag about technology and setting up nuclear plants. It's not the White man's fault. We import because we're lazy to start up our own industries. We waste resources in luxurious wars, trips and other selfish, egoistic businesses to pamper our families,' said Precious.

'The black man isn't serious at all. What he does, is out of ridiculous parroting and from evil purposes. My grandfather told me that there were many industries in 1950s and 1960s; and that Jinja was the hub. He narrated me stories about Jinja Nytil, Port Bell and Nile Breweries. He talked about blacksmithing in the neighbouring village there in Bukora, just above Kekubo, Kabale. The Bahesi of Bukora was a clan good at blacksmithing. They produced spears, knives pounding mortars, saucepans and other utensils. Today they would be producing guns which rulers are interested in. Much money is spent on armoury and arsenal like war is every day food on table! From there he took me to Kilembe Mines. The mining activity of copper was booming, and its railway line that connected the mining centre to Mombasa was a project to reckon with. The Cooperatives were also booming and shining. It's said that people were not as poor as they are today,' said Paddy, fearing that the direction they were taking was perilous.

‘Can we call this retrogressive in terms of progress and development? Here in Africa a freedom fighter takes over; he destroys what the former put in place and starts a fresh, or begins on something else, sometimes which is not in line with the needs of the populace. For example, a certain location is suitable for industrialization; instead it’s turned into an agricultural area when it’s actually a desert. Probably it’s due to poor planning, or out of selfish tendencies,’ said Kamuhanda, frowning at the prospective looming danger.

Immediately they switched off from the topic and attentively gave Old Man a room to untie the package he had for them. What was it they were going to share? God knew better!

‘My dear children, to live is to see a flicker of happiness; to live is to suffer. When you grow old you see a lot. As I sleep, I see those who left some time back. They must be thanking the creator for having given them a chance to fly away. I see the road narrowing as it becomes steeper and steeper,’ said Old Man, coughing dryly. The Youths pulled their seats closer to Old Man. They sat at the edge of their chairs, with a cocked ear. Listening was not so simple a task; it was a skill to be learnt and mastered in order to gain from verbal and non-verbal intercourse.

They say: ‘curiosity kills a cat’ but ‘curiosity saves a human being.’ When were you born, Grandpa?’ asked Boonabaana curiously. Old Man smiled. The face formed profound wrinkles, which were accompanied by wrinkles around his eyes. It was believed that people who smiled and wrinkles formed around their eyes were good natured and trustworthy.

‘I was born in 1916, in the middle of the first big war when it was raging. The hour, day, months, year, season, and generally the environment, which are determinants of one’s character and personality do make a screen on which your temperament is displayed. These shape you as an individual, adding to your genetic make up,’ emphasized Old Man, rolling his eyes in their sockets and looking at his children. His face was pale and sad. He was always thoughtful and cogitative. The truth was he was not a sad and an unhappy man, but it was senility that was playing its game on his face like a mirage on a hot sunny afternoon.

The youths were impressed with the gift of life! As if they had agreed on saying at heart: ‘How I wish I would have such a gift!’

‘Growing up to old age is, indeed, a gift from God. I was born during the war, fought many wars, and I have survived up to this time. All my age mates perished long time ago and some perished yesterday. I thank Allah without end. Have I not lived to see you give me presents on my birthday? This’s incredible and extraordinary,’ said Old Man, facing down humbly in genuflection.

The place was as quiet as cemetery. The fall of a pin or a quill feather could be heard. The world had fallen into an era, where the aged were not cared for; they were abandoned by their children and relatives. On air waves, the news ‘SON KILLED FATHER IN LAND WRANGLES’, ‘SON STEALS MOTHER’S MONEY, DISAPPEARS WITH GIRLFRIEND IN THIN AIR’, was a common phenomenon in current affairs and trends of communication.

