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No Easy Task

Jo Jozeni, the son of a village pastor, is offered a job on a newspaper in Kawacha, the capital of a British colony in Central Africa. Although his roots are in the country, Jo gradually takes to life in the city, where his sister and her husband are already living. Through his brother-in-law and colleagues on the *Kawacha News* he becomes involved in politics, though always remaining a little outside the 'inner circle' of the nationalist party. He suspects its leaders: they have become self-seeking and lost touch with Jo and people like him who want more real power for the African.

Suddenly his whole attitude changes: at a political rally in Kawacha it is his own gentle, retiring father whom he has never really taken seriously who takes charge and is carried shoulder-high from the stadium under the noses of the Riot Squad. Before long the Old Man is leading the party towards Independence, and as the Old Man emerges as a hard and determined political fighter, Jo has to work out what he wants for himself.

No Easy Task

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HEINEMANN

Heinemann Educational Books Ltd
48 Charles Street, London W.1
PMB 5205, Ibadan · POB 25080, Nairobi
MELBOURNE TORONTO AUCKLAND
HONG KONG

First published 1966
© Aubrey Kachingwe 1966

Printed in Great Britain by
Cox & Wyman Ltd, London, Fakenham, and Reading

You remember the evenings when under the moon we listened to stories told by one of the older people? I said that in later years I would tell stories in our native style, although not under an African, or indeed any, moon. Here is the story I promised you. It is about people, and it is about Africa.

A. K.

Chapter 1

'I'm sorry, man. We can't take any more passengers in the bus. It's full,' the conductor said. He started to close the door.

'Can't you squeeze me in, please?' I pleaded. 'I have only this small suitcase. That's all.'

'I can't take any more,' he said firmly. 'The traffic patrolmen are very strict these days. You want me to lose my job?'

He rang the bell.

'This is the last country bus for today, and I have been standing here waiting for it in this hot sun for over one hour,' I said, half to myself, 'surely, you can't leave me?'

I dropped my suitcase and clung to the rails of the door of the bus. The conductor pushed me off and I almost fell under the wheels as it started to move. My suitcase was run over but I was luckier.

I stood up, dusted myself, and looked at the suitcase. It had been flattened out of shape, and was gaping half open. A little dust had got inside.

It made me bitter to think that I would have to walk three miles back to the school at Makwasa, and possibly spend the night alone in an empty classroom. The place was empty now because the school was closed. I had just been there to see the principal about getting me a scholarship to England, but he had promised nothing. Now I

was returning to my father at Bangwe, a little mission station thirty miles farther in the interior.

I did not like to go back to that school even for a night. The principal would probably tell me to go away. Reverend John Webb and I never got on well, although he was the missionary in charge of all this area, including Bangwe where my father was the parish priest, and had thus known my parents for years. Lately, he had been my principal. Perhaps we knew each other too well.

Suddenly, I heard a car hoot. Shaken, I jumped off the road. The car pulled up, and the two men inside it laughed heartily.

I recognized the one driving. 'I am very sorry for blocking the road, Mr Dube,' I said apologetically.

'One should expect that sort of behaviour on a country road,' he said without anger. 'But you are educated, Jo, and ought to know how to conduct yourself on a highway.'

'I am sorry, sir,' I repeated.

'That's all right, Jo. Only don't do it again,' he said. 'Now, why are you here?'

'I am going to Bangwe – I was going – but the bus has left me behind,' I said. 'There was no room.'

'I am going there. Can I give you a lift?'

'If you can, sir, most grateful.'

'Take your bag and come in,' he said. He turned to his friend. 'This is Jo, the only son of the Reverend Josiah Jozeni.'

'And this gentleman, Jo,' he said to me, 'is Mr Zake Lukani, a great friend of mine. We are both going to see the old man. Make yourself comfortable.'

I shook hands with Mr Zake Lukani as the car started to move. This was comfortable, I thought, travelling in a car. Few Africans travelled in style like Mr Dan Dube.

People said that he was one of the richest Africans in the country. To what extent this was true I never bothered to find out, but I knew he was pretty important.

Dan Dube was the first African to be a municipal councillor on the white-only Kawacha Town Council. He was an outstanding businessman and clever politician – always in the news. Tall and broad, at forty-five he looked respectably handsome.

Like many things mysterious about Dan Dube, I never understood how he and my father were such good friends. Outwardly they had nothing in common. My father was over sixty, and, because of poverty and hard work, looked much older than his age. He laughed seldom, and outside his clerical work I don't think he had any ambitions. Yet the two were good friends.

'Now that you have left school, what do you intend to be?' Mr Dube asked me. 'You are twenty-three, if I remember correctly?'

'Yes, I am twenty-three,' I said.

'Do you want to be a pastor like the old man?'

'No. I want to be a lawyer if I can. But it all depends if I can obtain a scholarship.'

Zake Lukani spoke for the first time. 'Lawyers get a lot of money,' he said, 'I think you have chosen wisely.'

'We want African lawyers, that's true,' Mr Dube said. 'The Indian lawyers in town exploit us – poor Africans – like nobody's business.'

'But if he became a lawyer he would exploit the same market,' Mr Lukani pointed out.

'That may be so. But I think he would be less callous.'

Ahead of us a herd of cattle was crossing the road. Mr Dube slowed down. He was a very careful driver.

'A motor vehicle is a lethal weapon like a gun or a

panga,' he said, 'and driving it one must be extremely careful and considerate.'

The animals took their time to cross the road, and we had to stop and wait for several minutes.

'It's very beautiful and peaceful out here,' Zake Lukani observed.

'Is it the first time you've come this way?' I asked him.

'Well, not quite,' he said. 'I was this way many years ago when this road was a mere path. I don't have much time to go about. I have to look after my shop in the town. I even find no time to attend Council meetings.'

'Are you a municipal councillor, too?'

'Mr Lukani is the second African municipal councillor to be appointed, Jo,' Mr Dube said and added, 'here we go, the animals have now given us the right of way.'

For a while we were silent. We caught up with the bus and passed it.

'That's the bus which left me,' I told them.

'You'll get home much earlier,' Mr Dube said.

'You have been very kind.'

We were now in familiar parts of the country – blue hills, rolling green pastures, small streams of clear whispering water, clean fresh air, and simple, friendly people.

'And do you think you will get the scholarship?' Mr Dube brought me back.

'I don't know,' I said. 'Rev. John Webb is not helpful. I think he wants me to be a pastor, like my father. He and I are not friendly.'

'Webb is your principal, isn't he?'

'He was,' I corrected him. 'He is also the man in charge of the parishes around these parts. I can't afford to annoy him. I have to think of my father and his job.'

'Hm,' Dube grunted. 'I think the old man has done

his best to give you and your sister such an excellent education. You must do something to help him.'

'I want to help him and my mother,' I said. 'That is the main reason why I want to become a lawyer. I want to give them a happy retirement. We've always just managed to exist.'

Zake Lukani said, 'Many of us started in a very hard way.'

'I would like to assist you,' Dan Dube said. 'When do you propose to come to Kawacha Town?'

'I have no plans yet,' I said.

'How long will it take before you know whether or not you have been awarded this scholarship of yours?'

'It will take some time,' I said.

'What else would you like to do in the meantime? You ought to do some little job to earn yourself some pocket money.'

'If I don't succeed in becoming a lawyer, I would like to be a journalist,' I told him. 'The only trouble there I can see is that there are hardly any openings.'

'Well, I know an African editor of a newspaper in the town who can help you,' Mr Dube said. 'He's a friend of mine. I will tell him about you when I get back to town. Can you write well? Do you like people? and a hectic life?'

'I can write,' I told him. 'Last term I was the editor of our school magazine. But I have contributed a few articles to newspapers, some of which were accepted. I like meeting people. Can you really help?'

'Don't get excited. I will try my best,' he said. 'When we reach your home give me some of your articles and I will show them to Bill Akimu. He is the editor of the *Kawacha News*.'

'I know that paper,' I said. 'I'll let you have the articles.

I thank you very much, Mr Dube. You're very good to me.'

'I enjoy helping people, Jo,' he said. 'You needn't thank me at all.'

My small homestead came into view on the hilltop, a few miles away. The iron roof of the church shimmered in the bright sunlight. I was longing to get there; the car wasn't travelling fast enough for me.

'When I get back to town I will tell your sister that I met you,' Mr Dube said.

'Give her and her husband, Felix, my regards,' I said. 'I will write and tell them how kind you have been to me.'

We were now rounding the little church and making for my father's house on the other side.

'By the way, there is a new girl who has joined the teaching staff at this school – she's called Agnes Maki. Do you know her?' he asked.

'I have met her. She comes from Kawacha Town like Elizabeth Chake. Is that the girl?'

'That's her,' he said. 'Now, I want you to do me a favour. While I am talking to the old man, can you please slip and tell this girl that I would like to meet her a mile up the road? If not, she can come to the old man's house and she should ask me for a lift to somewhere up the road as I go back to Kawacha. Tell her I have something important to tell her.'

He smiled. 'I like the girl but she's running away from me,' he said. 'She thinks she is in love with a young university bloke in town. Don't tell anybody about this, least of all the old man. Understand, Jo?'

'I won't,' I said.

'Good. Just give her my message and everything will be fine. Here's your home.'

We pulled up in front of the house.

At fifty-eight my mother was still good-looking. She was a bit on the fat side, and when she walked the gait was like that of a duck, rather laboured but majestic. She always wore a long cloth that reached right down to her ankles.

My father was not at home, so she received the visitors. She was a strict observer of our traditional customs and behaviour, and I always found it very interesting to listen to her style of greeting. It was an art, and very few people were more skilled in it than she.

'I am glad to hear from our visitors that they have left their homes in good state. Here, we, too, are all well. Our property and our home are in good state.' And so she went on. Neither Mr Dube nor Mr Lukani could match her in this art, and I saved them from further embarrassment.

'Mother, the visitors are rather in a hurry to get back,' I said. 'Where's father gone to? Can I go and call him?'

She smiled and thought I was still a little baby. She always treated me like a baby. Being the last-born, perhaps, she still thought I had not yet grown up. Or was it just her wish that I was still a baby? She had stopped bearing rather early. Although she had born several children, the only living ones were Mary, several years my senior, and myself. My mother had now given up hope of ever becoming fertile again.

'We have left everything in the hands of God,' I overheard her once telling her friend.

'Your father has gone to a village church ten miles from here at the nearest,' she said. 'The local village headman is having a Christian wedding. He's left all his other wives and kept one who threatened to leave him

unless he became a Christian and married in the church. She herself became a Christian a year or so ago.'

I knew the man. He must have been somewhere near eighty years of age, and the woman in question about fifty years younger. What did he want to do all this for, I wondered. After all, he had only a few years to live. Why bother?

'Can't we follow him in the car?' Dan Dube asked.

'There is no road big enough for a car to pass,' she said. 'But if you like, Jo can get you bicycles from some friends.'

Mr Dube and Mr Lukani exchanged looks. The latter shook his head.

'Thank you, madam,' Mr Dube said, 'but I think we'll go back and come to see him next Saturday.'

'Do have some refreshment before you go, please,' she said. 'Jo, will you talk to the visitors while I prepare something?'

She left us and went to the back of the house.

'Look, can you slip out, Jo, and get Agnes to come here?' Dan Dube said. 'Don't tell her to go up the road. Tell her to come here. I don't think the old lady will mind.'

'I think the best thing is to tell mother?'

'What will you say?'

'You want to talk to the girls because you have just come from the town and have some news for them,' I said. 'My mother hasn't a suspicious mind.'

'Do as you think best,' he said. 'Meanwhile, will you give me those articles of yours in case I forget?'

I went into my room and brought him the articles.

'Good. Now, go and do me the favour I ask of you,' he said.

I went to the back of the house and found mother cutting up a newly dressed chicken.

'Why do you leave the visitors alone, child?'

'They are quite happy, mum,' I said. 'I've given them some of my articles to read. I want them to be quiet for a moment.'

'It's all right, child, if you think so,' she said. 'Where did they pick you up?'

'From the beginning of my journey, mum,' I said. 'He's a very kind man, Mr Dube. He's going to do me a big favour. I have asked him to pass our greetings to Mary and Felix.'

Mother brightened and smiled happily. 'That's very considerate of you, child. Do also ask him if he can take a little parcel of foodstuff and deliver it to your sister in the town.'

'I don't think he will refuse to do that,' I said. 'Don't you think we also ought to ask those two female teachers to come and meet the visitors seeing that they also come from Kawacha Town.'

'I hadn't thought of that. Go and tell them we have these visitors, by all means. I should have thought of it in the first place – very selfish of me, my child. Please hurry and tell the girls they can come and meet our visitors.'

Easy as that. I asked myself whether I was not taking an unfair advantage of my mother's trust. But Dan Dube was doing me a big favour, and besides, I didn't think he was going to do any harm to Agnes Maki by just merely meeting her in my father's house.

The girls appeared reluctant to come with me, and they made me swear that my mother had actually sent for them.

Agnes Maki was the better looking of the two. I suspected she knew she was attractive, and traded on the

fact. But whereas flirtations meant little to her, some men – like Dan Dube – took them more seriously and I could see she was a little frightened by him.

Elizabeth Chake had a dimple in each cheek. I had known her before I met Agnes Maki, but I never spent much time with either, when I came to Bangwe for my school holidays. Somehow, I was attracted more by Elizabeth than by Agnes, in a sister-brother fashion. I liked her warm voice, and when she smiled she was as beautiful as Agnes.

They were both my sister's friends. Mary had met them at the Kawacha Teachers' Training College when she had gone to take her teacher's course. Elizabeth followed Mary to Bangwe. She had liked it and stayed as a teacher at our little mission school. Agnes followed her later.

'Dan Dube is a scoundrel,' Elizabeth said. 'Neither Agnes nor I like him.'

But they came with me all the same.

'We are working hard in the town, and I always meet your friend,' Dan Dube told Agnes Maki. He did not feel at ease.

'Please tell him to drop me a line,' Agnes said.

Soon after greeting the visitors Elizabeth went to the kitchen to help my mother. Agnes had wanted to go there, too, but she had been asked by her friend not to desert the visitors.

'I wonder if you would like a lift a mile up the road?' Mr Dube said. 'There is something I would like to tell you. Something important.'

'Is it so important that you cannot say it here?'

'I am afraid it's so.'

'That's not what brought you to Bangwe?'

He hesitated. 'Well, that and something else,' he said.

'Let it wait until some other time when I come over to Kawacha,' she said, trying hard to control her anger. 'What else brought you here?'

'Public affairs,' he said, picking up an air of importance. 'I came here to discuss some important public affair matters with the old man.'

'What's "public affairs"?' she asked.

Dan Dube laughed easily. 'How can I explain "public affairs", Zake?'

Mr Lukani was as much at a loss.

'Well, read the newspapers and you will know what I mean by "public affairs",' he said.

Mr Lukani said, 'Fighting for our rights so that we can be like human beings. That's what Mr Dube is engaged in. I can assure you, young lady, it's no easy task at all.'

Elizabeth brought in food and put it on the table. She only caught the last part of Mr Lukani's statement, and, assuming that he was addressing her, said: 'It's not difficult. We are used to all kitchen work.'

This caused a roar of laughter.

'What's the laughter for?' she asked, perplexed.

'He wasn't talking to you, Liz,' Agnes said. 'He was talking about Mr Dube's undertakings – love and public affairs.'

'Love! Oh, Agnes, what *are* you saying?'

That sent us into further peals of laughter. This time, Elizabeth joined in. My mother, wondering what we were laughing about, came and politely looked around.

'Is everything all right?' she asked.

'Everything is all right, madam,' Dube said apologetically. 'These children are really laughing at nothing. You know what they're like, madam?'

Relieved, she said: 'Jo, don't delay the visitors. It's a long journey to town. Allow them to eat in peace.'

'Yes, mum,' I said.

The girls withdrew with my mother.

'I have looked at one or two of your articles, Jo.' Mr Dube said as we ate, 'and I think that you'll make a good journalist in due course. I shall use all my influence to get you an opening with the *Kawacha News*.'

'That's very kind of you,' I said.

'There is acute shortage of housing in the town,' he said, 'but then you can stay with your sister. They've got a very large house and as they have no kids, there is more than enough accommodation for the two, I think. Write them first before you come down. When you do come, please look me up. I shall be very pleased to see you. Meanwhile, drop a line to the Editor, *Kawacha News*, Kawacha, telling him about our meeting and asking him what he thinks of your articles. His name is Bill Akimu.'

I wrote the name down on a piece of paper.

The visitors did not stay long after the meal. Mr Dube said he had a meeting some time that evening and so wanted to get home early.

We stood in a little knot and waved at them as they disappeared in their car.

'He is a very kind man,' I told the little group.

'He certainly has helped you. The bus is only arriving now. What's happened to your suitcase, by the way, child?'

'The bus ran over it.'

'It's badly damaged. Come into the house, my children.'

'Won't you make them pay for it?' Elizabeth asked.

'Pay for the box, you mean?'

'Yes.'

'I don't know,' I said. 'It was already old in any case, and worth hardly anything.'

'But you will be needing something to put your clothes

in when you go back to school,' said my mother. 'That's the best we could find for you.'

'I finished school last term, mum. Shan't be going to Makwasa again.'

We went and sat on the veranda at the back of the house. On this side it was traditionally enclosed with a grass fence. The kitchen was a separate hut within the enclosure, as was the hut in which I lived when at home. The poultry hut was also in the enclosure. The back of the house was the private sanctuary of the family, and only trusted and close friends were ever entertained there. The usual practice was for only the women to retreat and chatter there.

'What are you giving so much thanks to that man for?' Agnes said. 'I don't like Mr Dube. In the town few people like him.'

'He is an important man,' I said, 'so naturally very few people would like him.'

'He thinks he is in love with Agnes,' Elizabeth said.

'He certainly gave me no such impression,' I defended him.

'He wouldn't tell you about his private feelings unless you were his trusted and close friend.'

'Like Mr Lukani?'

'Like Mr Lukani, yes,' Elizabeth agreed.

'He has no close friends, Dan Dube,' Agnes said. 'I have heard people complain that they hardly understand him. He is as cunning as a hare. Just you wait until you know him well. You will not have the same feelings about him as you have now. I shouldn't wonder if you didn't want to put a knife into his back.'

I laughed. Her suggestion seemed absurd.

'What is all this you are talking about, children?' My mother said. 'Say something nice.'

Agnes and Elizabeth were both good company. I had never thought before that I could ever be happy among women. When later they went to their house, I felt a sense of loss and loneliness.

My father had still not returned when I went to bed.

Chapter 2

The next morning I found my father sitting in a wicker chair on the veranda in the back yard, brushing his teeth. He had recently been to the dentist and had all but four of his teeth removed: indeed, it looked to me as if these, too, would have to go. Two in the upper jaw and two in the lower; they jutted out from his mouth like rodent's teeth.

'Sit down, child,' he said.

I sat down and he resumed the pointless brushing of his teeth. Habit? Would he still do it when all were gone?

My mother roused me from my thoughts.

'Here is water to wash your face, child,' she said, handing me a gourd filled with warm water.

'Thanks, mum.'

I washed my mouth and my face. When I had finished, I saw my father had also completed his morning toilet, and now appeared relaxed in the chair.

'Your mother tells me that Mr Dube gave you a lift from Makwasa,' he said. 'That was very kind of him.'

My father was a kind man, and never said ill of anyone. I felt remorseful for having entertained unkind thoughts about his teeth.

He asked me about my future plans. Patiently, he listened to me.

'You say you want to be a lawyer,' he said when I had finished talking. 'I have no objection to that, child. If that is what God wants you to be, let it be.'

'Reverend John Webb said that he will try and get me a scholarship to study law overseas only if you give your consent and approval.'

'Certainly, you have my free support,' he said with a trace of annoyance. 'What does Mr Webb think he – I mean what does he think I am? I would not stand in my only son's way.'

'But mother may object,' I said. 'I can't see her agreeing to the idea of my going abroad for several years.'

'Well, I am the head in the house,' he said. 'I give you my consent to do what you want. I don't want you to take a career you don't want. In my time, things were different. The missionaries chose careers for us while still at school. It was a matter of must. One had no choice. They said, "so-and-so, you are going to be a teacher", and a teacher you became. I am not going to see that happen to you, Webb or no Webb.'

I wanted to remind him that it could cost him his job, being opposed to his boss's decision. But when I remembered how poor we had always been, I decided that Mr Webb's ideas could go to hell.

Mother brought us breakfast. It consisted of salted porridge, a few boiled sweet potatoes and a cup of tea. We ate in silence.

'I am having a busy day,' my father said at last. 'We are cleaning up the station. The school children are also going to help. I must be there all the time to see how the job is done. Don't wait for me for lunch.'

My mother said, 'You are coming home for lunch, Pastor. You must. You know you are overworking yourself to death. What do you do it for?'

'All right, I will come. Send Jo along when food is ready.'

He picked up his church books and prepared to go.

'Let me carry the books for you, father,' I said, standing up.

'It's all right, child, I will manage. Thank you for being thoughtful. You have a full rest. Tell your mother about your plan. I approve of it.'

He carried his books under his arm and went away. I thought of his old khaki suit, his clerical collar, his canvas shoes with worn soles. Yet still working cheerfully.

I had to discuss the situation with my mother. It was important for me to become a lawyer – if not, poverty would always be at our door.

'Your father is getting on,' my mother said. She had noticed my thoughtful mood.

'I am going abroad to study, mother. It's important,' I said. 'Father has given his approval.'

'Give me time to think about it,' she said. I knew she was finding a way of avoiding discussion of this. 'Any profession you take will be all right. Don't be overanxious about giving your father and myself a comfortable retirement. God will look to that. Now, keep yourself busy. I must do some work in the garden. Lock up the house if you do take a short walk. If you do, please don't go too far.'

It must have meant a great sacrifice for my father and my mother to find the means of giving Mary and me a good education. Mary was now married and she could not be expected to do much for the ageing parents. Whatever was to be done for them, it was I who had to do it.

. . . . .

I took a walk down along the valley. I found a tree and sat under it. Cattle were peacefully grazing on the incline on my left, and I became absorbed in watching them.

Suddenly I heard the sound of somebody walking on the grass behind me. Startled, I looked round. It was Elizabeth Chake. She was wearing a bright dress printed with big flowers and looked delightfully fresh, like a white flower in the morning.

'I saw you come down here, so I followed you,' she said. 'Have I disturbed you?'

'No. You merely took me by surprise,' I said. 'Please sit down.'

I made a place for her and she sat down.

'Aren't you working?' I asked.

'The school children are helping to clean up the station,' she said. 'The male teachers let Agnes and me off. She has gone to Kawacha Town with the morning bus. I am alone. When I saw you come down here, I decided to come over and keep you company.'

'My mother has gone to work in the garden so I decided to take a walk here,' I said. 'Do you like the countryside?'

'Yes. It's quiet and peaceful,' she said. 'After my stay here, I do not think I will ever like living in the town again. How much of this area do you know?'

'I know most of the places around here. Do you ever take long walks? It's my favourite pastime when I am here.'

'You have never taken *me* to see the countryside. I can't go on long walks alone, and the male teachers don't care very much for such a thing. Besides, it would cause scandal if any of them was seen walking with me in the bush. They are all married men.'

'I never thought you would like to stroll in the country. I will take you for a walk any time you want.'

'When will you next go?'

'Next Sunday,' I said. 'Like to come?'

'Yes,' she said. 'But that's the Sunday Mr Webb visits our station?'

'I think so,' I said. 'I can find out for you from my father.'

'Don't bother. It makes no difference, really. I will come with you.'

'If Agnes Maki wants to come also, she is welcome,' I told her.

'I will ask her.'

The cattle were now near the bottom of the valley. Their smell reached us whenever the wind blew in our direction.

'How long are you going to stay here?'

'I'm not quite sure. I have no definite plans yet. Maybe I will be going down to Kawacha in a fortnight's time or later.'

'To visit Mary and her husband?'

'Yes.'

'After that, what do you intend to do?'

'Well, I really don't know.'

Suddenly she stood up and looked down where she had been sitting. Just there underneath the grass a large snake was unrolling itself.

I leapt up. 'Let's leave here,' I said. 'You're damn lucky.'

She was surprisingly composed, almost unworried. 'That snake is poisonous. But sitting over it is a sign of good things to come.'

She smiled at me, and, not looking where she walked, she tripped. I caught her, and she leaned against me. I

held her around the waist and walked her up to the clearer ground.

She looked up at me as I released my hold around her waist. 'It's all right now,' I said. 'You won't trip.'

When I thought of the snake she had just sat upon, my stomach turned over.

'Are you quite safe, Liz?'

'Sure I am. Want to feel my pulse?'

'So long as you say you are all right, that's okay,' I said.

We walked in silence until we were out of the valley.

'Come and have lunch with us,' I invited her. 'You will be lonesome at your house without Agnes.'

She thought for a moment.

'All right, I will come. But don't blame me if I eat all your share and you remain with an empty stomach until the next meal-time. You know, mama wasn't expecting me.'

'Don't worry. There is plenty for all of us,' I said. 'What has Agnes gone to Kawacha for?'

'She's gone to see her boy friend,' Elizabeth said. 'She's also going to have a frank talk with Mr Dube. I think Mr Dube is just being silly. That girl doesn't want him.'

'How did you two come to know Mr Dube?' I asked.

'Well, his first wife used to teach us at the K.T.T.C. So we used to visit her at week-ends. That's how Mr Dube came to know us.'

'His first wife, did you say?'

'Yes. He's separated from her.'

'How did he marry another woman then?'

'By African customary law. Having several wives is approved by our customary law and practice.'

'Yes. It is. But I wonder how he managed to get away with it in the church?'

'Who can question what Mr Dube does? He is a law unto himself,' she laughed. 'But seriously speaking, I don't think many people are keen to argue with that man.'

'You must admire him, then?'

'I don't,' she said decisively. 'I just tell you what I know about him. That way you'll know what kind of a man you are supposed to be dealing with.'

I smiled.

'Why is Agnes so keen to have a frank talk with him?'

'Because he is ruining her chances of getting married,' she said. 'There is a boy who wants to marry her, but he is hesitant because he is not quite sure about Mr Dube and Agnes.'

I felt sorry for the girl.

'Where did you two meet?' mother asked.

'I saw him down in the valley so I followed him,' Elizabeth said.

'He likes taking long walks in the bush,' mother said. 'He will get you into that strange habit, my child.'

Elizabeth laughed. 'As a matter of fact, mama, I have asked him to take me with him on one of his excursions.'

My mother gasped. 'You are both children. Come and eat your food.'

'What about father?' I asked. 'May I go and call him?

'I've already sent him a message, child,' mother said.

Mother said the grace and we started to eat.

'Where's my other child?' Mother asked Elizabeth.

'She has gone to Kawacha. She will return this afternoon. But if she doesn't then it should be tomorrow.'

'If she had known, that kind friend of Jo's could have given her a lift yesterday. She would have then had plenty of time to see her friends and her people.'

'He was too much in a hurry,' I said.

'Even if he hadn't been, Agnes would not have asked him for a lift,' Elizabeth said.

'And I have just remembered about the parcel of food-stuff which we intended to send to the children in the town. We'll send it by bus. But that costs money.'

'I will take it myself when I go there,' I said. 'You know, mum, Elizabeth sat over a snake.'

'Oh, child,' mother said sympathetically. 'Are you all right?'

'Quite sound, mama,' Elizabeth answered. 'I think something good is going to happen. Isn't that what people say about sitting over that kind of snake and nothing being done to you by it?'

'That's the belief, child.'

'Jo seems to bring me luck,' she said laughing. 'He's a good brother of mine.'

'Don't go into the bush again, children. It's dangerous.'

'It doesn't happen always, mum,' I said. 'You can sit on a snake even inside a house.'

'That's true, child. But must you go to the bush and start such incidents?'

'All right, mum. I shan't be going out again, provided you allow me only one last excursion on Sunday. Will you allow me that, mum?'

'But Mr Webb is coming here on Sunday, child.'

'He isn't coming for me, mum. What difference does it make to him if I am not here when he comes?'

'I don't know about that,' she said doubtfully. 'But I have no objection so long as it is your last country walk.'

Elizabeth said pleadingly, 'Mama, please let me go with him. This will be my first and last country outing. Please, mama.'

Mother smiled broadly.

'Go with him, child. Look after yourselves. It's dangerous in the bush. But I am sure you will come to no harm, both of you children.'

Father came home late for his lunch.

Later, I wrote to the editor of *Kawacha News*.

Chapter 3

The editor of *Kawacha News* answered my letter promptly. He offered me a job and asked me to report at his office in two weeks' time. I would be given a trial period of three months and if I proved good I would be considered for a permanent appointment. After a year of satisfactory work, this would be confirmed. Thereafter, I would enjoy all the privileges offered by the company to its confirmed permanent staff.

This was the first time I'd received such a letter. I was excited and wrote again to the editor, telling him I would be visiting some friends in Kawacha Town the following week. I would probably take the advantage of my presence in the town by calling at his office.

Two weeks of waiting I thought was too long. I could have gone there the same week, but I did not want to appear to the editor over-anxious to start work. Things were going according to plan.

On Sunday, early in the morning, Elizabeth and I set off on our country excursion. She had prepared a picnic lunch which she carried in a small basket, but I never carried any food whenever I went out on such walks. It was a luxury I could not afford, and I also thought it spoilt one's rest at the time of day when one could enjoy the cool shade of a tree on an empty stomach.

'Agnes couldn't come,' she said.

'That's all right,' I said.

I slowed my pace so that she walked effortlessly. The path was too narrow for us to walk abreast, so I led the way. After the first banana plantations we reached a well-spread-out village. Beyond that, cassava fields and maize gardens. After the fields, a flat country with short green grass, and then a long walk into a forest bordering a big hill. Farther on, a big stream.

'I am tired, Jo,' she said.

'We can stop here. Let's find a good place where we can sit.'

'What about near the bank of the stream?'

'Yes. Come along, follow me.'

It was well past mid-morning. We found a good place – a flat rock rising gently from under the water to join a clump of rocks seventy yards away from the bank. A big fig tree provided excellent cover from the sun. Along the stream birds sang in the branches of huge overhanging trees.

Elizabeth sat with her feet dipped in the water, massaging her well-shaped legs from knees to toes. The water was clear and small fish raced this way and that. Frogs and tadpoles splashed and swam in and out.

Elizabeth was suggesting we have our lunch when we heard loud, strange screams.

'What's that, Jo?'

I listened again attentively. 'I don't know.' The sound of the screams came nearer. 'Let's get on to those rocks,' I said quickly.

I helped her into her shoes and hurriedly we climbed up on to the highest rock.

'Look over there, Jo, such a lot of dust.'

I turned and looked where she was pointing. There was

a cloud of dust a mile away. It seemed to be approaching the stream.

'I think they are elephants coming to drink,' I said. 'Look! There they are.'

'I've never seen elephants before,' she said.

'I have seen one or two, but not such a large herd,' I said. 'Keep calm, I think we are quite safe here.'

I had expected the herd to go where we had been sitting, but fortunately they went farther down the stream. They were a dirty crowd. One in the herd was very large – much larger than the rest. I think it was the bull. Its ear alone was large enough to cover a double bed.

This big one was the natural leader, I could see. He and his companion stayed for a long time and eventually wandered farther down-stream. It was lucky there had been little wind throughout the day.

'Do you know it is ten minutes past two, now, Jo?'

'Time we started going back,' I said. 'Come down, Liz. Let me go ahead.'

She came down after me.

'Do you still want lunch?' I asked.

'Yes. Let's eat before we start going back. If the animals come again, we have a place to go to. Up there.'

'You are a brave girl,' I said. 'But if they came back and decided to stay, what would you do?'

'Spend the night up there.'

She gave me my share. 'Seriously speaking, we've got to get away from here quickly. I am almost certain other animals will be coming here for their drink. Seems this is their drinking place.'

I had hardly finished speaking when there was the sound of a wild stampede approaching. 'Up on the rock, Liz. Quick!'

Several hundred zebras came down to the stream. They

covered the ground from where we had been sitting to beyond where the elephants had drunk. They drank like cattle. They were beautiful animals.

When they were gone, we came down.

'Please kiss me, Jo,' she said.

I kissed her. At first lightly, but when I felt her body trembling against mine I could no longer control my feelings.

'Frightened, Liz?'

'Let's go away from here,' she said.

I packed the only remaining good plate in the basket. Three others had been broken by the zebras. Even the basket was damaged.

'Throw them away, Jo,' she said.

'No.'

'Please.'

I dropped them down reluctantly.

I kissed her again. 'You are sweet, Liz,' I said.

'Stop it, Jo.'

'You started it. All right, we go.'

She smiled 'I am not angry with you.'

We walked back the way we came. A mile away, I turned back and looked at where we had been. Another cloud of dust rose up from the other side of the stream.

'See that, Liz?'

She did. 'Another group coming down to the stream. Wonder what they are?'

The return journey took us a very short time.

Rev. John Webb's old Ford pick-up was parked in front of my father's house. I had expected to find him gone back to Makwasa.

They were sitting, very crowded, in the living-room.

Members of the revivalist movement. They were trying to get my parents to join them, so on some Sunday afternoons they came to the house to conduct their meetings. Rev. John Webb was said to be a revivalist, but he was not as enthusiastic as the others. The movement was most active at the station during the week of his visit.

My father was serving them tea.

'Come in, Jo,' Mr Webb said, seeing I was about to leave.

I hesitated. 'There isn't room, Reverend.'

'We'll squeeze each other. Come'n in.'

Somebody made room for me. I sat down. It was rather hot, but nobody minded and they went on drinking their steaming tea.

Later, when all the cups were cleared, a woman in the group started publicly to renounce her sins. She had such a long list. Some of the people involved in affairs with her were public figures, and I thought she was being most unfair. Several marriages could easily break because of her public confession.

When she finished, the group sang and prayed for her salvation. They said they were happy that one more lost lamb had returned to Jesus and accepted to be cleansed by His blood. She was now saved.

This went on, one after another. Mine came, but I said I had nothing to confess.

'We all have sins, young man,' an elderly man said. 'It may be that we may think that because we go to church and pray, so we are holy. We are sinners until we have accepted Jesus. Confess.'

They started to sing for me and my soul. I did not confess. It all looked very comical, particularly when John Webb took the floor. That was the end of the meeting.

They all left, except Mr Webb who had something

important to talk to me about. Even my parents were not allowed to stay.

'The first thing I want to tell you about is your application for a scholarship award. I have been able to obtain you one, but it is for a general arts degree at any university within the Commonwealth. But the condition is that on completion of your studies, you will come and teach in any one of our mission schools for a period of two to three years.'

'But I wanted to study law, Reverend, and I made this clear.'

'Law is ruled out. Forget it.' He waved his hand in the air.

I watched him. 'Out of the question – how?'

He took out his pipe, filled it, and applied a match. He puffed out smoke contentedly.

'So, what do you say?' He didn't even remove the pipe from his mouth.

'I haven't anything to say, Reverend. Law, that's what I want to study.'

'I will give you time to think over it. Drop me a line when you have decided to take the scholarship. I will then send you the necessary forms to fill in.'

'If the scholarship is not for law, you can award it to somebody else, Reverend.'

'Don't be in a hurry to throw away a rare opportunity out of hand. You are like my own child, that's why I am doing all I can to help you. I have seen you grow. You have been my pupil. I know your capabilities. I know you better than you know yourself. So, I am giving you time to think.'

He looked at me. I said nothing.

'The second thing is: why were you not in church?'

'I went out to watch animals,' I said.

He twisted his face as if in pain. 'Went out to watch animals on Sunday?'

'That's the only day I can.'

'Can't you go there any other day? I thought you were a Christian. Jo, you should be ashamed of yourself! I am ashamed of you – to think I have taught you!'

'But, Reverend, didn't you tell us once in a class that parents often took their children to the zoo to watch animals on Sundays? You were talking about England. I remember that. What is the difference here?'

'You are talking to your Principal, Jo. Don't forget that. You may have left school, but I am still your Principal.'

'I will remember that, Reverend. I didn't mean to be rude. I merely wanted to know the difference between . . .'

'Now, are you doing it again, Jo?' He sighed. 'The thing is, Jo, you are born in a very Christian family. You are a Christian yourself. You are better educated than most of the people at this station. You must therefore behave in an exemplary fashion. Do you understand?'

I understood.

That was all he wanted to tell me. We shook hands. He shook hands with my parents. Then he left.

'You did not come to the service this morning, child?' my father said. It was really a statement of fact not a question. My father looked ill and I wondered what was the trouble.

'Are you ill, father?'

'I am tired, child. But why didn't you come to the service?'

'I went on a country walk, father. This time I was fortunate to see some animals.'

'Reverend John Webb didn't like your not being at the

service. I don't mind, but I am concerned when people begin to talk. Makes me look a careless father in their eyes.'

'I won't do it again, father. I am honestly sorry to have put you . . .'

'It's nothing. Your mother, of course, tells me she permitted you to go, and you promised it would be your last country excursion. Did you enjoy the trip?'

'The animals were fascinating to watch, but a bit on the frightening side.'

'You must have gone beyond that wooded hill after the wide plain and the forest?'

He knew the area well. I told him we had seen the animals come to drink.

'We used to go there and hunt before the government declared it a reserve area. Did the teacher also enjoy the trip? You shouldn't be taking her out alone, child. People will spread wrong rumours. Promise me you won't take her out again? Spare me the sting and pain of wagging tongues, child.'

'I won't take her out when I am here,' I said slowly.

If I gave such a promise to somebody else, I could take it back. With my father it was different.

'I am going to Kawacha to visit Mary and Felix,' I said to my parents during supper one evening.

'I think that is a good idea,' my father agreed. 'When do you intend to go?'

'In two days' time.'

'That will give me time to pound some maize flour for them,' mother said.

'Don't let Felix induce you to become a Catholic like himself'

'No, father,' I said. 'Mary hasn't become a convert to this day.'

'She might some day,' mother said. 'He is a very good husband to her. Although she hasn't had a child yet since their marriage, he still treats her lovingly. He is a good man. What made him convert?'

'He was dissatisfied with our church. Jo, too, doesn't seem an ardent Christian.'

'I am, father.'

He laughed. 'You can go to Kawacha, child. I will find you the fare.'

'Thank you, father.'

I did not want to tell them that I was taking up a job. I wanted to give them a surprise after I had already been there a month – I wanted to send them some money out of my first month's salary.

Elizabeth and Agnes heard the news about my journey. Both came to the house the following afternoon.

'How long are you going to stay?' Agnes asked.

'I don't know yet. Maybe a month.'

'What next will you do?'

'I wanted to study law and become a lawyer,' I said. 'But I can't do that without money. Anyway, I will keep my fingers crossed.'

'We will get to see you there one week-end,' Elizabeth said. 'Give Mary and her husband our love.'

'I will. Any other messages?'

'No.'

I was ready to go. Any time now the bus would be here. A little group of people gathered at the roadside to bid me farewell. My father took me into the church and prayed for my safe journey and a safe stay in Kawacha. My mother was also in the church, and when my father stopped she prayed that I would not forget my prayers. She prayed for God's blessings to be bestowed on me,

so that I would be lucky in all I did and that I should always remember and love my parents.

I had always taken my parents' love for me for granted. But at this moment I realized how much I meant to them. Silently, I promised to be good. I was sad to leave them, but one must leave one's parents' roof some day and set out on one's own path.

We joined the group at the roadside with Elizabeth and Agnes.

The bus came. 'Be good, and look after yourself, child,' my father said. He handed me the money for my fare. I discovered later that it was a sum enough to cover three fares.

Once in the bus, I called good-bye to the people who meant everything to me. I was now on my own. I had gained my independence.

'Man, how you have grown into a real he-man,' Felix said surveying me up and down. He had come to meet me at the bus terminal. 'Mary couldn't come to meet you. But she is waiting for you at the house.'

Felix Tambala was a mechanic in a local big garage. His ambition had always been to study engineering.

He picked up my suitcase – the same battered one. 'Let's pick a taxi somewhere here. My friend who owns a taxi has gone on a journey. We'll take any.'

It was a long time since I had visited Kawacha, and it had grown out of all recognition. The buildings were now tall and new, the streets were wide. There were signs of prosperity. The girls were dressed smartly, as were the young men. I looked at my shabby clothes. I must look a typical countryman, I thought. Would I ever be as smartly dressed?

We went to Kumoyo Location, an African residential

area. The houses were of a uniform design. Felix said, 'This is supposed to be the best African location. The Municipality, who own it, treat it as a showpiece and they always bring visitors here telling them "We treat our Africans well".'

We stopped in front of his house. 'Welcome to Kawacha, Jo,' Felix said. The house was clean and comfortably furnished. Felix took me to my bedroom.

'This is your room, young man,' he said. 'I hope you'll find it satisfactory.'

He took me on a tour of the house and in the kitchen I met Mary.

'Hello, Jo,' she said, looking up from the pot on the stove. 'I'll be with you in a moment. Go and wash yourself in the bathroom. Are you all right?'

I said, 'Yes, Mary.'

'Good. Now, go and wash.'

She still regarded me as a child, I thought, the way she ordered me to go and take a bath. But I was grateful for her thoughtfulness in having it ready for my arrival. I was dusty after the journey.

It was not until the meal-time that we all met again. Mary and Felix had no children, and their house was always spotless.

We said no prayers before starting to eat, but Felix genuflected and Mary murmured to herself.

'We each say a private prayer,' Felix said, when he realized that I was at a loss. 'You will soon get used to it.'

Mary looked radiant and beautiful. She had changed little.

'How are the people at home?' She asked later.

'They are all well. They sent you both lots of love,' I answered.

Felix said, 'The old man still working very hard?'

'Yes, Felix.'

'He should retire,' Mary said.

'Yes, he ought to rest,' Felix joined in.

'And what is mother doing just now?' Mary asked.

'She runs weekly meetings for the mothers at the mission and the villages near by. Oh, she has a lot to do.'

The conversation continued in this vein until we finished eating. Watching Felix and Mary, I came to the conclusion that they were a very devoted couple. I went to bed feeling very happy.

That night I dreamed about Elizabeth. She was sitting very close to me in a church but whenever I tried to touch her she drifted away beyond reach. I woke up to discover that it was already light. I must have slept very soundly.

Felix had already gone to his work when I went for breakfast. Mary was preparing to go to the school near by, where she taught. She said that she would come home some time before the lunch-hour.

'If you are tired of sitting alone,' she said, 'you can go to the Recreation Centre and amuse yourself. They have a good library there, and the manager is Felix's friend. Tell him who you are; he will be pleased to meet you.'

I watched her go away, riding her bicycle confidently. Shortly afterwards, I locked up the house and went to the Recreation Centre. This was an attractive building situated in the centre of the location. The grounds were well looked after, and the place had a general air of cleanliness and well-being.

I met the manager in the canteen at the other end of the building. His friendliness immediately put me at my ease.

He said, 'My name is Benjamin Nyirenda. I know Felix and Mary very well.'

I told him my name, and very soon we were calling each other by first names.

Ben took me from one room to another, explaining everything he thought would interest me. It was a very big building, comprising a huge hall with a stage, a good library, committee rooms, offices, stores, an indoor games room with a ping-pong table at one end and a billiards table at the other, and the two canteens.

'The hall is used for cinema shows, for meetings of all kinds, for holding dances, and for anything you can think of,' Ben said. 'We have small committees which run the various clubs within the Centre voluntarily. We have a reading circle, a dance club, a games club and so on. We do not allow people to enjoy the amenities here before they become fully paid members. Priority, in this, is given to residents in this location. I hope you will become a member of the Centre when you have settled down.'

I said, 'Yes, I'll become a member when I have got a job. What's the fee?'

'It's a small fee, really,' he said. 'But you needn't worry about it now. You are my personal guest until you are settled down. By the way, tell me, how is Agnes Maki?'

'I left her happy and in good health,' I said. 'You must be her friend?'