The young, energetic youths abandoned their kin and kith, went too far places to hunt for money. Whether they got the money or not, it had become a habit to insensitively not take a second thought to remember and reconsider the wombs where they were sourced. It was the absurdity of life. Time had come when the difference between the fertile and infertile was nonexistent, or if it were there, it was a semi permeable membrane. Not once or twice a passerby would eavesdrop on a woman say: ‘I gave birth to an amniotic sac’, referring to a good-for-nothing child. In Katabago village, in the days of the past, a parent was regarded highly as the ‘God of here’. The changing times and the coming of modernity coupled with the dying of culture had beaten up respect for parents to coma. The desire and greedy for money had finally come to finish off the breath that was still holding the comatose that still lingered in the helpless body.

The meeting of the Youths with Old Man was miraculous, special and memorable. The old man told the children good stories- stories grim, stories gay:

Long long time ago,

A stranger came from south and sat low.

He was welcomed as a child of the house.

He was humble and a boy of promise.

The Head of the family would leave

Him in charge of the home; believe

It, he ate the pot of honey.

He grabbed everything; it sounds funny

But it was a tragedy to the family!

Never trust a stranger;

On your land, he can make you a beggar.

Old Man concluded the story. He gestured with his hand, signalling one of the boys to come. Paddy came, stooped as the old man whispered in the boy's ear. 'Tell one of those strong boys to go with you into the room opposite to my bedroom. Lift the biggest pot and bring it here.'

Paddy tapped on Aidajankidoo's shoulder and the two slipped into the house. As they opened the window to have vision for selecting the appropriate pot, their sense of smell was met by an enticing aroma that tantalized and induced saliva in their mouths. Like a hyena looking at the hips that had just come out of FACO, saliva splashed out of their eating gadgets. As decorum or etiquette demanded, they were not supposed to serve themselves in the room before getting directions from the elder. The two young men exercised self-control and restraint until they dropped the message to the owner. Trust was everything!

Cosy, Bonabaana and Karungi stood up. 'Come,' said Old Man in a low voice accompanied by a gesture. Go to the room opposed my bedroom. As you enter, look up just above your head. There's a rack. Slowly and gently, stretch your arms and bring down the three bundles of straws. Hurry before the appetite escapes from these young men- men lose appetite very easily; theirs is mercury. It's up to the woman to maintain it.'

The girls pretended not to have understood what the old man was saying. They became more serious than ever; it was a sign of shyness.

‘My children I have enough cups and glasses in my house. We’re not going to use them today. I have seven small pots in my house. That’s what we’re going to use.’ Good things talked for themselves. There was no need to advertise. The girls served from the big pot to small pots. Each youth would get the wooden straw, which would be used to draw or siphon the drink into the mouth and then down the gullet. What kind of drink was this? ENTURI- made from sorghum- the cereal popularly grown in Kigyezi or Kigezi. The drink was spiced with honey. The drink was famous for its nutritive value. It also worked and improved massively on the skin, body hormones, especially the fountain ones, which in turn spiced and turned on the night knob to produce good music. Music was the food of love. Those who took it were strong and plump. Their bodies and complexion was food for, and tourist attraction for the eyes. Old Man emphasized unity and brotherhood, or sisterhood.

‘Grandpa,’ they called him. ‘It’s really sweet,’ they said.

‘It’s sweet and old age is sweeter; it’s wisdom,’ said Old Man, winking one eye. They laughed a long cackling laugh. This was the best time they had ever had. The episode had broken anxiety and the tense atmosphere that surrounded and characterized the present generation. It was sometimes hard to tell what the cause of the fear was; nevertheless, that was how the situation stood.

‘Grey hair is wisdom,’ they whispered among themselves, nodding their heads as a lizard.

‘Why is it that women are left out in many activities?’ asked Old Man. I expected a woman to come and deliver a speech. I expected my daughter, Cosy, to be the DJ of the day! Is cooking, digging, spreading the beds and carrying the babies and the old babies the only jobs women were created for? Whether it’s a struggle or not, women shouldn’t be sidelined, deposited on the bank as you continue your way to the sea of vision and prosperity. Who told you that when a woman owns a fat account or drives a Benz, she runs mad?’ asked Old Man.