He smiled. 'I am her friend. But someone has been interfering. If he doesn't stop, I'll certainly fix him.'

He laughed softly, almost to himself.

'Don't take me seriously,' he said. 'Now, come to the other canteen and drink tea with me.'

After having our tea in the second canteen, we spent some time in the library. I went back to the house about lunch-time, thinking about Agnes Maki and this boy.

Chapter 4

It was a lively evening. Benjamin Nyirenda and two other friends came to the house just after we had finished supper. Felix brought out some bottles of beer which he passed round, and the conversation soon became animated.

Earlier in the evening, the radio had announced that the Governor had decided to appoint Mr Daniel Dube as the second African nominated Member of Legislative Council, and that the names of two others would be announced later. His Excellency would also be appointing two Africans as Members of the Executive Council. These would be drawn from among the four nominated Legislative Council Members.

Benjamin Nyirenda said, 'Nobody is surprised about this appointment.'

'You mean Dan Dube's appointment?' Felix said.

'Yes,' Ben said. 'He should not accept it. We have always demanded a constitutional change which will allow people to vote and return to the Legislature popular representatives. These nominated members don't represent anybody. The whole thing is out of date.'

Benjamin was the only one not drinking beer. He was a teetotaller, and yet he seemed to enjoy the evening as much as the others drinking beer. Mary, however, had retired to bed early. She had plainly said she did not like

Mangani Phiri, particularly when he was under the influence of alcohol.

Mangani Phiri was one of the two friends with Ben: the other was Zake Lukani. Mangani was short and talkative. I wondered if he really was following the conversation – often he laughed when the others were serious, or said yes when he should have said no.

Zake was also short, and was the oldest in the room. He was fat and spoke with the restraint of an older man among young people. He owned a shop which was looked after by his wife, while he himself worked as a salesman for the firm which employed Felix. He had made his money by privately selling spares belonging to the firm.

Felix said, 'Supposing you had been nominated, Ben, would you refuse the offer?'

'I would most certainly decline,' Ben answered.

Zake Lukani looked into his glass and shook his head. 'It would be a great pity if a man of your intelligence and education turned down an offer to serve his country and people,' he said sadly.

Mangani Phiri suddenly started to laugh loudly. Everybody looked at him in surprise. He tried to control himself, but failed.

Zake Lukani said, 'What is it that you find funny in me?'

Benjamin said, 'Don't mind Mangani. He doesn't mean to offend anybody. He is the specimen of an unspoilt African, full of laughter and full of love.'

'Well, yes,' Mangani Phiri said. 'You are right, Ben, I don't hate anyone. I don't double-cross my friends either.'

He laughed again, but now without any mirth. I doubted if Mangani Phiri was really the fool he tried to show he was.

'As I said,' Zake Lukani said, 'it would be a pity for you, with all your intelligence and education, to refuse an offer to serve your country and people.'

'Being in Legco is not the only way by which I can serve my country and my people,' Ben said. 'Anyway, that's not the point. Being in Legco is all right. What is wrong is how you go there, if you see what I mean.'

Felix started to speak, but Ben interrupted him.

'We want our people to go to Legco,' he said. 'We want to fill that House with our own people, the Africans. But the way we want them to go there is by our own free choice through the ballot-box. Not by being nominated; selected by the Governor, and not the people whom you are supposed to represent. No, not that way. I can't accept that.'

Zake Lukani said, 'Young man, if you go on talking like that, I can assure you, one of these days you will get into trouble.'

Ben said, 'I have heard that before, and all I can tell you, Mr Lukani, is that I don't mind. I don't mind at all getting into trouble if that is the only way we can be recognized as a people able to select their own representatives and . . .'

Felix said, 'Oh, Ben, don't make it difficult for Mr Lukani. He is one of the four people the Governor has in mind for nomination to Legco. I wouldn't be far wrong if I predict that he will probably be one of the two Africans to be appointed to the Executive Council, as well.'

Mangani Phiri put in, 'I have heard Mr Lukani has already been given the seat in Legco. We taxi-drivers don't miss any news. It's no secret, that, although we have yet to hear it on the radio or read it in the

newspapers. I wonder why *Kawacha News* has not said anything in its editorial about it.

Zake Lukani saw the chance to change the subject.

'Have you already started working for the newspaper, young man?' He asked me, smiling.

'No,' I said.

'They have a very pleasant man as editor,' he said. 'I am sure you will enjoy working for them.'

'The paper is a little too old-fashioned,' Felix said. 'They need a new editor.'

'Bill Akimu is all right,' Ben Nyirenda said. 'He is an intelligent journalist, and he knows what he is doing. What he really needs is enough of a free hand to exercise his skills. The management with its present policy allows him little freedom.'

Felix said, 'I like Bill Akimu. He is an interesting person.'

'Ben, you were at the same college as Bill Akimu, weren't you?' Mangani Phiri asked.

'Is Bill Akimu a university graduate as well?' Felix asked, unable to conceal his surprise.

'He left the university in his last year,' Ben said. 'Poverty.'

'Dan Dube put him where he is,' Zake Lukani said proudly. 'Without Dube, the man would be walking the streets of Kawacha, jobless.'

'We don't underrate Dan Dube's influence and ability,' Ben said. 'He is a clever man.'

Mangani Phiri coughed and said, 'Give me some more beer, Felix, please.'

'But you've already had a full bottle,' Zake Lukani observed.

'Oh, yes.' He laughed. 'Anyway, there is no harm in having another. Is there?'

Mangani Phiri's face contorted as he spoke, and this time everyone laughed.

'You hardly talk, Jo,' Ben said. 'Tell us something.'

'I don't have anything to say. I am quite happy listening to your conversation. I am learning a lot.'

'Well said, young man,' Mangani Phiri said. 'I think you will make a good news-picker. One of the great requirements of a news-picker is that he must be a good listener, and that is what we taxi-drivers are. We listen more than we talk. Yes, you will be a good journalist, my boy. But for your education, I could have offered to make you a taxi-driver.'

There was general laughter again at this remark.

Ben said, 'Why don't you go on with your education, Jo?'

'I am from a poor family, as you already know,' I said. 'It would be a simple matter if we had money in the family, or if my parents were young. But they are getting very old and I can't leave them alone.'

'It's a difficult problem, this poverty,' Ben said. 'It's restricting many of our boys and girls from becoming skilled in something. It is a sad thing. We must change the present order of things. It's not getting us anywhere as things are at present. We must change.'

Zake Lukani said, 'You must count yourself lucky for being one of the few African graduates we have in the country.'

'Of course, I am fortunate to have had a university education,' Ben said. 'But the fact that I am one of the few to do so should make all of us, including you, Mr Lukani, very sorry and very concerned. There are more intelligent men and women in this country who have been denied the opportunity. Here is Felix, for example. He is a matriculant. He has always wanted to be an

engineer, but because he has no money, opportunities to go to a college are denied him; so here he sits, and all he can do is to work as a mechanic, and live with his dreams of becoming a trained engineer. Man, it's disgusting. Just look at this boy now, Jo Jozeni. Isn't it a pity our people must stagnate like that, Mr Lukani, when we want trained men and women in the country so badly?'

'You are making a speech, Ben,' Mangani Phiri said. 'You should become a public speaker instead of a welfare worker.'

Ben smiled. 'Sometimes one has to make a speech even if the audience is only composed of one person – oneself. Have you ever tried to address your image in the mirror? You try it one of these days. It's big fun.'

'Careful, Ben, you don't lose your head,' Felix said. 'Intelligent people easily go mad, you know.'

Zake Lukani looked at Felix and supported him, 'I am afraid, Felix, what you say is not far from the truth.'

Felix ignored them and said, 'The thing is, Mr Lukani, you must not accept nomination to Legco, or Exco for that matter. Say to the Governor with all due respect "Your Excellency, I am unable to accept the gracious offer". That will be enough.'

There was an air of suspense. Everyone sat silent, watching Zake Lukani intently. The ominous silence was interrupted by the sound of a motor-car outside. Felix excused himself and went to meet the newcomer.

'That sounds like Mr Dube's car,' said Mangani Phiri. Felix returned to the room followed by big Dan Dube, wearing a smart grey suit and dark-brown suède shoes. We all stood up, and Dube, stretching out his hands in the fashion of a priest blessing his flock, said, 'You've all heard the great news, I expect. I am now your repre-

sentative in the Legislative Council; and – this is in confidence and it must not go beyond these four walls – I have been offered a seat in the Executive Council. That's great, boys.'

Beaming, he sat down in the chair next to Zake Lukani.

'I have just been to your house, Zake,' he said, 'and your wife said you were visiting Felix Tambala. So I have followed you.'

Then turning to Felix, he said, 'What is it you are doing here, boys?'

'Would you like some beer?' Felix said apologetically. 'I am afraid I have nothing better to offer you.'

Dan Dube said, 'Beer is all right, I'll have a glass. Thank you.'

I tried to catch Dan Dube's attention, but he seemed to have forgotten me. Somehow, I thought he was ignoring me intentionally, and I was hurt to think that I counted so little to him. A beggar, the son of a poor clergyman, that is what he thinks I am, I told myself.

That night Dan Dube looked big and acted big. He was drunk with excitement.

'I have been to a Sundowner Party at Government House,' he told us. 'Do you think it will upset my stomach if I drink this beer? I was on whisky all evening, you see.'

Somebody said, 'Well, you don't have to take it.' But Dan Dube ignored the remark with contempt, and accepted Felix's glass of beer cheerfully. He was in a very happy mood and soon was the dominant figure in the room.

Zake Lukani said, 'I am sorry I was not home when you called, Dan. Felix asked me to come to his house for a chat.'

Dan Dube looked surprised. 'You, Zake Lukani, an

older man to chat at a young boy's house. Since when has this practice come into style?'

He laughed loudly.

'Oh, never mind my remark,' he said. 'I don't mean to slight you, Felix. You are a good man. But really it's the young man who visits the old man. Not this rubbish Zake Lukani is telling me.'

Zake Lukani protested, 'You don't address a contemporary like that, Dan Dube, in the presence of . . .'

Dan Dube interrupted, 'I am sorry, man. The thing is, I was not happy to find you away from home – even though I'd told you I'd be coming to see you this evening.'

'This appointment of yours, Mr Dube,' Benjamin Nyirenda said, 'when does it come into effect?'

'Right away, my boy,' Dan Dube said. 'Man, our Governor is a wise man. This is what we have been demanding – representation in the Legislative Council and Executive Council. Now we have got it. What do you say?'

Ben shook his head, and said, 'It's not quite what we are demanding. You people have been nominated, but what we want is free choice by the people through elections.'

Dan Dube said, 'Boys, we must learn to walk before we can run. You demand elections. All right, well and good. But where are the people educated enough to choose representatives wisely?'

'Are you saying, Mr Dube,' Mangani Phiri put in, 'that we haven't got people to run our own show in this country? Haven't you been a Councillor of the Municipality for donkey's years, and a good one at that? Do you mean to say, Mr Dube, that you considered yourself not on equal terms with the other non-African Councillors? My, you surprise me with your talk, sir.'

Having said his piece, he stood up.

'Felix,' he said, 'I think you will allow me, please, to go.'

Ben said, 'Wait a minute, Phiri. I'm coming too.'

Dan Dube, still very composed said, 'I'll give you a lift home.'

Mangani Phiri said, 'I will walk, thank you. By the way, Mr Dube, when are we holding a public meeting? We agreed to launch the campaign months back, but we have done nothing. We have talked and talked and talked, but done nothing practical.'

Felix said, 'I think we have to make good plans if the campaign has to succeed at all, Phiri. That is the reason why Mr Dube has postponed the date of the meeting all these months.'

Dan Dube smiled and said, 'Felix is right. Before we launch the campaign, we must plan the course of events. We cannot go into this thing blindly. When pressure of work has eased up, I shall call you, boys, to talk things over.'

Then as if noticing me for the first time, Dan Dube said, 'Oh, my friend, you have come! Why haven't you been to look me up?'

'I am seeing you at your office one of these days, sir.'

Dan Dube drained his tumbler, stood up and said, 'Good. You come and see me at my office, young man.' Then turning to Mangani Phiri he said, 'Are you coming with me, Mangani?'

'No, I'll wait around a bit longer,' Phiri said.

We all stood up and trooped out after Dan Dube. As he climbed into his car, Ben said, 'Mr Dube, please don't forget the people want elected representatives.'

Dan Dube started the engine.

'The trouble with you, Ben, is that you are too dogmatic. I am much older than you,' he said, 'and yet you

think I have the brains of a child, the way you talk. I know what the people want. That's enough. Trust me, my boy, I am not one to sell my people down the river.'

'I don't know about that,' Ben said quietly.

Mr Dube was already driving away and did not catch the remark.

'Is your taxi not coming to collect you, Phiri?' Felix asked.

'It's in the garage,' Ben said.

'Felix should know that,' Phiri said laughing, and jabbed a friendly finger in Felix's ribs. 'I brought it into your garage this morning, remember? Don't tell me you haven't done anything to it.'

'I wasn't given that job,' Felix said.

'I will fry your works manager alive if he has not fixed my car by the time I call in tomorrow,' Phiri said. 'Well, good night, Felix. See you tomorrow, and please give the warning to your works manager about my cab.'

Felix laughed.

'You should have conveyed the warning to the manager through Mangani Phiri,' he said. 'He won't take it seriously if he gets it from me.'

Ben said, 'You know, chaps, that man is no fool. He is influential with the top figures in the government, and while he remains that way, he is useful to our cause. The only trouble with him is that he realizes his value, and he is getting a good price for it – mainly benefiting his own stomach.'

Felix and Mangani Phiri laughed. I did not understand the joke but I knew it concerned Dan Dube.

'That meeting, boys,' said Mangani Phiri, 'it's important we must convene it shortly. Ben, you give us a convenient date on which we can make use of the hall in your Centre.'

Ben said, 'It's not for me to fix the date. I think you two ought to see Zake Lukani and insist that he does something. After all he is the Acting General Secretary. You must show him that he has the power to decide these things for himself. At the moment, I think you will agree, Dan Dube is doing all the thinking for him.'

Felix added, 'Dan Dube is doing the thinking for all of us, man. In this respect, all of us in the movement are dependent on Dan Dube.'

'You are right in a way, Felix,' Ben admitted. 'Thing is, he's smart, too damn smart for many of us.'

'I sometimes wonder,' Felix said reflectively, 'if your private quarrel doesn't intrude into public matters?'

'What do you mean, Felix? What do you mean by that remark?'

'You know what I mean, of course,' Felix said coolly. 'This business of your girl and Dan Dube. You see; take my advice for all it is worth; that man is no fool. He knows you don't like him. But when you are too obvious about it, you only warn him you intend to harm him, and he easily reads your mind. If I were you, I would be very diplomatic the way I handled him.'

'I'm not the sort to hide what I think,' Ben said. 'In any case, Dan Dube knows we can never be friends. He is only tolerating me in the movement because he can't throw me out and survive himself. He knows you would never stand that, boys. But I have never forgiven Dan Dube for interfering between Agnes Maki and myself. And to be on the level with you, I think that as we've crossed in our private lives we can't really play ball in public affairs.'

'You have no right to mix private matters with public matters. You forget that public matters affect everybody – not only yourself. Don't let me hear you speak like

that again, no matter if you dislike the other chap privately. If you do mix the two things together, you are finished, my boy. I can tell you that plainly.'

Ben said, 'I am sorry, gentlemen, forget what I said. Please forgive me.'

They all shook hands. It was like watching a game played by three madmen in a lunatic asylum.

'You know, now that Dan Dube knows some of us disapprove his acceptance of the nomination to Legco, we should expect action.'

'We are ready for anything. We mean business.'

They all agreed.

After that the party dispersed. Felix and I went back into the sitting-room. Suddenly it was quiet.

At length Felix said, 'Those are great boys, Jo. You will be hearing much about them one of these days.'

All I could say was, 'D'you think so, Felix?'

'Not only think, Jo. I know it,' he said.

I changed the subject.

'Felix, I am going to see this man tomorrow,' I said.

'Which one, Jo?'

'The editor of *Kawacha News,*' I said. 'How do I get there?'

'I will take you there,' Felix said. 'What time do you intend to go there?'

'In the morning, Felix.'

'All right, I will take you there after first reporting myself at the garage. But are you sure you don't want to go on with your education, Jo?'

'I would like to go on,' I said truthfully, 'but odds are against me.'

Felix said sympathetically, 'It's a problem. Well, I hope these fellows on *Kawacha News* will give you a job which you will like.'

'I hope so,' I answered. 'As I have never worked anywhere else before, I suppose I must not expect much at first.'

'That is true,' Felix said. 'But that should not stop you from aiming high. That's important.'

Then my sister came in from the bedroom.

'You must come to bed now,' she said. 'And you, Jo, go to bed. I do not approve this drinking business at all, and I will tell the old man if you are going to drink again like you have done tonight, Jo. You are only a boy, and not even working. Felix should be ashamed of himself to give a young man beer.'

Felix laughed pleasantly.

'Drink is a form of relaxation,' he said. 'Jo will come to no harm if only he takes drink moderately, and Jo is a sensible boy.'

Mary said, 'To bed, boys.'

She put out the light even before we left the room. In the dark Felix kicked a stool and cried with pain.

'Good night, Jo, boy,' he said. 'Sleep well.'

'Good night to you both,' I called back and slipped into my bedroom. That night I kept awake for a long time wondering what it would be like meeting Bill Akimu, the editor of *Kawacha News*.

Chapter 5

I started work with the *Kawacha News* almost immediately as a cub reporter. I discovered, to my surprise, that the paper was actually edited by Peter Brown, an Englishman who owned it in partnership with another Englishman who had settled in the country as a farmer.

My colleagues were generally helpful, but in the early days I found them slightly patronizing and inquisitive. Mr Brown himself, a big, middle-aged ex-Colonel, was just as patronizing. He made it clear to us, the editorial staff, that his intention was to leave everything to us to manage. Bill Akimu was now being specially trained to take over the editorship from Mr Brown.

Bill Akimu was in his late 30's, of average height, a pleasant, rather withdrawn, man. He treated me with kindness and sympathy, and I admired him not only because he was my senior but because of his ability and profound knowledge of people and events. We called him 'the human dictionary'.

Others on the editorial were Kenneth Pasi, the photographer and dark-room technician, who obviously thought much of himself. He was about my age, but he was taller and handsomer. I don't think we liked him much, and little did he care. And then there was Alaje Kachaso, also in his early twenties. He was a kind of news editor, sub-editor and chief reporter all combined.

Alaje Kachaso – he preferred to call himself Al Kachaso – was a man difficult to describe. He knew his job inside out. He played football well. He owned a dance band. He had an insatiable capacity for drink and women. He was an all-rounder with hardly any enemies. We became big friends and spent much of our time together both at work and outside the office. He lived in Majengo Location, a very crowded African township with dirty alleys, houses of all shapes and ages, prosperous businessmen, spivs, prostitutes, everything. Majengo was the opposite of Kumoyo in every respect, and yet I think the people in Majengo lived as natural, and as happy a life as those in Kumoyo.

There was a distinct social pattern and way of life in Majengo which you could not find in any other residential area in Kawacha township. In the other areas it was like living in a zoo, whereas in Majengo it was different. Alaje had been born and brought up in Majengo. It was the only home he knew and loved.

He told me one day, 'You know, Jo, I could never be happy in any other place other than Majengo.'

I said, 'I like the open country. This is too crowded a life for me.'

'We are different, you and I,' Alaje said.

I think he was right, for although we were good friends, we never really understood each other – we were two people each belonging to a different world.

As for Kenneth Pasi, I did not even know where he lived. We hardly met at all after leaving the office, and unless we were on a job together, he was always alone. In the office, too, we often forgot Pasi was one of us, mainly because he spent most of his time in the dark-room.

As for Bill Akimu – I had been to his house several

times and had met his charming wife, an ex-hospital nurse, and their children. I liked the family and was happy in their company, but I found Alaje Kachaso far more entertaining.

One Saturday – which was also a pay-day – Alaje said, 'Jo, would you like to see a bit of life tonight?'

Without thinking at all, I answered, 'Sure, Al. I would.'

Bill Akimu intervened. 'Are you sure, Jo, you would like to go out with him? Better ask your brother-in-law first if he doesn't mind your staying out all night from home.'

Alaje chuckled. 'Well, he will be safe with me, Bill. I'll look after him. I want to show Jo what kind of life we lead in the town.'

I said, 'I really would like to come. But as Bill says, let me tell Felix and Mary about it first and see what they say.'

'You sound as if you think I will have you murdered,' Alaje said laughing. 'My band is playing in the Hall at Majengo tonight, so I thought you may like to come and listen to the music or even dance.'

'No drink?' Bill asked knowingly.

'Oh, of course, we'll have a little drink,' Alaje said. 'That we can't miss, Boss.'

I telephoned Felix at his garage, but he was not there.

'I'll come and collect you from your house at Kumoyo,' Alaje said. 'Shall we make it two o'clock? That suit you?'

'That should be all right,' I said.

'What's the number of your house?' he asked.

'E95 – East of the Recreation Centre,' I told him.

'I know that,' Alaje said. 'You know why they call it E95?'

'No idea,' I said.

'It means yours is the 95th house east of the Recreation Centre,' he said smiling.

When I went home, I gave all my pay packet to Mary to keep for me until the following Monday when I would put a little of the money in the bank and send a little to my parents.

'This friend of yours,' Mary asked anxiously when I told them about Alaje's invitation, 'is he a good man? This town is full of notorious thugs, you have to be careful, Jo.'

'We work in the same office,' I told her. 'He is all right, I am sure.'

Felix came to my rescue. 'I know Al Kachaso. He is a townee, but I think he is harmless.'

'Do go, but do be very careful, Jo,' Mary said. 'Come back home safely, please.'

Changing the subject, Felix said, 'You know, I expect, about this meeting taking place in the Centre, tomorrow?'

I said, 'I think Alaje and myself are covering it. Anyway, he has all the information about it. What's it about?'

'Dube is convening it to tell people about his nomination to the Legislative Council and so on,' Felix said. 'I think it's going to be an interesting one. There are many people who think he ought not have accepted the seat, but Dube says that had he done that, then he would be letting his people down. He is, therefore, giving his critics a chance to express their objections publicly, so that he can also state his case publicly.'

'Are you involved in the controversy, Felix?' his wife asked anxiously.

'Ah, well, in a way,' he said vaguely.

'What do you mean, Felix?' she insisted.

'This business, Mary, everyone is involved in it somehow, even the Old Man,' he said.

'Which old man?' I asked, smelling a rat.

'Your father,' Felix said simply.

Mary said, 'Don't make such jokes, Felix.'

Felix shrugged his shoulders and pretended to look serious. 'But I am not joking, dear,' he said. 'It is an open secret that the Old Man, like Dan Dube and Zake Lukani, and a fourth man whose name we do not know yet, will be our African representative in the Legislature.'

I said, 'But how do you collect such information, Felix?'

Felix said, 'Well, that's a difficult question, Jo.'

I was about to say something when someone knocked at the door. Felix opened it, and Alaje Kachaso stepped in.

'Have I interrupted a family discussion?' Alaje said laughingly.

Mary looked at him seriously and said, 'But that's none of your business.'

Felix said quickly, 'Oh, Mary, but Al didn't mean to be rude.' Then he turned to Alaje and said, 'My wife isn't very well this afternoon, Al. Don't mind her bad temper. I think you two had better be going right away and enjoy yourselves. Al, look after Jo. He doesn't know the town well enough, yet.'

Alaje, who didn't look crushed, said, 'Sure, Felix. I'll bring him back safely and in one piece.'

We laughed and went out.

It was still hot, although the sun was very low in the west. As it was Saturday afternoon, the streets were full of people, some drunk, others solemn, serious, and oppressively sober.

On the outskirts of the location, we found a bus just about to leave for the town. The town was quiet and deserted, hardly any traffic on the road. We dropped off the bus near the main Barclay's Bank building in Main

Avenue, took a narrow side-street and after walking a short distance entered an old-looking three-storey building. We climbed the stairs to the second floor where we found a crowded bar.

'We'll have a drink here,' Alaje announced approvingly.

Most of the customers were Asians, but there were a few Europeans and three or four Africans. Some of the people in the bar greeted Alaje like a long-lost friend. As we edged our way to the counter he told me a few names of some of those greeting him, but I hardly remembered them by the time we reached the counter and gave our order. I gathered that this place was called the Angel. The name didn't seem appropriate for such an evil-looking place, but after I had two or three drinks and caught the feeling of its peculiar happy cosmopolitan atmosphere I approved of it. Drink was offered us from left and right.

'This is because of you, Jo. They are making you a member of the Angel.'

'You're popular here, Al.'

'I'm a musician. They all know when I am on the stage I will return them their favour by playing them numbers they request.' He laughed. 'You drink as if the stuff is poison. Gulp it down if you can't drink it as I do.'

I was trying my best to keep pace with him, but I was still new to it.

The proprietor was a fat Greek called Martins. He floated everywhere in his crowded bar. He talked to this one, then that one and the other. He knew almost all his customers in the room.

When he came to me after talking to Al, he said: 'How do you like it here? This is your first time to pay us a visit. Enjoy yourself, Jack. If there is anything you want, just call Martins and he will see to it. Me, Martins, no

colour bar – like to make friends. Everyone same to me because their money is the same. Been in this country thirty-two years. All that I have has come from this country. Enjoy yourself, Jack.'

'Jo, that's his name, Martins,' Al corrected him.

But by then he had already floated to the next customer. Fat as he was, I couldn't understand how he walked about so easily in such a packed room.

'A rich sucker, Martins,' somebody told me. 'Owe him any amount and he will go on lending you so long as you don't forget to worship at the Angel. That he knows is just getting you deeper and deeper into debt. Bloody sucker.'

He washed down his bitterness with whisky.

I was in bed with a woman in a strange room.

'Where is this?' I mumbled. 'Where am I?'

She giggled. 'Sleep and rest,' she said.

'For God's sake, where is here? Al, Al. Where's Al?'

I heard him laugh. I sat up and saw him sitting in a chair at the other end of the room. He was cleaning a trumpet.

'Don't scream, Jo,' he said. 'You're in safe hands. She won't eat you.'

I rolled out of bed quickly and almost landed on my face.

Alaje Kachaso said, 'Steady, man.'

The woman giggled. Feeling sick, I said: 'Take me out, Al. I feel like vomiting.'

He said, 'Sit down and be quiet, you'll be all right.'

I sat down and held my head in my arms against my thighs. I felt sorry for myself.

Alaje said, 'Girl, bring us a head clearer.'

I did not bother to look up and see what she looked

like or what the head clearer was. But I felt him hold something against my face.

'Here, Jo, take a little of it,' Al said lifting my head up.

I took the tumbler, put it to my lips and took a long pull at the stuff in it. I gulped it almost at once. It was sweet wine, and it made me feel good in a few minutes.

'How do you feel now?' he asked.

'Good,' I said.

'That's fine,' he said. 'You'll be all right in a short while. In a few minutes we should be on our way to the Hall for the dance. Do you want to come, or would you rather stay with her? This is her room.'

I turned round to look at the woman for the first time – or that's what I thought. I had imagined her something of an old bag, but I was surprised to see a very good-looking girl.

'How did I come into your bed?' I asked, now feeling warm in my stomach because of her wine.

She nodded at Alaje Kachaso. She was smiling, and I thought, boy, you can sure select them well enough even in your drunken state.

The girl said shyly, 'I will look after you safely until your friends return from the dance, that is if you don't want to go with them.'

The girl was beautiful and I thought, I won't be missing anything by staying away from the dance and keeping her company. But somehow, I was still a bit frightened of her.

I said, 'I would like to come with you, Al. Can't we take her with us?'

'Okay,' Al said. 'Come with us, good girl.'

The girl said, 'All right, Jo. If you want me, I will come.'

Al said, 'You will find us in the Hall. Don't be too long.'

The dance started at ten in the evening. The hall was so crowded that there was just a tiny space for the dancers in the centre. I stood leaning against one corner of the stage and watched.

The music was good – very good. Even if you didn't want to dance, the sheer force of the rhythm made you sway. They were playing a rumba.

I was swept on to the floor with the others, like people possessed. A girl attached herself to me, and like one person, we moved to the music. When the band stopped suddenly, everyone came to an abrupt halt. It was as if everything was electrically controlled.

There was a short interval. I asked the girl to have some refreshment with me in the canteen. She hesitated, but agreed to come. 'I will, just to keep you company. I don't want anything to drink.'

The canteen was nearly empty. We were among the early customers. I bought a Coke and sat down beside her.

I sipped the Coke and we talked. We were getting on well together. Then it happened.

A tall man towered over me. 'What the hell are you doing with my girl?' he demanded. 'I have been looking all over for her. Who the devil are you, eh?'

He started to roll up the sleeves of his shirt, obviously looking for a fight. I didn't want to fight, and looked round for a quick exit. He advanced one more step towards me, and the girl screamed. 'Stephen, please don't fight. He hasn't done anything. Please . . .'

'Not done anything, eh? When the bloke took you away. What are you talking about?'

'Let me explain, Mr Stephen,' I said lamely.

'Shut up, sonofabitch. This is my girl, and you have no right to take her away without my permission. I am going to teach you a lesson.'

The noise attracted several people from the main hall. Al came to see what was happening, and pushed forward determinedly when he saw the man. He was followed at a respectable distance by his bandboys, and others eager to witness a fight.

Al grabbed the man's shoulder and spun him round. 'Listen, you bastard. This boy is my friend and he's on the level. If you want any trouble with him, then I will give you so god-damned much fight you'll be spitting out teeth like melon seeds.'

Somebody in the crowd shouted, 'Fight, cocks, fight. God damn you.'

Without warning, quick as a flash, my would-be assailant swung his fist at Alaje's face. But Alaje side-stepped. A vicious uppercut caught the man on the chin, and he collapsed on the floor. Then the manager of the hall arrived with some attendants.

'Stop it, boys,' he shouted authoritatively. 'Nobody is going to fight in this place. Those who want to fight, please go out.'

'Come'n out, you idiot,' Alaje shouted at the man on the floor. 'Come outside and I'll give you a good thrashing.'

'Please, Al, leave him alone,' the girl shouted.

'Shut up, you,' Alaje said. 'You are the cause of all this. Come out, you bastard. Get up off the floor.'

The manager said, 'Look here, Al. Get back to the stage and start playing, please. I don't want trouble here.'

Then turning to the man on the floor, the manager said, 'And you, Stephen, get out of this hall right now.

If I catch you in here, I'll have you in the lock-up. I can, you know.'

Stephen said, 'I won't cause any trouble, I swear.'

'All right, if you will behave, then stay on,' he said.

The manager looked at me and smiled.

'Never seen you here before,' he said. 'Be careful with Majengo lice.'

We went back into the hall and the dance started again. Soon afterwards, everyone was again in a gay mood, and I wondered if there had been any quarrel at all.

I did not join the dance floor, but stood watching and listening. Later, Alaje asked me to play the maracas so that the man who was playing them could switch to the spare guitar. At first I found it difficult to keep time with the rest of the band, but I soon got into the swing of the rhythm, and after that I played like an old hand.

The dance ended around two in the morning, and within half an hour everyone had left, except the band and the manager of the hall. The instruments were packed, the gate money counted and shared, and the lights turned off as we finally left. The cool morning air was very refreshing. Alaje led us to a back room of a certain house where illicit drink was being sold, even at that hour of night. I was told later that the place never closed night and day.

The room was small, and badly ventilated. A small paraffin lamp on a box in the centre gave out a weak light. The room was crowded with customers who sat thigh to thigh on boxes or chairs placed against the wall. Somehow we managed to get enough space to sit in, and an elderly fat woman waddled in. She took a quick, sweeping look round the room, and walked towards Alaje. Her face creased in a motherly smile.

'Oh, my children. You must be thirsty. What will your

mama bring you?' Her voice was soft and steady, although outwardly she looked tired and sleepy.

Alaje fished out money from his pocket and gave it to her with a theatrical flourish.

She said, ignoring the money, 'Keep the money for a while. First, please, drink on the house. What shall it be?'

'As usual,' somebody in the group said.

'Yes, as usual,' another seconded.

She went out, and soon afterwards a good-looking, sleepy-eyed girl brought us several bottles of European beer, and a bottle of home-made gin, as well as an assortment of vessels to drink from. She sat down to help us drink on the house.

I said, 'Where is Sleepy Aunt?'

'You mean the mama?' somebody asked.

'That's a good name for her,' Alaje said.

'She is serving other customers in her room,' the girl said slyly.

It was difficult to hear what was said as everyone in the room seemed to be talking at the same time, yet conversation went on as drink flowed. The gin was strong and warm. One tot was enough for me. I felt sick and went out, vomiting immediately as soon as I was in the street. I knelt down, and after a while I felt better. I wiped my mouth and dusted my trousers. A little way across the street was a taxi. My head was unsteady, my mouth felt bad. I did not feel like drinking again. If I went back into the room, the boys would force me to drink, so I decided to go home and sleep.

The driver in the taxi was Mangani Phiri.

He said when I came near, 'How is it with you, Jo?'

I said, 'Not good. I am sick. We have been having a

late-night session at Sleepy Aunt's joint. The boys are still there. Can you take me home?'

Mangani Phiri laughed.

I said, 'I will pay you when we get home.'

He said, 'Oh, I know you will pay me. What I am laughing at is the idea of your going home in that condition – what is Mary going to say?'

I said, 'I don't think she will see me.'

He said, 'Okay, get in.'

He started the car, and when it was moving he said, 'How was the dance and the party?'

I said, 'The dance was good, but I got into trouble with a jealous fellow who objected to my keeping company with his girl friend.'

'Were you hurt?'

'No,' I said. 'My friend came to my rescue.'

'That's like Alaje Kachaso,' Mangani Phiri said. 'He is a good fellow, that chap.'

After a while, he said, 'Why do you call your hostess the Sleepy Aunt?'

'She looked sleepy and so motherly,' I said. 'I think she is fond of Al.'

Mangani Phiri said, 'Well, she has plenty money, that woman. She owns several houses in Majengo, and gets a lot of money in rent. She has two or three late-hour drinking dens, she has girls going about, and has never known a regular man around. So, she chooses the man to keep her company, when she has an appetite. These days, she has an eye for boys, and she rewards them well in cash and clothes for service rendered. Old men like me, oh, never. Unless he happens to have a good pocket. So, you see, Alaje Kachaso is not a fool.'

I said, more to myself, 'She must be terrible.'

Mangani Phiri laughed.

'She is generous,' he said. 'Twenty pounds and a good suit, plus free drink, don't you think is a good reward for company you give an old wench, even if she is old enough to be your mother?'

'I don't know.' I said reflectively.

He said, 'That woman is not the ordinary type. She has, besides her money and appetite for boys, hidden influence.'

'I don't follow.' I said.

'I mean this,' he said. 'Your Sleepy Aunt has influence and power to make you – build you up or literally destroy you. She does it quietly, too. She built up Dan Dube, but I think later he fell out with her when he supported the Municipal Council with its measures to clean up Majengo.'

I asked, wondering, 'How far did these measures succeed?'

'They never even saw the light of day,' he said laughing. 'Majengo may be within the boundaries of Kawacha municipal area, but I think honestly it is a separate town, with Sleepy Aunt as its unofficial mayoress.'

We reached No. E95 in silence. Felix opened the door for me, and I went straight to bed, not even bothering to remove my clothes.

Chapter 6

The morning was hot. After breakfast Felix left the house, saying that he had an engagement. He did not say what kind of engagement it was nor where it was going to be. I stayed reading for a while, partly waiting for Al Kachaso to come and collect me so that we could go to the meeting at the Recreation Centre.

Al did not come. I decided to go alone and hoped I would meet him there.

There was already a huge multitude in the grounds of the Centre, and still more people were pouring in from all directions. I noticed a rather large number of policemen around. Their attitude was offensive, and most of them were impatient and bad-tempered. Perhaps because it was so hot.

No one was allowed to enter the Centre, and a policeman was guarding the entrance. Something seemed wrong somewhere. Al Kachaso was not to be seen anywhere. I looked for somebody to tell me what was going on, but I could find no one I knew.

I approached one policeman. 'What time is the meeting starting?'

He moved away without answering, and his obvious bad temper infected me. I went to a commissioned officer. 'I am a Pressman,' I told him and fished out my card. 'I want to get into the Centre. I want to speak to the manager.'

'We have orders not to let anyone in. Not even the Governor,' he said.

'But I have got to see him.'

He examined me up and down. 'What is it you want him for?'

'I want to know what time the meeting is starting, and I want to take my things from there.'

'All right. Go in, but don't be long.'

I did not even thank him.

Ben was in his office, sitting behind his desk, doing nothing, sulking. 'The meeting should have started already by now – what's happening, Ben?'

'Dan Dube has played us a dirty trick. There is no meeting.'

I did not understand.

'The authorities refused to issue a permit for the meeting. They claim the notice was too short. Dube claims he instructed Lukani long ago to notify the authorities. Lukani says he passed on the ball to Mangani Phiri. Hew!'

There were angry shouts outside, piercing the air menacingly. Benjamin stood up quickly and locked up the safe and cupboards.

'Come, let's go and see what is happening,' he said hurriedly and started for the door. I followed close behind him, feeling more and more uneasy.

We got out and saw a crowd pushing towards a police van with a number of people jammed in the back. Worried policemen were pushing the noisy crowd back from the vehicle, now slowly moving away. The crowd closed around it, and the situation seemed critical.

I lost Ben Nyirenda in the crowd: then I saw him trying to speak to a harassed white police officer who was swinging his cane right and left on the surging people.

Suddenly, from behind, a black police constable heaved Ben up and tossed him into the moving Black Maria.

The crowd angrily demanded the meeting to go on as arranged, and shouted for Dan Dube and for the release of the prisoners in the police truck. But soon the vehicle was loaded and closed, and, as it left, several other trucks arrived with a contingent of the police Riot Squad.

The District Commissioner for Urban Area drove up with two high-ranking police officers and a heavy escort. The Riot Squad cleared the crowd for the D.C. and his party. He was a tall man wearing a short-sleeved khaki shirt and khaki shorts; he stood erect, his white, clean-shaven face betraying no emotion. For a moment there was silence, the atmosphere tense and dangerously charged with emotion.

'Everyone please listen to me,' he said in a clear, loud voice in the vernacular language, making hardly a mistake. 'This is an illegal gathering. No permit was issued for any meeting here today. Now, I want everyone here to disperse peacefully. Each and every one of you, go home.'

Somebody in the crowd shouted, 'Free the prisoners!'

'We want a meeting,' another shouted. The uproar looked as if it would start again.

The District Commissioner cut in sternly: 'I will count ten. I want everyone to go away from here within that count. We don't want trouble. Those who have been arrested will be charged and given a fair trial. Now, o-n-e . . .'

The D.C. counted from one to ten. Nobody moved.

'If you don't start to disperse now, I am going to read the Riot Act,' the D.C. said. 'Start moving.'

The dangerous suspense was broken. The crowd started to push towards him. He looked this and that

way. Then he fished out a piece of paper from one of his pockets.

'This is the Riot Act and I am reading it.' He read the Act, and by then the front section of the crowd was almost at arm's length. He moved backwards perspiring badly. The Riot Squad was on the ready, and only waited for his one word to strike.

Just as the situation was getting out of control, a lone voice was heard above the murmur: 'My people. Listen to me.' The voice came from behind the crowd. I looked up, and saw an old man hoisted up above everybody else. *My father!* My God, what was he doing?

'Go home, my people. Disperse. We do not want trouble. Don't let yourselves be mowed down because of acting against the authorities. We are a peaceful people, and God-fearing. Let your leaders fight for you. We will claim our rights the correct way. I appeal to each one of you to go home. We shall call for a meeting soon. Go, my people. Children of God.'

Miraculously, the crowd started to melt.

'Our good Josiah . . .' they chanted.

'Long live brave old Josiah. . . .'

He was carried from shoulder to shoulder up to his car. I saw Felix and Mangani Phiri get into the car with him. But hardly had they closed the door when a policeman leaned in and dragged them out. In a moment he was joined by several other policemen, and, given cover by the Riot Squad, they shoved the old man and the two boys into a police vehicle and hurried them away.

At this the crowd was enraged. I saw a Press cameraman thrown to the ground and kicked viciously by the crowd. It was Kenneth Pasi.

But why had the police provoked the crowd by

removing the old man? Now the Riot Squad came into action as the crowd threw stones and pebbles at them.

Somebody hit me and sent me sprawling. By now things were really hot. The crowd still threw stones but now at anyone who happened to be near. The police in turn made baton charges, threw tear-gas bombs, and filled all the trucks available with screaming men and women.

From Kumoyo Location, where an uneasy quiet now reigned, the trouble spread to Majengo. We could hear the noise from there, some three miles away, clearly: sounds of shots, followed by sickening screams of fright or pain.

Night came, and things over there were still bad. Felix and father were still held, and I told Mary that I would go to the police station and find out what was happening to them.

Mary was afraid of being left alone in the house, and said that we should both go. I went out to look for a taxi, but after half an hour of failure I returned to the house.

'We better wait here,' Mary said. 'Father is an old man – they will probably let him come home for the night.'

Although she said this, we knew they would not free him so soon. While we were talking like that, Dan Dube arrived in his car. At first, when we heard the sound of the car, we thought it was father being brought home. It was still a relief to see Dan Dube, and he was full of reassuring words.

'I'll see what we can do for the old man,' Dan Dube said. 'I think there has been a mistake. They should have not taken him, unless it was for his own safety. Anything could happen in such a riot.'

Dan Dube was composed and undisturbed. I admired his nerve.

'I gather you came to see me, Jo,' he said. 'I was not at the house. I went to see the authorities to see if I could get a permit for the meeting even at such a late hour.'

I said, 'You left it too late. The people were disappointed because there wouldn't be a meeting.'

'It was not my fault, young man,' Dube said and lighted a cigarette. 'I instructed Mangani Phiri to get a permit from the authorities for the meeting over a week or two ago. I told him he was to liaise with Zake Lukani and the other boys. I am a busy man, you know that, and I can't look into everything personally. That's the duty of my secretary and other assistants.'

'Did you arrange to have the old man at the meeting?' Mary asked.

'Not me,' Dan Dube said.

'Who did?'

'Oh, I don't know,' Dube said, and shrugged. 'Why don't you ask Felix about that?'

'Felix is locked up with father,' Mary said, her voice becoming high-pitched. 'But can't you do something to get them out, Mr Dube? My father is a sick old man. He can't stay there all night.'

Dan Dube said, 'Well, I'll see what I can do. I can't promise to bring him here at once. It may be he is being kept there for his own safety. This should be a lesson to him once and for all. Old men ought not to join in mass demonstrations, or make a public show of themselves. I was not there, and here I am talking to you.'

It was difficult to follow his line of thought, and I did not want to ask him to make it clearer for fear of upsetting him.

He stood up to go.

'Can I come with you?' I asked anxiously.

'If you like,' he said. 'But I don't want you to quote me in the *Kawacha News* about what I just said.'

'You mean. . . ?'

'About what I said of old men not joining in demonstrations,' he said quickly. 'That was just for your benefit personally.'

I said, 'I won't quote anything. Perhaps you would like to make a special statement later on?'

'Yes. I will give you a statement,' he said. 'I am also calling a Press conference in the morning tomorrow. I will ring up your editor to send a representative. Now, come on, let's go and see what I can do for the old man.'

I followed him into his car, and he took a long, zig-zag route to reach the town. His first stop was at the Town Hall. I did not follow him in, but he must have made several telephone calls because when he returned he told me that the authorities had promised to look into the old man's case right away.

We stopped at a hotel which I knew to be exclusively for non-Africans. With all the confidence in the world, he led me into the dining-room, full of white faces, to a table already laid for two. As we sat down, he said, 'I am breaking colour bar. This is a better way than shouting at the top of your voice for your rights and what-have-you.'