The Youths took long swigs as they danced to the rhythm of their throats. The drink flowed down into the stomach like water on a cliff. *Gutu gutu gutu* was the beat and rhythm of the epiglottis as the drink trickled down from the cataract into the stomach. As they took their drink, Old Man kept silent. He feared he would crack a joke and the drink could stray to the

trachea! Practically, the drink started doing its job. It activated the fluid that runs in the veins. One of the young men stood up, pocketing; he looked disturbed. Pocketing! What was he hiding? When a sharp object happened to land on your fabric, a hole would be expected. This would render your pants useless because of seeing you wearing tattered clothes; people would call you a mad man or a drunkard! Or it would strain one's pocket going to the tailor.

The young walked in the compound, followed by another and yet followed by another. It was a queue. One would think or guess that they were going to piss near the mango tree. No! They were just extinguishing the fire out of their blood.

'God willing, you'll graduate in January, 2019. Whoever will pass with a good grade, I shall give him a gift. The gift came from my grandfather. It passed through the hands of my father to me. I have it well kept,' Old Man narrated with astounding composure. He whetted the listeners' curiosity.

'Grandpa, Grandpa, tell us- what's the name of the gift?' they inquired, and begged enthusiastically. The old man sucked from his pot and cleared his throat. The Youths discussed their performance.

'Oh! A hen sweeps the ground but feeds herself too'. 'No man fouls his hands in his own businesses. You must work hard. There're basic needs you want. You need fame. You've to take care of others; you've to be exemplary. Work hard; you'll take the trophy.

'I loved my Grandfather so much. If I were asked to sacrifice everything I had to save his life to stay here with me, I would let it go... I would surrender passionately,' Old Man said with fondness. My Grandfather had a wrist watch. It was swallowed by his bull. When they slaughtered the bull on my father's wedding day, they found the wrist watch in its stomach. It was still telling the correct time!' so narrated Old Man.

The youth laughed their lungs out. He further told them about the man in their village. Once upon a time, there was a man in this village, who had long pubic hair that when he was naked and the wind blew from behind him, the hair would stretch a mile in front of him. The people in a mile would see the hair before seeing the owner.' The young ones' ribs, lungs and the whole chest ached because of laughter. The day was really memorable and intriguing!

The day was coming to a close. The smooth rough road where everyone travelled had a destination- cul- de- sac. ‘Troubles find men,’ the old man said. ‘Learn the dynamics of the world. There’s corruption, unemployment, poverty and disease. Learn how to fight and fend for yourself,’ Old Man advised the young. ‘Today, it’s technical- know- who. Make connections. A void evil and it’ll distance itself from you. You’ll roam the streets looking for the job in vain. Learn how to save what you already have and never cry for what you don’t have. At eighteen you’re cursing heaven and earth that you don’t drive a posh car, you don’t own a bungalow. At what age did your father build a castle? Why do you want to walk when you’re still in the womb? Why does it want to crow when it’s still in the egg?’ he questioned, adding: ‘Haste never milked a barren cow.’ There’s time for everything. Time for birth, time for sowing, time for harvesting, time for happiness, time for sorrow and time for departure. This is journeying on a smooth rough road. Do what you can. See those you love; do what you want to do for them. And when you’re gone, they’ll say: “We had good time.” And this will be the time to say: “Thank you Allah- you’re the Greatest.” ‘Eat what your hands toiled for; eat what comes from your sweat. You’ll age gracefully. Avoid greed and jealous. Never be like politicians,’ Old Man concluded as sleep overpowered his head.

The Youths fell into a moment of silence. Their mind wandered as a cloud through all the places they had ever seen and heard. They saw truth, hope and encouragement in what Old Man was saying. They regretted as to why they had not all along been exploiting the opportunity and resource.