I said nothing. My mind was too full of things to think about. There were a few curious glances at us from the other occupants in the room. But Dan Dube was hardly disturbed.

He said, 'Don't you think so, Jo?'

'This is wonderful,' I said.

'I am being practical,' he said. 'I act instead of making a lot of empty talk.'

I said, 'You certainly act, Mr Dube. But then there are several routes by which you can reach Kawacha Town.'

He understood.

'Yes, indeed,' he said as he looked at the menu. 'Short ones and long ones. Cheap routes and expensive routes. Easy routes and difficult routes. I see what you mean. I follow the shortest and easiest route to obtain our rights.'

'I have heard you shout at meetings,' I said. 'In the Municipal Council meeting last week, I heard you shout.'

'That, my boy, is for show,' he said. 'The real work is done quietly.'

I said, 'You don't blame others for doing the same, then?'

He looked at me sharply, then, to avoid an argument, he said, 'I think I'll be able to get your father out.'

I decided it was in my interest not to start an argument with so formidable a man.

'We will be thankful if you can persuade the authorities to release at least the old man,' I said.

The food came, and feeling like a sinner, aware that my father and my brother-in-law were suffering, I ate with Dan Dube, and, despite my thoughts, enjoyed the food.

We were drinking coffee when one of the waiters – they seemed to be too numerous to me – came and said that someone was on the telephone and wanted to speak to Mr Dube.

'Did he give his name?' Dube asked.

'No, sir.'

'What did he sound like?'

'The voice is that of a European woman,' the waiter said.

'Carry on, Jo,' Dan Dube said standing up. 'Shan't be long.'

Alone at the table, I felt like one without protection in that strange unfriendly room. I pushed away the cup of coffee half finished and brooded over a disorderly stream of thoughts until Dube returned a short while later.

'That was Government House I was talking to,' he announced, as if it was a natural thing for him to speak to highly placed people and personalities.

'Did you tell them you would be here?' I asked, wondering how Government House could trace the movements of one Dan Dube.

He laughed. 'I am a V.I.P., and where I go everybody knows,' he said.

I wanted to tell him that it was not so. Only this morning they missed you at the meeting. They didn't know where you had gone to, and so trouble started.

'You are thinking hard,' I heard him speak. 'What is on your mind, the old man?'

'I am thinking of him, and the others,' I said.

'The old man will soon be on his way to the house,' he said in a confident way, as if he was a cousin of the Almighty Himself. I wondered if I still admired this man. There was something about him that revolted and attracted at the same time, rather like the pain of a mosquito bite and the itch afterwards.

'And Felix – is he with the old man?' I asked.

'Felix!' he looked surprised. 'Was he with the old man?'

It was my turn to be surprised. How could he not know so simple a thing? Everyone who had been at the gathering knew that Felix and Mangani Phiri had brought the old man, and had also been arrested with him. Mary, I remembered, had also mentioned to Dan Dube that

Felix was with the old man, wherever he was. Why did he now pretend he did not know this?

'Where is the old man?' I asked, half aware of what the answer would be.

'They kept him somewhere safe,' Dan Dube said. 'I was assured that they took him away because they were afraid he might be injured if he was left in the crowd. It was for his safety that he was removed, and he is being taken back to your house now.'

It was several hours before we finally got back to the house in Kumoyo Location. Dan Dube had many other stopping points. My father had gone to bed by the time we reached home, but we had a surprise in store for both of us. Sitting quietly in the living-room with a newspaper in his hands was Mangani Phiri.

Dan Dube was quick in recovering from the unexpected encounter with Mangani Phiri.

'Obviously you didn't expect to see me,' Mangani said sarcastically. 'Did you have a good evening, boys?'

He put aside the newspaper and looked at Dube with deliberate interest.

Dan Dube said, 'It's a welcome surprise to see you at this odd hour, in such odd circumstances.'

'Why an odd hour and an odd place?' he asked smiling as if he meant no offence.

Dube ignored the question, lighted a cigarette and sat down.

'You made a mess of things, Mangani Phiri,' Dube said, at once assuming an air of business and seriousness. 'How is it that you failed to obtain a permit for a meeting, and yet I gave you all ample notice to make arrangements?'

Very apologetically, Mangani Phiri explained. 'There was some confusion in the whole affair. It's difficult to say who really is to blame. But as it is all past now, my

suggestion would be now that you concentrated on trying to get the boys out. As an important Member of Legislative Council and all that, you should be able to exert some influence to bear on the authorities for the release of the boys.'

Dan Dube looked at Mangani Phiri strangely, as if wondering whether Mangani Phiri was not laying a trap for him.

'So the boys are locked up,' Dube said, and tried to look sorry. 'Well, I was waiting for someone to tell me what had happened. I failed to witness much of what happened this morning over there because I went to see the authorities to try to force them to issue a permit for the meeting. It was impossible. Law is law, and everyone has to observe it, no matter how high or how low they are. The law is there for everyone to obey.'

Mangani Phiri stood up suddenly.

'I understand, Mr Dube,' he said distantly. 'I understand. The law must be obeyed, indeed. I suppose there is nothing that can be done for the boys since the law itself is involved?'

Dan Dube threw the cigarette-stub into an ash-tray. He lighted a fresh one, and drew on it before he replied.

'I am not a lawyer, and I don't know the reasons why the boys are locked up,' he said. 'I will look into the matter tomorrow, sometime. Since you are already here, may I tell you I am holding a Press Conference sometime in the morning. Check up with me, and please inform Zake Lukani about it. He will want to come. I must clarify the position about what happened this morning, otherwise people will be left with a wrong impression.'

'I am glad you are calling a Press Conference to clarify your position,' Mangani said. 'But do see what you can do for the boys. That's more important and more pressing

than any Press Conference. My friend here, Jo Jozeni, does probably not agree with me.'

He picked up his hat.

'Good night, both of you,' he said, and went out.

Dan Dube remained in the room for a while, as if unsure whether to leave or not.

Softly he said, 'When there is nothing to be said, some fool always says it.'

Then he, too, went. He said no other word. I locked the door and went to bed.

Chapter 7

Bill Akimu arrived at the office just as I was finishing typing my story about the happenings at Kumoyo Location the previous day. He sat down and glanced quickly through the morning daily.

I took the story out of the typewriter, read it and handed it to Akimu.

'What is this, Jo?' he asked.

'Last night's story,' I said.

He put the newspaper away, and picked up my story which he read quickly at first, and the second time more slowly. I watched him intently.

'It's good,' he said. 'Any follow-ups?'

'Dan Dube is having a Press Conference sometime this morning,' I said. 'But if I may, I would like to go and see what's happening in the court, and perhaps also at the police station.'

'Where is Alaje Kachaso?'

'In the dark-room,' I said. 'Having a chat with Kenneth Pasi.'

'Has he come?'

'Yes.'

'I must have a word with him,' Bill Akimu said. 'I gather all was not well with him at the meeting.'

'He had some rough handling,' I said. 'But so had many others.'

'You?'

'I kept my distance,' I said.

'The old man got it instead,' Bill Akimu said, meaning no harm. 'Seen him this morning?'

'He was still in bed when I left the house,' I said. I did not want to talk about my father, and Bill must have noticed my reluctance.

He read my story again, and then sub-edited it.

'If you want to go to the courts,' he said after Alaje came back, 'arrange it with Al Kachaso so that he goes to this Press Conference.'

Al said, 'I will go and cover that.'

'You should also try and get a story from Jo's father,' Bill said.

'Yeah,' said Al. 'I have got a story, too, on our celebrated photographer.'

He started to laugh.

'What's funny?'

We all looked up, and Al abruptly stopped laughing. The questioner was Peter Brown, the editor. He had quietly come from his office.

Al said, 'It's Kenneth Pasi, sir, I am laughing about. He started a landslide that almost buried him.'

Just then the subject of the conversation came into the office, carrying an unrolled belt of processed negatives in each hand, his whole face swollen up as if he had been having a skirmish with venomous wasps. Even Mr Brown found it difficult to suppress his laughter, and hurried back into his office; through the wall we could faintly hear the sound of his mirth.

Kenneth Pasi looked at each one of us in turn, but none of us could meet his glance.

I stood up and said, 'I am off to the courts, Bill.'

'Just wait a minute, Jo,' Bill said. 'Let me see what's in the editor's diary.'

He went into the editor's office, followed by Kenneth Pasi, who had said nothing at all since coming into the office. A moment later Bill came back and said, 'Boys, please will you come into the editor's office for a minute.'

I was sure we were going to have the rough side of the editor's tongue because of what had happened earlier, but to my relief it was quite a different matter.

After squeezing ourselves in the limited space on the chairs available, we waited to hear what the editor had to say; it was an anxious moment.

'Well, this is an odd way of doing it,' he said. 'As you are aware, I am going away and Bill Akimu is taking my place. I had not realized how soon that would be until two days ago. For a few years now, after many years of constant loss, the paper has steadily paid its way and even made a little profit. As I say, the early years were bad times financially. We kept it going only because my partner and I were convinced that there was a dire need for the existence of a newspaper of this kind. We were not motivated by the wish to make money in keeping the paper going, otherwise we would have called it a day right away. Ours was a missionary type of – what shall I call it – service. Yes, we wanted to serve the Africans by giving them a simple, factual, unbiased newspaper. We have succeeded in doing it, and have enjoyed doing it. And now, the time has come when we must leave the task to you, Africans, to carry on. And so from now, Bill Akimu is taking my chair. I have shown him what to do, and I pray that all of you work together to make the job a real success.'

He looked at us, and I was momentarily gripped by a feeling of sadness.

'There is something further that I must tell you,' he said. 'My partner and I, having played our small bit, have agreed to sell the paper to a bigger concern which has the resources to expand and improve *Kawacha News*.

'Tonight, we have a small party at my house,' he went on. 'I am inviting all of you there so that we can celebrate this changeover both in management and ownership. I shall expect you at the house at 6.30 this evening. You will also be able to meet your new employer there. Now, that is all I had to say. Thank you.'

The room was silent for several minutes.

'You probably will want to say something,' Peter Brown broke the silence. 'We can do that at the party tonight. Now, let's get back to our normal routine.'

Silently, we streamed back awkwardly to our places next door. I picked up my coat and left the office. With a troubled mind I wondered what it was going to be like with the new employers.

At the police station, I was told that the prisoners I was after had been released on bail. I asked about the other people who had been carried away from the same place, and it appeared that the police were sifting them, and, where there was a possibility of a charge sticking, one was preferred. Where a charge would not stick, the person was sent away. And the charges were so many. Ranging from failure to pay tax to being in town without a regular job. Most of them, I gathered, would be fined.

As I came out of the station, I met Mangani Phiri with some women. I recognized one of them – the owner of the drinking den I had been to with Alaje Kachaso the other night, the one I christened Sleepy Aunt because she looked so sleepy then. She didn't now.

She smiled knowingly at me, and went into the station. But I pulled Mangani Phiri aside.

'What's happening?' I asked him. 'What brings you here?'

He laughed, and drawled, 'You newspaper men, always after news. Well, we have come to bail out some of the men and women who were taken away from Majengo last night. There was some trouble there after the one at Kumoyo had been quietened.'

I said, 'I know. By the way, how is it I found you at our house last night? Didn't you go with my father and Felix in the Black Maria?'

'You are asking too much,' he said smiling. 'Someone had to remain out of lock-up while the others were inside. So I came out.'

'But how?'

'I will tell you some other time,' he said and started for the door. I blocked his way. 'All right, I will tell you,' he said. 'Somebody looking after us was hungry, and when someone is hungry it is foolish to say "no" to ready money.'

I looked at him and concluded that he was no fool.

I said, 'You know that Felix is out on bail? I have just collected it from the people in there.'

He nodded. 'I know that. Benjamin Nyirenda, too, and a few others are out.'

'Back at their work, I presume?' I asked.

'That, I am afraid, I don't know. Can I go now?'

'Yes. Thank you,' I said. Then I remembered about Dan Dube's conference.

'What about the Press Conference?' I asked.

'What about it?'

'Didn't Dan Dube say last night that he was giving a Press Conference this morning?' I said. 'What's going on?'

'Oh, that,' he roared with laughter. 'Yes, he is giving one right now. Why aren't you there?'

'Alaje Kachaso is covering it,' I said.

'I see.' He lighted a cigarette. 'Well, there is work to do. See you at the house this evening.'

I wanted to tell him that I was going to a party, but I changed my mind. I said instead, 'We will be there.'

I was just walking away when Sleepy Aunt hurried out from the police station.

'Mr Phiri, I think we should go to the bank and get the money,' she said. 'There are quite a lot of friends locked in who will require bail.'

Mangani Phiri looked at me. 'Jo, will you by any chance be passing near the bank on your way to the office?'

He mentioned the name of the bank, and I said that I would certainly be passing near there.

'Do us a favour, please,' he said. 'The mama doesn't write, and if you can help her by filling in the withdrawal form for her, I will be grateful. Shouldn't take much of your time doing it.'

'Who will sign for her?' I asked trying to find an excuse for not doing it. I was not keen to walk with Sleepy Aunt. I feared her – she was persuasive and liked her men young and virile. Mangani Phiri had said so the other night.

'She will print a thumb-mark,' he said. 'There won't be any difficulty.'

Then he turned to the Sleepy Aunt and told her that I would give her all the necessary assistance at the bank. He himself had some job to do, but would be seeing her again after she had drawn the money. He went into the police station, and the two of us walked down the street, and Sleepy Aunt hailed a taxi to take us to the bank building.

There were many people forming several queues at the counter, and the movements in and out of the building

resembled the formations of an army of ants. I went to one of the small tables and pulled out a withdrawal form to fill in the required details.

'How much do you want?' I asked Sleepy Aunt, who was standing massively beside my chair.

She gave me her bank book, quite ancient-looking with frequent handling. It was a duplicate of the original. I flapped it open, and I was staggered to see the incredibly large amount of money Sleepy Aunt had. Most of the entries were for deposits: withdrawal figures were far spaced and extremely few.

I heard myself say, 'You have a lot of money, mother.'

'This is not all,' she said simply. 'I have some more buried somewhere. I can't touch that because it is much safer where it is than this money with the Europeans. That money there I can see any time I want. The money in here I can't see.'

'The money in here is quite safe,' I said, still holding the pen over the space to write the figure. 'They have strong-rooms where the money is kept, and it's well guarded. Where have you buried the other money?'

I realized as soon as I asked that I had made a mistake. For she quickly looked at me.

'Don't play me tricks, will you?' she said innocently.

'Of course not,' I said getting annoyed. 'How much do you want to take?'

'I knew you are on the level,' she said. 'I like you, young man, Now, let me see. How much do you think will be an adequate amount for this sort of thing?'

'Well, it's difficult to say,' I answered. 'Suppose you take £50?'

'That is all right if you think it is adequate,' she said.

I filled in £75.

'I think £75 will be adequate,' I said. 'Take the form

and the book to the teller at the counter. He'll tell you where to print your thumb-mark. Now, I must go.'

I gave her the bank book with the filled form inside it. I stood up from the chair.

'Don't leave me alone,' she said as if this was a wild jungle. 'You wait and see how I get along.'

We went to the counter, and after half an hour of standing in the slow-moving queue, she got her turn. The teller looked at the form.

'This isn't signed.' he said.

I stepped forward.

'She can't write,' I said. 'Can she make a thumb-mark?'

The teller looked at me.

'What are you to her?'

'Nephew,' I lied, but it was near enough to truth.

He said to Sleepy Aunt, 'Will you press your right thumb here, please.'

She inked the thumb and pressed it on the form. The teller took it back, stamped it, crossed the thumb-print with a single pencil line, then counted out £75 in crisp new sweet-smelling notes which he handed to Sleepy Aunt. He returned her the bank book after making entries.

'That's that,' said the woman and we walked out into the street.

I hailed a taxi.

'Here, take this,' Sleepy Aunt said holding out a few notes to me.

'No, thanks,' I said. 'That's your taxi. See you later.'

She hesitated a moment, then shoved the money inside the neck of her dress and climbed into the taxi. I stood there a moment, watching her go. She gave me a huge smile and a knowing stare. I smiled back, turned round and walked back to the office.

Alaje Kachaso was tapping out his story. When he heard me pull out my chair, he looked up from the Corona typewriter.

'Jo, your brother-in-law has tried to contact you on the phone twice,' he said. 'He is ringing you again in a moment. Don't go away.'

The telephone bell buzzed. I went and answered the call. It was Felix.

'Jo, I have been sacked,' he said in a steady voice. 'Now, can you please take the afternoon off so we can arrange about moving away from this house? It's rented by my employers, as you know.'

I said, 'We are homeless. Is that right?'

He chuckled. 'So we are, old boy. But it's nothing to worry about, really. Thank heavens, it's happened when the old man is here with us. It simplifies matters somehow. But do come so we can see what to do. The bloody company wants the house empty by tomorrow morning.'

'Don't you have a one-month notice to serve?' I asked.

'A one-month salary in lieu,' Felix said. 'See you this afternoon.'

I felt sore to find ourselves homeless so suddenly, and I thought the animals in the bush are far better off as they don't need things such as houses. God rot their souls, these unsympathetic employers. I went back to my desk.

Without looking up from his typewriter, Alaje said, 'That's too bad, Jo. What's he going to do?'

'You mean Felix?' I said. 'Well, I don't know. Look for another job, I suppose. He can't afford to stay jobless for long. He has a wife to support.'

Bill Akimu was in the editor's office as editor now. I went in to tell him of my problem. Mr Brown was there, handing over to Akimu.

'Well, you can come and live with me for the time

being until you have got a place of your own,' Bill Akimu said to me after he'd heard my story.

Mr Brown said, 'Have you applied for any house at all?'

'Yes, I have, sir,' I said. 'But I am told by the people in the Housing Department of the Municipality that I must not expect anything so soon. The waiting list runs in hundreds. Some have been waiting for the last four years.'

'Disgusting,' Mr Brown said. He picked up the telephone. 'Who is the Housing Secretary?'

'A Miss Jenkins in the African Affairs Department of the Municipality,' Bill Akimu said.

He dialled a number, and he said, 'Miss Jenkins, please.' When he got her on the line, he asked her if he could have a house in Kumoyo Location in the name of the firm.

The woman at the other end said there were no available houses, and furthermore, his firm already had one house in that location. This, I presumed, was the one occupied by Bill Akimu.

'We are expanding,' Mr Brown said, 'and it is important that we are allocated a house as soon as possible. I have a very good African employee who has no house, and I am sure you can do something for us.'

It was a command, although softly couched.

Miss Jenkins said she would see what could be done, but she was making no promise. These matters were a big headache, and so she rang off. I wondered if she kept a bottle of aspirins handy, and was she taking some now since no doubt the request was going to cause her a big headache. I was sorry for Miss Jenkins. Considering how many thousands of people in Kawacha Town were on the waiting list, even if she took more than a million aspirin tablets the headache would still be there.

Mr Brown said, 'As it is, you will be well advised to

move in and stay with Mr Akimu, Jozeni. Then, of course, you can share the rent.'

'I will consult my brother-in-law first,' I said. 'I wonder if I can please have the afternoon off, sir?'

Mr Brown looked at Bill Akimu.

'You are the editor, Akimu,' Mr Brown said.

Like one not yet sure of his powers and limitations, Bill Akimu said, 'Can he go? Oh, well, you can go, Jo. Call at my house later in the evening, will you? I will tell my wife you are coming to stay with us.'

Mr Brown reminded us that he would be expecting us at the party at his house at the appointed time.

'Take a taxi, and charge the fare on the editorial expenses,' Mr Brown said. 'It's time you had a car of your own, Akimu.'

Akimu said he didn't have the money to run a car. Mr Brown said nonsense, Akimu had all the money. Was he waiting for a day when he would receive a fortune? Would he then feel he received enough money to run a car?

I said, 'Can I go now, please?'

They remembered I was in the room with them.

'He can go, Akimu,' Mr Brown said picking up his authority again, like a habitual drinker unable to resist the attractions of alcohol. 'Let him go.'

'You can go, Jo,' Akimu said. 'Don't forget to come to my house. We can all go on to Mr Brown's house from mine.'

I said thanks, and went next door.

'Let's go and have a bite,' I told Alaje Kachaso, who had now finished writing his story. 'How was the conference?'

'Lousy,' he said. 'Read that.'

He gave me his typed story.

I shook my head. 'No time to read, man,' I said. 'Come, tell me about it as we go.'

We put on our coats and walked down the steps instead of taking the lift.

'Let's go to the Angel, Martin's place,' Alaje suggested. 'I'm thirsty, and, seeing you are homeless, maybe a drink will do you some good.'

I had no objection.

'I have the afternoon off,' I said. 'I have no story apart from this bloody job of shifting from Kumoyo.'

'I always say a man should be independent,' he said. 'This is a wonderful opportunity for you to set off on your own, man. I can get you a room in Majengo or Kumoyo Location for that matter.'

'Can you, or are you kidding?'

'Don't get excited,' he said laughing. 'Of course, I can. I am not kidding.'

'That's wonderful,' I said feeling happy and hopeful. For no particular reason, I said, 'Met Sleepy Aunt an hour ago. Offered me money. I refused.'

'You did a manly thing,' he said. 'You have made sure of a better offer any day from her.'

We reached the Angel. Already it was almost full.

'Give us two beers,' Alaje told the waiter. 'Then we'll tell you what we want to eat. God, I am hungry.'

'Me, too,' I said and picked up the menu. 'This place is by far more homely than where we ate last night. Boy, the place was cold and unfriendly, like a mortuary.'

Alaje Kachaso laughed.

'That's like Dan Dube to take you to this exclusive place,' he said. 'He was selling you a story. I know him.'

'He got my old man out, though, as the price,' I said.

'The old man is not impressed,' Alaje said. 'I talked to

him, and boy, he has very little regard for Dan Dube, I could sense that, even if he didn't say it.'

I protested. 'Don't put words into the old man's mouth, Al.'

'Here is our drink,' he said. 'Now, tell him what you will have.'

I regarded the menu again, and told the waiter what I wanted to eat. Alaje handed me my beer. I sipped a little at first, then found it good. I took a long pull.

'I am not putting words into the old man's mouth,' Alaje came back to our conversation.

'Then why do you suggest things he didn't say?'

'Do you admire Dan Dube?'

'I think he is clever,' I said. 'Don't you admire his brains?'

'Me!' He said it as if I had asked him to love a snake. 'He is a politician, and politicians are a tribe of their own. I am a journalist, not a politician.'

'Well, I think as a journalist you are very much related to a politician,' I said; 'for one thing, both of you use words for your livelihood. A politician talks words, loves his voice, his words, because his words are his work, his training and his life. And a journalist does the same thing. He writes words, loves to see them in print. Words are his work, his training, his life. Where is the difference, tell me.'

'I don't tell deliberate lies,' he said. 'Dan Dube does.'

'You slant your information,' I said, 'almost to the point of distortion. Dan Dube does the same. There is no difference.'

'I don't know,' Alaje said, and drank his beer. 'I don't know. I don't care.'

The food came and as we ate I thought that I, too, didn't care.

Chapter 8

The reality of being suddenly homeless hit me nakedly when I got to Kumoyo Location and found house No. E95 bare and empty. The furniture and other household effects were piled up in front of the house. The old man and Felix sat on the grass, talking. It was as if they had just returned from a burial ceremony.

Mary was alone in the house looking for anything they might have left or forgotten to remove.

'You managed to get the afternoon off?' my father asked.

'Yes. I delayed coming here because Alaje Kachaso stopped me for a chat,' I said.

'Have you arranged where you will stay from tonight?' he asked.

'Bill Akimu has asked me to stay at his house while I am looking for a place of my own. Al promised he will try and get me a place.'

'I think the sooner you can have your own place, the better.'

'I am sorry about this, Jo,' Felix said. 'But you know how insecure it is to work in a company whose other interests clash with your own. It's a pity that we cannot find any security in the town.'

'Insecurity in the town is only for Africans,' the old man said. 'You must live with one foot in the town and

the other foot back in the village. And that is where you will always end – the village.'

'I am only sorry for Jo,' Felix said moodily.

'Don't worry yourself so much, child. Jo will find a place, I am sure. He ought also to experience trouble. Trouble and worry such as this help to make you develop into a man. It's much like a little sand in an oyster, it helps to make a pearl.'

Mangani Phiri arrived in his car, with Benjamin Nyirenda. They clambered out of the car and joined us on the grass. Mangani was wearing a wind-cheater and a cap. He took off the cap out of respect for the old man.

'The lorry is on its way, sir,' he announced to the old man.

'So you are going, Felix, boy!' Ben said to himself. 'I am following you to your home. I, too, I am being sacked. The Municipal African Affairs Officer called me into his office this afternoon. "I have something important I want to tell you," he said. Boy. . . .' He wiped his forehead with a clean handkerchief.

'The man can be rude!' Nyirenda said as if what happened was a passing dream. He went on, 'I sat down in the chair he gave me, and I was beginning to feel comfortable when he suddenly jolted me from my complacence. He said, almost shouting, "Mr Nyirenda, we don't allow our employees to deal in other affairs outside their official duties. We feel, and rightly so, too, that no person can serve two masters. It has come to our notice, in your case, that you are not observing this condition. In fact, because of your failure to observe this rule, you have had some trouble with the authorities."

'I looked at him,' Nyirenda went on, 'and wondered what he was trying to say. But I didn't have long to wait for that. He looked at me sternly, then said gravely,

"I am in an unpleasant position, therefore, to have to ask you to do one of two things. The first is that you divorce yourself from other affairs and devote your whole time to your duties with the Municipality, or secondly, that you devote your time to other private affairs and divorce yourself from your ties with the Municipality as its employee."

'I told him, "What exactly do you mean, mister?" Now, that really enraged him, calling him mister instead of sir. I said it deliberately to annoy him because the way he was speaking to me, he seemed to regard himself as superhuman – a little tin god.

'His eyes dancing, he shouted, "I give you twenty-four hours to consider, Benjamin Nyirenda. Either you are an employee of the Municipality under me, and do what I tell you as your superior; or you leave your job and do what you please, I don't care what. That is that, and I mean exactly that."

'It was my turn to say my piece,' Nyirenda said. 'And boy, I said it in so few words. I told him, "My friend, you and I are both employees of the Municipal Council, and you are not the Council as you imply. But never mind that. If you want to play the role of the Council, that is your business. What I want to tell you, mister, is that I don't need twenty-four hours to decide what I want to do. You can keep your job, as far as I am concerned. I will devote my time to public affairs in a different way, even if that means walking naked. I am through with the Municipal Council. Take back your job, and thanks."

'That jolted him in turn,' Nyirenda went on. 'He hadn't probably expected me to take that line. After a while, he said, "You don't have to resign, you know. After all, we all have our personal views and beliefs about these things, but being public servants we keep quiet, at least

in public. You have a good job, the salary is not bad. You are clever. The future should be bright. Just think for a moment how many other young Africans would be glad to be in your shoes. Think carefully before you make any decision."

'I told him, "I have made my decision. I can't change even if I have to be where you are. Give the job to anyone you wish. What I want to know is when can I go? Can I go tomorrow? When can I go? That's what I want to know within the next twenty-four hours." I left him completely at a loss and went back to my office.'

'Is this a fact, man?' Felix asked.

'Sure, man. The time has now come when you and I must devote our time to help the old man in organizing the Movement. We have left it far too long to our elderly folk. We must now act instead of just talking. Action. That's what.'

My father said, 'That's it, my children.'

We loaded the things into the lorry. Mary's friends from the neighbouring houses came to see her off. Mangani Phiri offered to take the old man, Felix and Mary in his car, and they all, including Nyirenda, got in the car.

'I can't come with you, I am sorry. I have got to go to my boss's party.'

'Look after yourself,' the old man said.

I pulled out a wallet from my pocket.

'Here, father, take that. Buy a little sugar on your way home. Please give my love to mother. Good-bye, Mary. Good-bye, Felix, boy. Travel well, father.'

I moved away from the window. The car started.

'Look after yourself, Jo,' Mary said. 'Felix will be coming to town to join you.'

'Thank you, child,' my father said, holding up the money I had given him.

Mangani Phiri said, 'You still don't want to come with us?'

'I can't. I have got to go to this party. It means my job.'

He laughed.

'All right, man. Have a good time.'

He shifted the gear lever.

'Are we all set?' he called out. 'Here we go.'

The car moved away, followed by the groaning lorry. I waved and, when they disappeared round the buildings at the corner, I sighed.

I was now alone, except for the women who had come to see Mary off. I knew they were now discussing me in their minds, silently, wondering what I was going to do with my loneliness.

One of them detached herself from the silent group and timidly came where I stood fixedly like a statue.

'Are you staying in this house alone tonight, or would you like to come and stay with us for a day or two?' she suggested.

'Thanks, but I am going to live with friends,' I said, wishing she was young and attractive, and unmarried. I could not help looking quickly at the other women in the group, wondering if there could be one to tally with my wishes.

'Is it far that you have to go, because if it's near, we can help you to carry your things there,' the woman said again. The others moved near as well.

'Don't bother about me, really,' I said without wishing to hurt her, 'I will manage. I haven't got much personal belongings, just a suitcase and bedding.'

'A bachelor,' one in the group said. The others giggled.

'Thank you all,' I said. And seeing there was nothing

they could do for me, they all left. They left me with a strong desire for female company, wishing one of them had remained with me – I wouldn't have minded what she looked like.

I called two men from the road and asked them to take my suitcase and my bundle of bedding, while I myself carried my other two pairs of shoes.

'Will you come with me, please,' I said. 'We'll agree what sum to pay you for the job when we reach there.'

Bill Akimu's house was at the other end of the Location, about a quarter of a mile from No. E95. I found him waiting for me. He and his wife had already prepared my room. I paid my porters after putting my things into the room.

It was a much bigger house than our E95, but the Akimus had crowded it with furniture, and so it gave you the impression of being smaller. But it was all very comfortable in its own style.

Darkness was now settling down over the town. My host went to a near-by public telephone kiosk to make a call to order a taxi which was to take us to the party. Mrs Akimu was busy in the kitchen feeding her small children. I washed and changed from my office clothes into my Sunday clothes, a dark-brown gabardine suit, a white shirt with a blue tie and dark brown suède shoes. I was pleased with what I saw in the mirror.

Akimu came back and said that the taxi was on its way. He went into his bedroom, and later came out wearing a well-cut charcoal-grey suit.

The taxi came.

Mrs Akimu said, 'This party – why don't you go with your partners?'

Akimu and I both laughed. We said cheerio, and got into the cab.

'Where, sir?' the driver asked.

Akimu, who had been there before, told the driver the direction.

'That's the white-only suburb,' the driver commented.

It was over five miles from the centre of the town. A beautiful residential area. The houses were built far apart, and there was no uniformity about their size and design, like the houses at Kumoyo Location. I was always reminded of soldiers on parade whenever I was in Kumoyo Location – neatly arranged houses, all looking the same.

Mr Brown met us at the door.

'Tell the driver to come back for you at 8.30 – an hour and half from now.' Then he took Bill Akimu in.

The driver heard what Mr Brown had just said. He drove away. He was a quiet, sullen-looking man, uncommunicative. I wondered why he chose to be a taxi-driver.

I met the new boss at one point during the evening. He was about the same age as Mr Brown, but much lighter and thinner. He was tall and authoritative. He didn't seem much different from Mr Brown in his ideas.

'My job will be to carry on from where my friends have left off,' he told me. 'So don't expect many changes.'

'I haven't been thinking of changes in policy or that sort of thing,' I said.

He laughed.

The room was crowded. Government officials, business executives, politicians and secretaries. Dan Dube was the most dominant figure.

Mr Brown had tried to make it a multi-racial sundowner party. But the guests spoke to each other with phoney liberalism. Saying yes instead of no, or laughing where

laughter was uncalled for. It was a dismal failure in race relations. The pretence was worse than that shown by mourners at the funeral of a distant relative they knew little about.

Dan Dube joined us. 'I am pleased that the *Kawacha News* has changed hands. I hope we will see a lot of improvement. You did your best, Mr Brown. But I think there was still much left undone.'

'I have just been telling Mr Jozeni here,' the new boss said, 'that I shan't be making any changes as such. My job will be to carry on what my friends started. I shall build from where they laid the foundation.'

'A poor foundation,' Dube said. 'And I am sure your building will fall to pieces. You have got to change the whole structure. These boys – Bill Akimu, Jo Jozeni, Al Kachaso and what have you – will be able to give you assistance. They know what the Africans want.'

The new boss looked at me. 'What is your opinion?'

'But Mr Dube is being unfair,' Mr Brown snatched away the conversation. 'We have always given him plenty publicity. We have published plain and factual news like responsible journalists. Where necessary, we have commented without malice. Our primary aim has been to try and obtain positive results. To a very large extent, we have managed. We have been in the forefront in kindling public opinion among all thinking Africans.'

'That is a good foundation,' the new boss said.

I detached myself from the group, and bumped into a Government official. He looked like a police officer or an assistant secretary in the secretariat. He sounded as if every word was costing him a lot of money.

'A journalist, that's interesting,' he said. 'What do you think about the Governor's nomination of African Members of Legislative Council?'

'The arrangement does not satisfy the African people. We are interested in direct elections. . . .'

'Wait a minute,' he interrupted. 'Surely, that's not the opinion of the *Kawacha News*.'

'*Kawacha News* is not myself,' I said.

'Well, as a Government official I talk what the Government says,' he explained. 'I cannot say what the Government doesn't say.'

'But are you not the Government?'

He ignored the question. 'You educated African chaps should help to explain to the uneducated African brethren of yours about the good things that the Government is doing for them. Give us a chance to develop the country.'

I left him still talking. I joined Al who was standing alone near the bar.

Our seclusion was interrupted by a couple who, after refilling their tumblers, decided to stay and chat with us. They were settlers who owned a tea estate on the high lands, and, from the look of it, were wealthy.

'I came to this country long before either of you two was born,' the man said. 'Where our tea farm is now was nothing but bush, roamed by wild animals. There was not a single person living anywhere near. I transformed that wild land into what it is now, and it was not until I had cultivated the area that people started to settle in the neighbourhood.'

His wife joined in, 'And the boys at the farm have always been good and meek. My husband has given them work, and I have always tended to their ailments. But these days you town boys put ideas into the heads of these innocent chaps.'

'Mind you,' said the husband, 'not all the town boys are bad. There are others who are very good boys, who realize they cannot do without the European leadership.

We have brought here everything – wealth, health, and the little civilization that there is. But what do the few ambitious boys want? To spoil everything, and return back to the darkness. What do you want to do it for?'

Alaje Kachaso suddenly said, 'Do you own dogs?'

'I beg your pardon,' said the woman.

'Do you own dogs?' Alaje repeated.

She became cheerful. 'We do, and good dogs, too,' she said. 'My husband brought bull-terriers from South Africa last summer, and I must say they have proved themselves capable of keeping a watch round our house. Do you know anything about dog breeding?'

'I don't like dogs, really,' Alaje said. 'What's your housing scheme like for your African workers?'

'We have built them traditional huts, where possible,' the husband took up the ball from his wife. 'We give them the best of treatment, I must say.'

'I once visited a farm,' Alaje said keeping up the conversation, 'and the European owner had several dogs. He kept them very well, and he was very fond of them. But when I went to see the compound where his African workers lived, I had quite a different picture of the man's outlook.'

The conversation stopped. A few minutes later I saw the couple leave: they went out of the door without saying thanks to the host and hostess.

Alaje said, 'Well, let's be alone. Will you have another drink, Jo? I am having another myself.'

I said, thanks, I didn't want any more. He had his tumbler refilled and drank the contents quickly.

'Time we left,' he said. 'Coming?'

'Yes,' I said.

I went over to where Bill Akimu was talking with the new owner of *Kawacha News,* Dan Dube and a young

European lady who was either a shorthand-typist or the daughter of a business director. It seemed they were discussing the lot of educated African women and their role in modern life. I didn't want to get involved in any discussion, so I pulled Bill Akimu from behind gently. He turned round.

'Can I go ahead?' I asked him.

'I think we will all go,' he said after looking at his watch.

He excused himself from the group, and joining me we marched towards the door, saying good night and thanks so very much to our host and hostess as we crossed the room and went out.

The fresh air outside was so welcome. Alaje Kachaso was standing near our taxi, waiting.

'I am coming with you,' he said. 'Is that convenient?'

'You are welcome, Al,' Bill Akimu said. 'Do we drop you first, or does he drop Jo and me first? Make your choice.'

'Drop you first,' Kachaso said. Then he asked, 'Where are you putting up tonight, Jo?'

'I am staying with Bill,' I said.

'You have abandoned E95 already?'

'Yes,' I said.

We got into the taxi, Bill and I, in the back seat; Alaje Kachaso and the driver in the front seat.

It was a dark night, and there was a sharp cool breeze. We sped along the deserted roads, the tyres screeching protestingly at sharp corners and the body swaying dangerously. 'Take it easy, driver,' Bill said leaning slightly forward.

The warning came too late. At the next corner the car skidded violently and somersaulted, coming to rest upside-down. For a moment there was utter silence – a

moment when we were all in a state of shock, hardly aware of what had happened, not even aware of our unusual posture – our feet above our heads, like bats hanging in a cave.

Al was the first to recover from the momentary stupor.

'Bill, Bill,' he called out. 'Bill, are you safe? Jo, are you all right?'

I groped for the door.

'I can't get at the door,' I said.

'Where's the driver?' Al said. 'I can't see the driver. Come this way, boys. I see the door is open.'

We squirmed after him, and with some difficulty got out of the car. The driver was missing.

'I feel great pain in the head,' Al complained. 'Please look for the driver. I will rest a bit on the pavement.'

Broken glass littered an area of several yards. Bill and I found the driver lying grotesquely in a growing pool of blood. His breathing was loud and laboured. Bill bent down and felt the man's pulse. He straightened him out.

'He's going fast,' Bill said and stood up. 'This is very bad, Jo.'

'Is he dead?' I asked.

'Come along,' Bill said.

'Is he dead, Bill?'

'He's dead,' Bill said. 'Man, we all walk with death like we do with our shadows. We don't realize there is death until it strikes. Like the shadow – the moment you realize it is not there, you are dead.'

The police came like vultures.

Al was now lying quietly like a dead man. But Bill felt his pulse and said he was alive.

An ambulance came. Al and the dead driver of our taxi went in first. We were taken in the front. At the hospital, we were sorted like mail in the post office. The

dead went to the mortuary. Al was taken to the theatre. Bill and myself were treated for shock, and later allowed to go home.

'Report at the central police station tomorrow morning,' an officer who had taken our statements told us.

It could have been a dream, but it was not. I thought of Al.

Chapter 9

For over a week no visitors were allowed to see Alaje Kachaso in the hospital where he was on the danger list. According to what little information I could gather, he had sustained a broken skull.

They were days of great anxiety, those. Whenever the telephone bell rang in the office, I thought it was news to say that the patient had failed to recover. At night, sleep came with difficulty as I lay, wondering far into night whether he was still alive. The dreams were dreadful, and when I woke up sweating after a nightmare the darkness of the night was very frightening.

Fortunately, they were very busy days. The new owners of the newspaper took over almost at once, and without wasting much time methodically set upon introducing many changes and many improvements. The editorial staff was considerably expanded, and there was talk that we would be moving into a new spacious office shortly. New printing machines were on order, and we were promised the arrival of a variety of new type-faces. *Kawacha News* was going to be given a new look.

Bill Akimu was confirmed as the editor, and our salaries were raised considerably overnight. With the expansion of staff we had many new faces, some of them experienced journalists from different papers in the neighbouring countries where the new organization had

branches. There was much keen competition among us such as had never existed before. Except for the London newspaper man who was reorganizing the editorial, and the advertising manager, everyone in the office was African.

The other departments were housed in the offices of a tall building just across the road, and it was there that we later moved to – occupying the third floor with the machine-room on the first floor – when the reorganization was completed.

With my new salary I acquired new confidence in my ability to manage my life independently. So I doubled my efforts to get my own house, using every possible method. I frequented the offices of the Municipal African Affairs Officer and harassed them considerably. I used a particularly annoying tactic.

The person responsible for the allocation of houses was a white girl, and I discovered that she had a boy friend who came practically every day to the office at 10 o'clock and took her out for an hour. She had a young Indian gentleman as an assistant, and two African clerks. I made it a point to drop into the office at precisely five minutes to ten. I would then engage the girl in a hot argument about my house request and would not let go even long after her boy friend arrived.

This annoyed her considerably, and I refused to leave until she had said something definite. So later she used to order her Indian assistant to deal with me, and with him I decided to be good friends. He was about my age and it was easy to get to know one another before long. But he, too, got tired of my visits, and decided that the best way to get rid of me was to get a house for me. He was a clever chap and realized he could make a little money on the deal.

One morning when I paid him a visit, and seeing that we two were alone, he said. 'If you know of a house that is empty, let me know at once. Maybe I can help you.'

I knew E95 was still empty, and I told him so. He looked in his books and said, 'Seems the firm which was renting it has given it up – the house, I mean. But I will check up and see what's the position.'

'We lived in that house,' I told him. 'My brother-in-law was staying in the house during the time he was employed by a certain firm. He was sacked and lost the house, too.'

'Well, I still must find out if the house is actually free,' he said. 'This problem of accommodation is common in this town. My community have it as well. I had to oil the hands of a man handsomely before I got my present two rooms. This house in Kumoyo has more than four rooms, but I can't be hard on you.'

'I am game for any figure within reason,' I said quickly, and smiled in a friendly sort of way.

'I don't want much,' he said, in a businesslike manner. 'Meet me at the other side of the golf course at seven this evening. No bank notes. Silver coins only, do you understand. No third person either. Ten quid on the deal, but I can settle for five, tonight. Now, go. Seven o'clock; silver only; no third person; five quid.'

'See you there,' I said. 'Cheerio, for now.'

'Cheerio, and don't babble about,' he warned casually.

Now, I thought as I went out, I will have a home of my own. I will be a man now. I congratulated myself. Finding the £5 and changing it into silver was not difficult. My problem was how I was going to carry the money with me in the streets without attracting attention.

If Alaje Kachaso was around then, I would have asked him to help me carry the money. I did not want to let

Bill Akimu into the secret before the scheme had worked. I did not know if things would work out to a satisfactory conclusion, and if I told him about it beforehand and things failed to succeed, I would look like a big fool and most ungrateful to him.

I had to buy a cheap brief-case to carry the money in. After work I went home, changed from my office-clothes into my home-clothes and went to work in the little vegetable garden at the back of the house. I worked for an hour or so, then took a cold bath and changed into fresh clothes.

'I am going out to the pictures,' I told Bill and his wife. 'Don't keep me any supper. I shall eat out.'

'That's a waste of money, eating in hotels,' Bill advised me.

I did not have a quick answer, partly because I did not want to tell them too many lies at the outset of my little plan. I did not want to trap myself in a web of my own lies if I could avoid it.

Seeing I said nothing, Mrs Akimu assumed I was meeting a girl.

So she said, 'Let him enjoy himself. You did the same before you got married.'

'Have a hell of a swell time,' Akimu said jokingly. 'Is she beautiful?'

I laughed softly as if to say, indeed she was beautiful. The plan was a beautiful one, and if Akimu wanted to call it 'she' I had no objection. I took my newly bought brief-case with its valuable contents and walked to the nearest bus stage. The golf course was on the other side of the race course. And the race course was adjacent to Majengo Location – a wide road separated them. The two open fields were unsafe to walk in by yourself alone between sunset and sunrise. It was full of bad hats, as the

Municipal Councillors were fond of calling them in their Council debates.

It was a fine evening, and when I got there, the area was almost deserted. A car came and the driver, a young Indian, said that he could give me a lift. He behaved as if we had met before and knew each other.

'I don't want a lift,' I said. 'Thank you all the same.'

He looked round him as if he expected to see another person in the vicinity. There was nobody besides the two of us and the car.

'Get in,' he said. 'It's all right. He's just down there.'