Finally, Old Man said to them, ‘My beloved children, if you want to die early, tell the truth; display your wisdom and knowledge. If you’re lucky, you’ll live for a year or less. You can be knocked by a vehicle, or poisoned, or shot down... fear a man who treats you as a criminal, an enemy, and calls you a friend and gives you protection! It’s the very protection that will silence or liquidate you. Allah is the Protector. Life is sweet but short! Our villages are now living in fear. The citizenry are worried how they will stand behind the candidates of their choice. We’re all suspicious of this exercise because it may attract brawls, feuds, enmity, and break down of family ties and other services in the villages. Neutrality and impartiality are a dream. However, be assertive. Fight for your rights, freedom and liberty. Bend and toil. Seek for

knowledge and you'll conquer the world of evil. Pray day and night without getting tired. Success is yours. Thank you, my children. Produce many children to fill this earth. Bring on board six or seven. If you want to produce one like a white man, others will produce them and you'll feed them through taxation. *Mungu anakileta mtoto analeta sahani yake.* It is thirty-two years since Bahati migrated to this village. He has never held a hoe and a machete in his hand but his children eat well. Go and live in peace. Lead me away.'

* * * * *

CHAPTER TWENTY

Time was a bird; she had grown wings to let her fly out. January, 2019 had conspired with December of the previous year to hurry so that she would knock on the door, calling the eight students of Katabago village to graduate. After the ceremony, they would be released like fish into a new pond of the world of work. There was a universe waiting for them. The Universe had built a school, where the lessons of understanding were taught. The Universe had erected the Great Wall. Those who had gained skills and those who had not would meet in the arena to compete. Only those who had mastered the skills of the day would win. There were no teachers, no timetables, blackboard and chairs. The tuition was not very high as the former, but it was a school. There was self-drive. It was the school of experience.

The newly hatched academicians roamed the streets like hungry lions looking for what to eat in vain. The well-polished black shoes turned red earth. The soles were one sided after being weighed down by friction. They moved from building to building- the nice structures of the city. The hosts seemed to be busy in their small, four-walled spaces. The envelopes that carried the fool's gold wore out and got torn because of many touches. The vagaries of nature had taught the job seekers that they had to buy a polythene bag of two hundred shillings to keep the fool's gold from rain, or from falling in the stinking trenches of the rotten city. The seekers were footing; most of the time they would take short cuts to make a wider coverage of offices. The short cuts were infested with bad people; however to be persistent and brave was the option and the way to go. It was always the brave that took home the game. These were called the real Bushmen. Formerly, envelopes were for carrying money. What could the searchers be carrying in the yellowish envelopes? They were not fit and blessed to receive and touch yellow envelopes.

The Reverend's child had been discharged from the big hospital. Old Man had walked slowly with the support of his walking stick to check on the convulsing child. When he was coming back home in the evening, he was ambushed in the vale that divided his home and the Reverend's home, where he was murdered in cold blood. Aidajankidoo was knocked down by a speeding Police Patrol Car. The news of terror continued to flow in the ears of citizens. The listeners started fearing the air waves. It was hard and trying time, especially when it came to the time of turning on the Television sets and the knobs of radios. 'SEVEN MEMBERS OF THE

HOUSE GUNNED DOWN IN MABIRA FOREST' The economic, political and social aura was very disturbing and in dire austerity. Time continued its way. Those who died or went to prison were forgotten. Life went on...

Papa was old. He slept early and woke up late. Papa sat on his bed. It was Monday morning. The shadows were tall as the artistic drawing of the sun on the ground showed vividly and graphically. He looked at his side and saw nothing. He called to no response. He crawled out and saw nothing. There was no single person in his sight. He called again in a low, hoarse voice. He was greeted with silence. He became disturbed. He developed hallucinations and mental aberrations because of loneliness. The desolate and formless world raised dust on him. He ran mad because the Country House was too big and strange for him.

The Neanderthal Man of Africa was full of all sorts of casuistry. He aired out his plight to solicit sympathy from hearers from all over the world. The massive empty-handed immigrants trudging towards the furious and raging waters epitomized the heart of the matter on the African continent. It was human race evading and running way from an enemy to a friend. The hypocrisy cooking in the pot of the greedy, evil men and women was the meal of the suffering subjects. Many people kept on wondering why the lion invited wild thoughts in the minds of the people because it had paws! There was war and turmoil. The heavenly bodies fought with the earth. The pulling of ropes between the ruler and the ruled was intense. Husbands did not trust their wives and, so were the wives in turn. Children murdered their parents. The relationship between the lender and borrower was appalling. The divide that existed amidst the teacher and the learner, doctor and patient took away all the delights of knowledge and health. The employer was a hunter; the employee was an antelope. The moon pulled the waters of the earth. The crests and troughs raged to cause havoc. Floods from oceans, seas, lakes and rivers swept the coastal as well as the inland, causing untold destruction and suffering beyond human repair. The cold war that slumbered in the hearts of nations intensified and became colder and colder day by day. The achievements, developments, and optimism the human beings boasted about waned to bleakness and absurdity. There was no tinge of happiness, for it was in the wet blanket of pessimism and obscurity.