He opened the door for me at the back. I got in, and in no time the car shot forward. Farther down the road, he stopped the car and went into a house near by. Shortly afterwards another came out of the house and got into the car. It was my Indian friend I had come to meet. He started up the car and drove off.

For a while we drove in silence.

'Do you like it?' he said.

'Like what?' I asked him.

'This drive?'

'Where are we going to?' I said. 'I have the money here with me.'

'You like to do business very quickly,' he said, unperturbed by what I had said. 'That's no good. You must take your time in doing business.'

'I have a date with a girl in fifteen minutes time,' I lied. 'So, I must hurry.'

He stopped the car.

'Where is the boodle?' he said looking behind.

I passed on the brief-case across to him. 'It's all there. You can return the case to me tomorrow. Now, take me into town.'

'Put the case down on the seat beside you,' he said.

'You can leave it there when you get out of the car. Where exactly can I drop you down?'

'Near the Angel, just off Main Avenue,' I said.

As we drove into town, I said: 'And when do I get the keys for the house?'

'I'll post them to you, if you like, in a day or two,' he said.

'Why so late?'

'There are certain formalities,' he said.

'Can't we skip them?'

'Skip what?' he asked.

'The formalities,' I said. 'After all we are not following a strictly conventional procedure in this deal.'

'My friend,' he said sharply, 'you talk too much.'

'I am sorry if you think I talk too much,' I answered. 'I want a house, and I want it quickly. That's why I am doing all this.'

I patted the brief-case by my side on the car seat.

He said, 'Well, in that case, old boy, you had better meet me again tomorrow. Same place, same time, same amount.'

I was stunned. Some more money before I even had the house. He was mad.

'I don't think that can be done before I get the house,' I told him.

'That's up to you,' he said. 'If you want a house quickly meet me tomorrow at the same place, the same time and the same amount. I told you this morning that I don't want to be hard with you. I could ask for four times as much for this deal, but instead I am settling for ten quid.'

'But that's too much money, my friend,' I protested.

'You probably don't know that I don't deal alone in this business,' he explained vaguely. 'There are others

who are also interested in your dough. Five quid is chicken feed if you want a house by tomorrow. It's up to you.'

'All right, you win my friend,' I said surrendering. 'But can't we make it earlier? I want to move into the house over the week-end, you see.'

'Call at the office in the morning, your usual time,' he said. 'If you have another brief-case, bring it with you to my office and pretend to forget it when you leave. I shall take it back to you or send it to you with a boy with the keys in it.'

He dropped me in Main Avenue. I had a drink and some food at the Angel. Without Alaje Kachaso with me the place didn't seem the same. I left early, saw a picture, and after that I went to Majengo to try and meet Mangani Phiri. I had not had any news from home, and I wanted to ask him if he knew anything from there.

I met him without difficulty at the taxi rank. He was talking volubly to a group of other cab-drivers. It was a peculiar group of birds of a feather. Dressed very nearly the same – tight trousers, zip-jackets and caps placed at sharp angles on their heads. Most of them were young. Mangani Phiri was probably the oldest in the group, and he seemed to be their natural leader.

He was thoroughly enjoying himself, and I felt so different that for a moment I hesitated whether to disturb him or not. But he saw me in the poor light. He stopped gesticulating and quickly finished whatever he had been telling them.

'Hello, Jo,' Phiri said cheerfully.

'Hello, there,' I answered.

The group started to melt quickly, like flies disturbed from sugar candy in a bowl. I felt guilty.

'Come to my car,' Phiri said. 'Where are you staying? Still with the Akimus?'

'Yes. I am still living in their house at Kumoyo Location,' I said. 'But I am getting a house of my own. I'm going back to E95.'

We stopped walking.

'How are you getting back into that house?' he asked, unable to hide his surprise.

'Oh, well,' I stammered. 'I got it back somehow.'

'How?'

We started walking again and reached the taxi.

'Get into the car,' he said. 'Did you bribe them?'

'Beg your pardon?' I said.

'What did you do, bribe them?' he repeated.

'You can call it that, I suppose,' I said. I settled down more comfortably in the seat. 'You don't approve of it, I take it.'

'I don't know, really.' He started up the car. 'Where do I take you to?'

I did not want to go to bed so early, and I did not quite know where I could kill time.

'Let's go and have some coffee,' he suggested seeing I had not made up my mind yet where to go. 'Perhaps you want a drink of beer?'

'Coffee,' I said.

We went to a coffee house situated near the end of the main town and the beginning of Majengo Location. The atmosphere in there was something of a mixture of Majengo and of the town proper.

As we drank our steaming coffee, Phiri said: 'I am glad you are going to stay in your own house. I am only sorry that it was not possible to get it legitimately.'

I protested. 'My method is as legitimate as any.'

'Maybe it is, and maybe it it is not. Depends on how

you look at it,' he said. 'The trouble is that once you have bribed these people, they will go on milking you until they have milked you white. I know them, and you won't be the first victim either. Dreadful, my boy, those bastards.'

'Don't blame them,' I came to their defence. 'It's not their fault. Maybe it's the fault of the people who give out the bribe.'

'It's not their fault either,' he said. 'The people to blame are those responsible for the way our society is set up. I blame them. Even this wave of crime is directly due to our unnatural social set-up. It must stop. We are determined that it shall stop.'

He became so worked up, carried away with his emotion, that he forgot to drink his coffee. I watched him and listened to his talk. It was unusual to see Mangani Phiri in such a mood. Usually he was happy and laughing, passing light-hearted remarks here and there.

I said, 'You are not happy, Mangani. Anything wrong?'

'Plenty,' he said. He smiled. 'Pardon me for flying off like that. These days I am not quite myself. I think it must be the death of that friend of ours – the taxi-driver who took you two, three days ago. We are burying him tomorrow at the African municipal cemetery for the common. He had no religion, as if that matters, and we must rest him there.'

I said, 'It was a terrible thing.'

'I know,' he said. 'And why you people should go to such parties just beats me.'

'It was my boss throwing it, and it meant my job going there,' I said. 'I am not self-employed as you are.'

'I didn't mean you, personally,' he corrected me. 'I am just speaking in general. Now, do you want some more coffee?'

'No, thanks,' I said. I had not enjoyed it, and I now felt like going to bed.

We went back to the car and started for Kumoyo.

'Be careful with the people you have bribed,' he advised me as he dropped me at the house. 'I'll be seeing you tomorrow at the funeral – if you are coming, that is.'

'Yes, I am coming,' I said. 'What is the burial time?'

'Five in the afternoon,' he said.

'I'll be there,' I said. 'Good night.'

'Good night.' He went away, and I opened the door and went straight to bed.

I dropped into a comfortable pit of sleep. I don't know for how long I was there, but when I awoke dawn had broken, and my host and hostess were engaged in a furious row in their room. The noise they made woke me up.

I lay in the bed and listened to the loud exchange of bitter words which soon ended in an exchange of blows. I wondered whether to go and stop the fight, but decided that would make their domestic problem worse. So I got up, had a quick wash, dressed and left the house for the office.

The night watchman at the office was just about to leave.

'You are an early bird,' he said to me. 'Anything special happened?'

'No. I just want to write some letters before the others arrive,' I said.

'A good idea,' he said.

He was an old man, dressed in tattered clothes with so many patches that it was almost impossible to tell which one was the original cloth, for the patches were of different colours and shapes. In his prime days he was a soldier, a smart N.C.O., and had fought in a number of

African battles, including the First World War. Did he know what he had fought for, I wondered. I didn't know either. Now he was an old man, poor and lonely, spending cold nights on a mat made from empty carton papers in a building only occupied during the day. I was not even sure that he could grapple with a determined burglar. He folded up his paper bedding and as he bent I noticed an old rosary hanging round his neck under his shirt.

When he stood up, I said, for no particular reason, 'So you are a Christian.'

He looked up and brightened. 'I once was, a long, long time ago. Then I had one wife. But that was not the way a strong man could keep; one wife, that's not our way. So I married other women as my strength and desire could manage.'

He went back to those old days, and he was a young man again.

'I have many children,' he said. 'Some of them important men with good jobs, but few remember I am their father. I don't want to bother them begging them to help me. I have had my time of happiness and it is gone. This is their time. I am happy it is so.'

He put away his bedding and things. I wondered if he had a home to go to, or did he go wandering about the town until it was dark, a time to return to his job? What did he do with his money?

I said, in English, 'Well, well, what a world!'

He looked at me and smiled.

'Don't be surprised, my child,' he answered in English, and I was astonished. We had been talking in the vernacular, and I had never expected him to know English.

'As you grow older you will find more and more new things to discover,' he said. 'Old as I am, I still find there

are things I encounter for the first time, and I have come a long way.'

I took two shillings from my pocket and gave him.

'Thank you, son,' he said. 'What is your name?'

Should I tell him my name? There is no harm in doing so, he doesn't look the beggar type.

'Jo Jozeni is my name,' I told him.

He bent down his head as if searching for something.

'Now, let me see,' he said thinking hard. 'I once knew a man, a teacher, who used to give reading and writing lessons to our unit in those years now gone, whose name was Josiah Jozeni.'

'That could be my father,' I told him. 'He is called by that name, but he is no longer a teacher. He is a minister, and has been that even before I was born.'

'Oh, my child, what I am talking about is what happened obviously long before the world knew you would ever be born,' he chuckled. 'I am glad to meet you. Now that you have said, I can see you have some resemblance with the teacher I knew. Please give him my regards. Tell him that Sergeant Njoka Maki sent him greetings. He will probably remember.'

I said, 'I will tell him. He will be very pleased.'

'I don't know,' the old man said. 'Still, do give him the message. Thank you for the money.'

He started to go, and I remembered Agnes Maki at Bangwe. Would she be his daughter? I asked him.

'Possibly, but in all probability she is one of my many grandchildren,' he said.

'I would like to know a bit of your life history,' I told him. 'It's interesting, I am sure.'

He laughed clearly, with no trace of senility.

'You flatter me, child,' he said, still laughing. 'You see, my child, when a man reaches my age, he no longer

has any illusions because any illusions that he ever had have been scraped away by the sharp edges of reality and the passage of time. Interesting my life history is, you say? Well, some parts of it are interesting, some dull, others painful. As an old man, I don't regret any portion of my time. If I were given it back, I could not live differently. I must go. Good-bye, child.'

After he left, I also left and had hot tea at a near-by teashop. When I returned, I was still the first man to arrive in the office. I wrote a short letter to my father and told him I might be coming home at the week-end. Then I decided there was no need to send the letter, so I tore it up.

The morning newspaper came with the messenger. Much of the front page news was about international conferences and negotiations of this and that. The African scene was mainly monopolized by Ghana, and a little about the other countries there.

Lost in my thoughts, I did not notice the coming of Bill Akimu into the room. When he said, 'Good morning, Jo. You are too early. . . .' I was so startled that I almost jumped up from the chair, as if I had been suddenly caught looking at some obscenity.

'I am sorry I left the house so early without a word,' I said quickly shouldering a blame that wasn't there. 'I wanted a little time to myself in the office.'

I saw the relief come round his eyes.

'That's all right, man,' he said. 'Just wondered why you left so early. Have you had breakfast?'

'Yeah.'

'Good. What's the news in the paper?' he asked, still standing.

'The usual stuff,' I said. 'Have a look at it.'

I handed him the newspaper, and he took it with him

into the editor's office. Very soon the office was filled with good morning greetings as the staff arrived, and it was like every other day.

Later that morning I went to the bank and withdrew £6 from my savings account.

'Are you gambling your money?' The teller asked me in a friendly way. 'You were here only yesterday.'

I knew I was breaking into my hard-saved account. But that was the only way I could get a house. There was no simpler way. When I returned to the office, I was told by one of my colleagues that Dan Dube, Zake Lukani and Mangani Phiri were in the editor's office. The editor wanted to see me as soon I returned.

I went in. The visitors had occupied all the spare seats, and I had to stand all the time I was there.

'Mr Dube complains that he was misquoted in the last story about him,' Bill Akimu said with an official air.

'Which story?'

'The story about my Press Conference,' Mr Dube said. He held up a copy of *Kawacha News* and jabbed his finger at it. 'That story there.'

'May I see the story?' I said.

He gave me the paper. I read the story. I had not written it. The story quoted Mr Dube as having said that the reasons there had been no meeting at Kumoyo Location were because his lieutenants had failed to co-operate with the authorities, and their failure to follow his instructions had led to trouble.

The report went on to say that Dan Dube now planned to reshuffle the executive.

I handed back the paper.

'Did I say that?' he demanded.

'I don't know what you said, Mr Dube,' I said. 'I was not at your Press Conference.'

'Let me see,' Bill scratched his head. 'This was not an agency story, Jo, was it?'

'Don't remember,' I said.

'Do you deliberately write lies?' Dube asked.

I said, 'I don't think I do. Neither does my friend, Al Kachaso. I think he handled this story. I know he is a reliable reporter. He could not lie.'

He looked at me, and I returned his stare. He smiled.

'I don't remember saying that I am going to sack my assistants,' Dube said.

'Is that the only thing you have been misquoted about?' Bill asked.

'The whole story is wrong.'

Mangani Phiri looked at me. 'I would like to have a word with you, Jo, after this.'

Akimu said, 'You can go, Jo. Unless Mr Dube has anything more to say.'

'I think Al spoke the truth,' I said.

'I think so, too,' Mangani Phiri said.

I left them and went back to my office.

'Do you still want a house, Jo?' Mangani Phiri asked me.

I looked up at him.

'I want it badly, man,' I said anxiously. 'I have money for that man, here.'

'Well, don't waste it. I will get you a house.'

'Thank you very much, man.'

'I will get you the keys from those fellows. You still want No. E95?'

'Yes.'

'You will have it,' he said. 'By the way, don't worry about Dan Dube's query. We know he said those things. He said them but he is afraid to tell us he did. His friend

Lukani knows too that Dube said those things. We came here just to prove my point that he said those things.'

'Al Kachaso could not have written things that Dube didn't say,' I said. 'He has no axe to grind.'

'No.'

'You are very kind, man, in getting me a house,' I said.

'Don't thank me.'

Was he trying to put me in a position where I owed him a favour? He was being kind all the same.

I decided to visit Al at the hospital that afternoon.

Chapter 10

The hospital people thought it was still too early for any outsiders to be allowed to visit Alaje Kachaso, but believing I had been sent by his employers I was given 'no more than five minutes' to stay with the patient.

He had been put in a private side room in the surgical ward. A nurse took me there and was instructed to see that I did not exceed my allotted time. The room was clean, very clean, and smelled strongly of carbolic acid.

The patient's face was still swollen, and although his eyes seemed to be on me, he did not recognize who I was. Occasionally he murmured something I could not follow. Sometimes his eyes brightened for a moment, but most of the while there was a strange remote look in them. I did not try to speak to him, for I knew, even without being told by the nurse, that he would not understand me.

I looked at the nurse, and without saying a word, or bothering to finish the five minutes allowed me, I walked out of the room. I was sorry for having not listened to the hospital people's objection to my visit. Alaje Kachaso whom I had just seen was not the same happy, hard-drinking friend I knew barely a week ago.

It was plain he would be in hospital for a long time, and I prayed he should get well. But there was also doubt in my mind whether he was going to recover and be his old self again.

Outside the door of the ward I said to the nurse, rather hurriedly: 'Thank you, nurse.'

She looked at me and seemed to have caught my sadness.

Unconvincingly she said, 'We hope he will pull through.'

'I hope so, nurse,' I said. 'Good-bye, and do get in touch with us should anything happen. You know the telephone number?'

'Yes,' she said quickly. 'Do give him time. Don't be impatient. He'll be well.'

I left the hospital without saying any more. I knew the nurse did not want me there, and she probably thought I had no human feelings: my concern, like those of his employers, being that the patient should get well and return to work.

I went back the way I came a much sadder man. At the office on my desk I found a bulging sealed envelope addressed to me. True to his promise, Mangani Phiri had sent me the keys for the house at Kumoyo Location, Number E95. He had also enclosed papers that authorized me to live in the house as a tenant of the Municipal Council. So he had done it. I almost danced with joy, and for a moment forgot all about Alaje Kachaso.

I had no furniture at all, and to furnish such a house as E95 would need more money than I had in my savings account. I decided to see the editor and ask him to recommend me for a loan.

I went into the office and found him studying a make-up dummy of the front page. It was several minutes before he looked up.

'Yes, Jo,' he said impatiently. 'What have you got? Quickly, now tell me, I am very busy.'

As if I did not know.

I said 'I have got a house at last Bill, and —'

In a moment he had forgotten how busy he was and evinced keen interest in what I was saying.

'Now, now. Did you say you have got a house?' he interrupted.

'Believe it or not, Bill,' I said, 'I have got a house and what's more it is in Kumoyo Location.'

'What? Congratulations, man. . . .'

I went on: 'And none other than E95.'

Bill Akimu almost jumped up, but he remembered he was the editor and had to maintain his dignity as befitted his position in the office.

Trying hard not to look excited, he said, 'Now, Jo, you aren't trying to pull my leg?'

'What I am telling you is a fact. I have the official papers of tenancy and the keys – they are here with me. My problem now is to get the furniture for the house, and I wonder if you can please recommend me for a loan from the manager.'

'This is really remarkable,' he said. 'I stayed five years in this town before I was able to get a house. When I got it, it was not given me in my name. The tenancy is in the name of the company and the moment I leave my job, I get out of that house. Man, I don't know!'

Maybe he suspected I had got the house the backdoor way, but he did not ask any more questions about it. All he said was: 'That's in order, Jo. You can get a loan for purchasing the furniture you want. Write a formal application through me to the manager and state how much you want and for what reason. Mention also how you propose repaying the money, how much per month you want them to chop away from your salary. That sort of thing, okay?'

'Yes, sir,' I said very pleased with myself.

Then I started for the door.

'By the way, Jo,' he called behind me. I turned round, one hand already on the door knob. 'When do you intend getting into the new house – your old house really – at the end of the month?'

'I was thinking of moving into it, say, tonight,' I said. 'Provided, of course, you have no objection, Bill. I am very grateful to you both for giving me accommodation and keeping me so comfortably. . . .'

'Oh, that's nothing, Jo,' he cut me short. 'Do you think you can get all the furniture this afternoon and be able to move into it tonight? Won't you want it given a white-wash first?'

'It's been cleaned up since we vacated, and there has not been anyone in it at all. It's been empty all this time,' I said.

'But what about furniture?'

'Maybe I'll get a bed and some utensils today,' I said. 'I can buy the rest at the auction on Saturday. It's only a matter of two days to Saturday.'

He said 'We are not chasing you away from the house you know. But if you must leave today and get into this new house it's all up to you.'

'I know you would like me to stay in the house with you, and so would I, Bill,' I said thoughtfully. 'But if I don't get into this new house, I will lose it. So I must get into it as soon as I can. You see my point?'

'Sure, I do,' he said. 'Well, get back to your table and write the letter now. Don't make it a large figure, a reasonable amount which you will easily repay without getting into other debts is the idea. Maybe £30.'

'I was thinking of £50 ' I said.

'That's reasonable enough, I suppose. How much is your salary?'

I told him.

'Well, you can manage,' he said. 'Go ahead and write the letter now.'

I went back to my table and wrote the letter. After that I went through the various stages until finally I got the money just about the time the accounts department was closing to go home for the day. By the time the money was safely in my jacket, I felt like water that had run the whole course of the river and reached its destination in the sea.

The next two days were very busy ones for me, but by Sunday I had the house almost fully furnished, and it was looking as comfortable as if I had been living there for a number of years.

Mangani Phiri came to see me on Sunday morning.

'Man, where did you get all these things?' he said admiring the house. 'Have you broken up your savings?'

'I have worked hard,' was all I said.

Then he said, 'You didn't come to the funeral of our friend. Why, Jo?'

'I am terribly sorry,' I said. 'You know, I was so very busy furnishing this place and cleaning it up, and I didn't have the time to come to the funeral. How was it?'

'You should have come,' he said. 'I think there was a crowd of nearly five thousand people. He went like a chief.'

'I must have missed something big,' I said.

'Yes, boy. He was a big chap, that one,' he said. 'We liked him, and I am sure we'll miss him so much in the organization.'

'Was he a big shot in it?'

'Well, he was not a leader in the sense that Dan Dube is a leader. That boy was an ordinary kind, but he was a man of action. He would do anything he was told, and was so faithful.'

'He struck me as a quiet and reserved man,' I said trying

hard to remember what he looked like that night. His image in my mind seemed blurred.

'In a way he was a quiet man,' Phiri agreed. 'But he could also be very friendly. His nature suited his job as a taxi-driver, as well as a collector of the town gossip. He was my eyes when I wasn't there. Boy, that chap was a character. He was quick and sharp when the occasion demanded. It's good luck that he wasn't at Kumoyo Location on that morning of disturbance. Were he there and if he should have seen how we were being pushed about, particularly the innocent old man, I am almost sure that the boy would have thought nothing about sticking a knife into somebody's back.'

I shuddered at the picture Mangani Phiri was painting of what might have happened.

Abruptly he said: 'I am visiting the boys at Bangwe Mission this afternoon. Would you like to come?'

'Yes, indeed. I would very much like to come,' I said quickly. 'What time do you propose to leave?'

'I have no fixed time, really,' he said. 'What time would you like us to start? Make your suggestion.'

'I would like to leave now,' I told him. 'We could have lunch there.'

'That's all very well with me,' he said. 'Are you ready then, now?'

'Yes. But let me lock up the place first,' I said.

Mangani Phiri went to his car while I closed all the windows and locked up the doors.

'It's a fine, lovely day for a drive in the country,' he said as he started up the car. The engine purred into life.

'I would like to buy a few things for the old folk,' I said as the car started to move. 'Can you drive via the town, please!'

'You want to buy them sugar?' he asked smiling.

'Yes. They are very fond of tea,' I said.

My father and my mother loved tea, and on a day such as Sunday, they drank tea almost by the hour. And my mother liked her tea very sweet. On Sundays, visitors dropped in to chat (and to drink tea) one after another until almost sunset.

So I bought for them fourteen pounds of sugar, a one-pound weight packet of tea leaves and two large loaves of bread.