I walked towards the hill through the small winding path, with confidence and hope. The lawyers and the youths had gathered momentum and mettle so extraordinary that defendants shook like a leaf in the wind. I stood on the hill's summit, looked far beyond in front of me in the northern direction. My eyes met a giant mountain. Under it, there was a stretch of land that was a sanctuary of wild life. Its peak touched the sapphire sky that reflected the two different lakes- the blue lake and the black one. One was a blessing; the other one was a curse. Nevertheless, a stranger and a native never ceased to admire the snow flakes.

I turned and looked behind in the south direction. There was another giant mountain that smoked like a chimney. The green belt and the cousins of man- the Apes- could leave the observer in wonderment. I turned and looked west; another giant stretch of mountains radiated crimson light in the twilight, and the sun sank down pitilessly because of the human beings' plight. I turned and faced east well assured that a new day would come. I was standing amidst the Great Rift Valley, on Katabago hill that faced her sister hill Kirezi, where and when you looked you could see milk and honey; and yet the inhabitants were languishing in terrible mendicancy.

A cirrus cloud appeared; it covered me. Reading poetry, I vanished from the sight of the worldly- cursed devils that were so mean in mind and soul.

FOR WHOM THE BELL TOLLS

The united teeth break the bone.

To suffer and cry, man was not born.

Work to put the devil on the cross;

In this act and deed, there's no loss.

Never be enslaved on your land.

This is not, in sooth, one man's island.

You wretched of the earth, shout freedom;

The noise will shatter the ill kingdom.

Look at the politicians!

They are not Christians;

They are not Muslims.

For whom the bell tolls- it may be

You or me.

The sun is high in the sky.

To ask for food I am not shy.

You spent the whole night on Rex;

You didn't pay the right S-excise tax.

You paid customs duties.

It was done to outside beauties.

I'll strike to cause strife.

I am your genuine wife.

I gave you a vote of love.

What I need is a smooth drive.

Don't make my road rough.

On you I'll be tough!

Let all labour to kill the Devil.

It will not be novel.

Man and woman derived the greatest happiness from killing their fellow men and women. The protection from nuclear weapons, strong, able-bodied bodyguards and bullet proof

never brought peace. It was only truth and trust that did the magic to those who believed and walked in their footsteps. The years gave birth to decades to activate the politicians' appetite for temporal power. There was something wrong with the Black man! The voted and the voter were all guilty!

The MP and his wife were long time gone. The former MP had left politics ten years back. He had discovered himself a class apart. He had accumulated too much wealth. He was in Dubai doing business. When he heard about the loss, and that Papa was pampering the House members with all the treasures of the country, he decided to fly back and take up the seat of the MP that had flown away.

His first rally left the country in shock. The people attended in full. He lectured them as usual. When he had reached in the middle of the talk, a woman and a juvenile standing near the orator jumped and pounced on him like a tigress and a tiger. The rest of the gathering joined them and swarmed around him. The big numbers over powered the bodyguards not to administer the rescue. The crowd whisked the guards from the scene of action.

'The Playboy was given thorough treatment. We've kicked him in the ass and the pot-bellied stomach. We've slapped the chubby cheeks and have left him out of breath. It's stoning the devils. We've disarmed the bodyguards; we're rowdy but we can't harm the bodyguards; they're innocent; they're just being used. The struggle has just begun!' said Rwamubende, optimistically. And he added a quotation from Luke 6:31 'Do for others just what you want them to do for you.' 'Look and listen! A hen pecks at what she can swallow. The winds of change are feeding them on what's not soft and palatable,' concluded Rwamubende with an air of contentment. Victory was already on the silver platter!

* * * * *