Soon afterwards we were on the country road, and the town was left behind us. The day was bright and shimmering. It was so quiet in the countryside that the gentle drone of the car's engine was very soporific.

'I envy the people who live in the country,' Phiri said. 'It's so open and refreshing.'

We travelled in silence for a long distance. It was beautiful and peaceful: no traffic on the road, cyclists were few, and no pedestrians. Everyone seemed to have taken a holiday. The Sunday atmosphere was very marked.

At Bangwe we found the people still in church. The station was deserted except for pets. We left the car in front of my father's house, and went to the church. Just as we reached it, the congregation started pouring out.

'Let's mix in with the crowd,' Mangani Phiri said.

Phiri did not know the country people, I thought. How could we mix with the crowd when by our dress we were conspicuously strange? In the country each person was a separate entity, known and recognized. In the town, it was different.

The first man out came over. 'Hello, gentlemen,' he said. We shook hands. After him came another person. Then another, and another. Soon we were the centre of a large crowd.

Mangani Phiri said, 'The way we are treated, one would think we have just landed from heaven with a message to these people here.'

I laughed.

Felix, Ben, mother and Mary came out through a side door. They had heard the news of our arrival and came to join the growing assembly. It was not until nearly everyone had pumped Mangani's hand and mine in greeting that we were left free to go.

'Why don't you stay with us for a few days, child?' my mother asked me.

'I have to go back, mum. I haven't got a holiday yet.'

'Don't you like home any more?'

'I do,' I said. 'When I get a holiday, I am coming home.'

My father had grown slightly fatter since we last met. He also looked happy.

'How are you getting on with your work?' he asked me.

'I am progressing,' I said.

They both looked very pleased.

'Mangani Phiri helped me to get a house,' I told them. 'It's the same house in which Mary and Felix were living in at Kumoyo Location.'

'How did you do it?' father asked.

'Mangani Phiri did it for me,' I said. 'How he managed it I don't know, father.'

'It's very good that you have your own house,' he said. 'A man should have his own place. Are you managing all right?'

'I am, father.'

'You will be needing someone to look after the house and your property,' my mother suggested. 'We want grandchildren, too.'

'It's too early to be thinking of a helper,' father said.

Mother went into the kitchen and left the two of us alone. Mangani Phiri was at the house Felix and Mary were staying in. It was lent them by one of the mission workers who had decided to live in his own house a mile or so away from the station.

'Mr Nyirenda is with us. He is living with his friend,' my father said. 'He is a very good and hard-working young man. He is helping to teach at the school without pay.'

'He is a nice man,' I agreed.

'He and Felix are like twins, the way they love one another,' he said. 'Mr Nyirenda is preparing to marry the teacher one of these days. Won't you be coming to attend the wedding?'

'I think I will come, father,' I said.

I left father and went to see the others.

'How is the town, Jo?' Ben asked.

'It's fine,' I said.

'Mangani Phiri tells us you have entered into E95?' Felix asked.

'I have, man,' I said. 'When you come, we shall live there.'

'I am not coming to town very soon,' he said. 'I have a lot of work here in the country.'

'How is Al getting on these days?' Ben asked. 'I gather you had a nasty accident. What happened?'

'We had been to this party. A lousy party it was,' I said. 'Well, Al had come by his own transport, but when we left we shared a taxi. The driver seemed to be in a hurry – he was driving terribly fast and taking corners at speed. We had not gone very far when he failed to negotiate a corner and the car went out of control. We rolled over several times. The driver must have been thrown out, or

he'd tried to jump out. It was sudden, so sudden that we didn't really know what had happened.'

Everyone was silent and attentive.

'We came out. Al who, ironically, was at first the most fit collapsed,' I went on. 'The driver died soon afterwards.'

Elizabeth, who had been there listening said, 'What about you, were you unhurt?'

'I was very fortunate indeed,' I said. 'I came out with superficial bruises. But I had been badly shaken. The same with Bill Akimu.'

'It's a loss, that driver's death,' Mangani Phiri said.

'I gather, Ben, you are getting married one of these days?' I said.

Agnes laughed. 'You'll be the best man,' she said.

'When are you getting married yourself, Jo?' Felix said. 'You have got a house. What are you waiting for?'

'You'll hear when I am ready,' I said.

Mangani Phiri stood up. 'I must go and pay my respects to the old man,' he announced. 'Coming with me, boys?'

'Yes,' Felix said.

We followed Mangani Phiri and went to my father's house.

It was one of those quiet Sundays, rare for my father.

'It's surprising, father,' I said, 'that you haven't guests today.'

'Of course I have. What about you and Mr Phiri?'

'We are not strictly speaking guests,' I said.

For a while we talked of things in general. Then Mangani Phiri brought up the subject of the Movement.

'You must work in co-operation with Dan Dube,' the old man said. 'We can't afford to pull apart. We must pull

together. You boys must work from inside. That's the only way to get Dube into line. At the moment he's a big influence and is like a big river. To control it, you must watch the flow of the water.'

Mangani Phiri said that he saw the point, but Felix and Benjamin seemed doubtful, still unconvinced.

'If you say so, father,' Felix said, 'does it mean that we must accept that the Governor will nominate the four who will take seats in the Legislative Council? Shouldn't we demand a say in who goes there – suppose the House is filled with "yes-men"?'

The old man said, 'It's very simple, really, my children. All we need to do is to accept the four seats, and the two seats on the Executive Council being offered to us. We will then tell Dan Dube to tell the Governor that the people want there to be some form of election for the returning of the four Members of Legislative Council but not nomination. The Governor will probably find a way of having the Members elected.'

'I think you are right, father,' Benjamin Nyirenda said thoughtfully.

'Try that first, and if it fails we can try another way,' my father said. 'God will help us. We must not lose Dan Dube. It's difficult to find leaders so easily among our people.'

Felix said, 'Father, wouldn't you like to go to Legco?'

The old man smiled, and his face looked young. 'I am an old man, you know, child. I would much rather you, the young ones, did these things.'

Mangani Phiri said, 'But we want you to lead us, Reverend. The people want you.'

'I have not gone away, my child,' my father said gravely. 'Here I am, still with you. If you want me, here I am. But first, do as I ask you. Get together with Dan

Dube and reconcile yourselves, for the good of our people.'

Mangani Phiri said, 'We will do that, Reverend. I agree that Felix and Benjamin ought to take the remaining two seats in the Legislative Council. I am sure Dan Dube and Zake Lukani will not object.'

The women brought in food from the kitchen and we sat down to eat. Mary had also sent food, as had Elizabeth Chake. It was late in the evening when we left for the town. Darkness had already set in.

On the way, Mangani Phiri said, 'I am glad things promise to take a turn for the better. How did you know that Ben was planning to marry shortly?'

'The old man mentioned it to me,' I said. 'Is it supposed to be a secret?'

'Not really,' he said.

'He's been in love with Agnes for quite a long time,' I said.

'Yes. And I am glad the boys came to Bangwe. Their short stay with the old man has given them a lot of wisdom. It's been a unique education for them in public affairs.'

I was homesick and I told my companion so.

'You will soon be so busy that you will not have the time to think about home,' he said.

It was a dark night, but several times we came across small game on the road. The lights of the car temporarily dazzled them. In self-preservation they jumped into the bush when the car came near.

I thought of Elizabeth most of the way.

Chapter 11

The wet season came with heavy rains. For weeks on end the rain fell with hardly an interval. The day started with rain. People went out to work in the rain. It rained throughout the day, and at nightfall it was still raining. Everyone got tired of the rain and tempers became short.

Dan Dube and his colleagues had presented to the Government a petition in which they requested that the country's constitution be reviewed, and that, as the first step, African Members of Legislative Council should be elected. The petition was issued on behalf of the Organization. The Government turned it down. Dan Dube saw the Governor several times, but he was told that the time was not yet ready for reviewing the constitution.

The matter did not end there. The leader of the non-Africans who formed the majority in the Legislative Council in the course of his speech in the House one day, said: 'We do not refuse the Africans to have their own spokesmen in this House. We want them to have their own Members here. But what we do say to them is that before that happens, the Africans must first learn the art of Government by observing what we are doing. It takes time to learn these things. It took us several hundreds of years in the West to reach our present development in parliamentary technique.

'There is something I would like to remind our African

friends, which is very often forgotten. This country has reached its present progress and prosperity mainly because we, the non-Africans, have provided the capital, the initiative and the know-how. Above all, we have provided a stable leadership leading to the establishment of a stable government, which has brought about a profound confidence in the country by the industrial financiers.

'For a long time to come, this country will need our leadership. It is necessary, therefore, that at all times the government of this country will remain in civilized hands. Let it not be forgotten, too, that this country is as much the African's country as it is ours by adoption. Many non-Africans have made this country their home, and they have no other home, and have no intention of leaving. We have no intention either to abdicate our responsibility towards this country and its people. The sooner the few African agitators will realize this fact, the better for us all.

'I have been in this country for the better part of my life,' he went on, 'and I do know for certain that the majority of the African people in this country are a friendly people with no ambition to rule, but interested only in having a job, good shelter and plenty of food for themselves and their wives and children. Those who are ambitious are only a few who are too lazy to work, and want an easy life. We have no time for such men.'

When he sat down, he was applauded loudly and long by the non-African Members in the House.

The noise died down after a while, and Dan Dube stood up seemingly unperturbed.

'Some people believe that, although in the minority in this land, it is their God-given right to hold down in perpetual bondage the Africans who outnumber all the other races in this country. They invent all kinds of excuses for

putting us down. They say that Africans are uncivilized. That Africans are untrained. That Africans are this or that. If civilization is this kind of selfishness, then I ask them to keep it. We don't want it.

'I don't have much to say,' he said softly, 'but before I sit down I would like to remind this House that the Africans are supported by the facts of the situation. We must not forget the march of history. If there are others who doubt our stand, let me say this that we, the Africans, will get what we want even if others don't want it to happen. We will toil for our rights. We will fight to the last man. Thank you.'

Somebody shouted: 'Sedition!'

'Put him into prison!'

'They are not ready!'

The Governor, who was then Chairman of the House, shouted for order. The uproar died down, but the atmosphere in the House was charged with anger.

When they came out, the two African Members of the Council were hailed by a crowd of Africans who had gathered in front of the building. Dan Dube quickly told them to disperse lest the police declare it an illegal meeting.

'We are going to have a big meeting at the stadium shortly,' he told the gathering. 'Meanwhile, there are certain things your leaders want to discuss with the Governor.'

When I got back to the office, Bill Akimu, called me into his office.

'Some big news is going to break today, Jo,' he said, 'and we are all working late. Now, I want you to cover the Press Conference Dan Dube is holding late this evening. I want as much detailed material as you can possibly gather. Meanwhile, try and get background information from

Benjamin Nyirenda or Mangani Phiri. Don't bother about this morning's Legco story. I will handle that from agent's copy. The Press Conference is at seven, in the library room of Kumoyo Social Centre. Now, go and get something from Ben Nyirenda. He's probably at their office.'

As I went out, I almost bumped into our managing director. He was accompanied by Kenneth Pasi and both appeared to be in a happy mood.

'Morning, Jo. Very busy?' The boss said as he passed me.

'Good morning, sir. Quite busy.' I went to our classroom-like office and took my notebook and pencil. I went out and it started raining.

Benjamin Nyirenda, I was told at their newly opened office, had gone to fetch his wife's things from Bangwe. He was not expected back in the office until next day.

I had a strong urge to follow him in a hired taxi to Bangwe. But with such heavy rain falling down steadily, I knew the road would be muddy and unsafe. I decided to get hold of Mangani Phiri, and found him at the taxi rank.

'I am looking for you, man,' I told him, almost dripping wet. 'Couldn't find Ben Nyirenda. I gather he's gone to fetch his wife's things from Bangwe.'

'Well, he hasn't gone. I warned him the road would be too wet,' Phiri said. 'He's at his in-laws' house. He is staying there with his wife since they got married. Why do you want him? He's still on his honeymoon, you know. But then you are a bachelor and you can't understand what it means.'

He laughed good naturedly. I was too wet to laugh.

'You want to change those wet clothes of yours, Jo,' he said. 'Come, get into my taxi. I'll drive you to your house. We can talk in the car.'

We got into the car.

'Have lunch with me afterwards?' I said.

'You wanted to meet Ben, Didn't you?' he said. 'Well, why not have lunch with him? I'll take you to his place after you have got into dry clothes.'

I said, 'How is the new couple getting on?'

'You mean Ben and Agnes. They are a devoted couple,' he said. 'Dan Dube tried to interfere at one time. But Agnes Maki is a steady girl, faithful and devoted.'

'They haven't been married a long time,' I said, 'and it's too early to judge whether or not their marriage is a success.'

'You are a pessimist, Jo,' Phiri said. 'But you may be right.'

He lit a cigarette after offering me one.

'How's Kenneth Pasi these days?' he asked suddenly, and the question surprised me. Of all people on *Kawacha News*, why Kenneth Pasi?

I said, 'He's still there.'

'Prospering?'

'I don't know about that,' I said. 'He's quite happy, I should say. Met him with the boss just before I left the office – laughing gaily.'

'Man, he's clever, that bloke,' Phiri said.

'Who's clever, Pasi or the boss?' I asked.

Phiri avoided the question, and quickly changed the subject. Somehow, I felt that he had something he wanted to tell me and yet was reluctant.

'Were you in the Legislative Council this morning?' he asked.

'Yes. You?'

'No. I had a fare to deliver eight miles away,' he said.

I said, 'The non-African Members through their leader have said they don't want to share . . .'

He cut me short. 'I know. But that's nothing. You can't

expect them to give us our rights on a plate. If you have ever tasted power, my friend, you would know how difficult it is to give it up and let somebody else take it. It's human nature.'

'Dan Dube put up a good show,' I said.

'So I am told,' Phiri said. 'He's gone to Government House to explain his position. Things are moving, Jo. Remember what I told you the other day when we were returning from visiting your parents? I said that we had now reached a turning-point. We are all going to be busy. Dan Dube is now our man.'

'He certainly behaved differently today,' I said.

'He can't afford to do otherwise. We all know what our people want,' he said. 'No one can go against the wish of the people. No one.'

He talked with such conviction that I wondered what it was that made him and his friends, the old man included, speak as if they had exclusive access to nature's own top secrets. But if you asked them that, they would not agree. They would say that they were exactly the same as any other human being on two feet.

I changed into dry clothes when I reached my house. Phiri waited to give me a lift to Benjamin Nyirenda's place. It was only raining a little now, and by the time we got to Nyirenda's it had left off. A timid sunshine brought gentle warmth.

The house was big and built just outside Majengo proper. This area, unlike Kumoyo Location, where the houses were owned by the Municipal Council, was for personally-owned improved houses.

We went into the living-room and waited several minutes before Nyirenda came. Apparently he had been still in bed. Mangani Phiri had been right when he said that the couple were still having their honeymoon. Agnes,

who followed her husband into the room, appeared ill at ease with us, but her husband did not seem to mind.

'I will get dressed up properly if you can only give me a few minutes,' Ben Nyirenda said. 'Will you please allow me?'

'Jo Jozeni is anxious to take you out. Better get dressed,' Phiri said as if Nyirenda had come in unclothed.

'I'll get some lunch for you,' Agnes suggested.

'We will have it some other time,' Mangani Phiri said. 'We would like to eat somewhere where Jo and Ben can talk.'

'No. I will get you lunch,' she insisted. 'You can do the talking here. I will leave you to yourselves. Please.'

'What do you say, Jo?' Phiri asked me.

'One does not spurn away the hospitality of a newly married wife,' I said trying my best to appear amiable If I wanted Nyirenda to give me the information I wanted, I had to be friendly not only to him but to his wife as well.

'I don't have to go and dress up then,' Nyirenda said. He sat down and offered us cigarettes.

'Agnes is going to start work next week,' Nyirenda said. 'She is going to teach at the local mission school. She is lucky, I think.'

'Is it difficult to get a teaching job in the town?' I asked.

'Not quite,' he answered. 'The mission doesn't seem to want our wives.'

'Mary Felix Tambala can't get a job at Bangwe, I gather,' Mangani Phiri said.

'Yeah. It's that old Webb who's the trouble,' Nyirenda said. 'He doesn't like Felix at all, first because he became a Catholic, and second because he is a nationalist.'

'He is an imperialist, then?' Phiri suggested.

'John Webb, you mean. Yes, he is an imperialist all right,' Nyirenda said. 'He thinks he knows the Africans, and he thinks he knows what they want. So, he goes to the Governor and advises him privately what he should do or should not do for the Africans. I think we should get rid of such undesirable people.'

'We have many of his type,' Phiri said.

'Yes. Another one is the so-called leader of the non-African Members of Legco,' Nyirenda said. 'The man is loaded with money. He's made it all in this country. He's chairman of many business concerns here. Now, instead of thanking this country which has given him his wealth through exploiting our people, what does he do? He wants to go on exploiting us. My, did you hear what he said the other day: "The European and the African must work together like true partners. Only through partnership can we continue to live in real prosperity. The partnership that we want must be based on what each race has contributed, or is likely to contribute. There is no doubt that the European has played a larger share than any other race in bringing about the development of our country. We are proud of this record. Now, is it wrong, therefore, if we demand that because of our larger share we should be the senior partner, and those whose share has been less than ours should be our junior partner? To put it more simply, such partnership can be regarded as that between a rider and his horse. . . ." Now, I am using his own words from this newspaper cutting. Can you imagine working with such a man who thinks others are horses?'

'We won't have it,' Mangani Phiri said.

'Some of the missionaries,' Nyirenda said, 'are our worst enemies. Many of our traditional customs have been branded anti-Christian, and so our people have been told to forsake them. But tell me, what is wrong in doing a

traditional dance in which you don't have to hold a woman close to you? And where is the good, the Christian virtue, in a European dance where you have to hold a woman close against your body? One form of dance is discouraged and yet there is no apparent danger that it can lead to immoral feelings. The other can easily lead you to break the moral code. And this is encouraged. I am not saying this particular dance is bad. What I am saying is that our African forms of dance are good.'

'It's an expression of our culture,' Phiri said.

'Exactly,' Nyirenda said. 'And you, Jo, writers of ours, you must put these things down. Don't just be one-sided. Of course, at the moment I can understand your difficulties. The Press and the publishers of books, they are all non-Africans, and perhaps most of them will not touch things that say the things that do not agree with their people. But I think time will come when the position will change."

'It is a problem,' I said.

'It is a big problem, man,' Nyirenda said. 'Fortunately we are now awake. We will solve all these problems soon. The land problem, the education problem, poverty, all these things we have got in mind to set right. Our first step is to get the government machinery in our hands. We'll get Dan Dube and Zake Lukani out of the House. We'll put our own people in there very soon. About that we are determined to act much sooner than probably many people in this country realize.'

Mangani Phiri said, 'Can we tell him about the plans we have in mind?'

Benjamin Nyirenda laughed.

'Jo Jozeni knows everything that there is to know,' he said smiling. 'I like you, Jo. I have liked you ever since we first met because you are plain and sincere. Don't change.

Don't do like some of your friends do. I know full well that writers have got peculiar temperaments. But there is no excuse for over-stepping one's doings. We want people to be loyal to their employers. But reasonable men don't go beyond what they are supposed to do. I suppose you know what your friend, Kenneth Pasi, is doing? Don't get yourself in such a muddle. We have watched that bloke. We watch everyone, and by jove, we know what people do.'

Lunch came, the conversation changed to ordinary affairs, but I had lost my appetite. The nagging quiet statements of Benjamin Nyirenda which he had spoken a moment ago hung in the air as if he had left them there on a peg.

I had obtained some information all right, but I knew what I had been told was something I could not very well use. They had given it to me in good faith.

Dan Dube's Press Conference was not very well attended. Only about five journalists turned up. Surprisingly enough, he did not have much to say.

'I have no prepared statement,' he told us after greeting us. 'The main thing I wanted to tell you, my friends, is that this morning after explaining my position to the Governor I told him I could not possibly continue to sit in the Legislative Council. I cannot claim to represent African interests while it is not the Africans themselves who put me there. I have therefore asked the Governor to relieve me of my responsibility as far as the House is concerned. In other words, I have tendered my resignation.

'Now, you probably want to know what alternative plans I have got in mind. I haven't got any plans. I will do what my people want me to do. My friend Zake Lukani is still in the Legislative Council. I don't quarrel with that. This is a free country. We are all free men, free to do what

we please. But I do not honestly think a nominated African Member can serve his people any useful purpose in the honourable House any more. That is my personal opinion.

'Our people are organized. We know what we want. We are very soon going to have a well-tuned body under a leader that the people want and respect. We will summon an emergency meeting of the governing committee for the purpose of appointing office bearers. This will take place within the coming few days. After that we shall have a big rally at the stadium here in Kumoyo, or at the race course near Majengo. We shall give you the date in due course. We have nothing to hide.

'I must now thank you all for coming, gentlemen. Unless you have any questions, I have nothing more to say.'

Dan Dube looked at each one of us in turn. No one had any question to ask.

'What about you, Jo Jozeni,' Dube said, smiling. 'Haven't you got any question?'

I shook my head, and because he had singled me out, I was at a loss. I had to find something to say.

'Is His Excellency not appointing somebody else in your place, if so, do you know who it is?' I said quickly, and wondered if I had not asked an obvious and silly question.

Dan Dube suddenly showed great interest.

'The first part of your question is easy,' he said. 'The Governor is probably going to appoint somebody else. As for your second part, an obvious answer would be that I don't know who the Governor will nominate. But then I have a very good idea as to who he is likely to appoint. It's a mere guess, but I know it is more than that. Anyhow, you ought to know the person. Do you really want to know?'

'Yes, I do,' I said.

He laughed.

'All right. But I shall tell you when you bring your very able cameraman along to my next Press Conference,' he said. 'I am afraid, gentlemen, I can't detain you much longer. Good night.'

I went to the office and started typing out my story. So that was what Mangani Phiri, Benjamin Nyirenda and Dan Dube had been trying to tell me all along. The Governor was going to appoint Kenneth Pasi, the *Kawacha News* cameraman, as the new Member of Legislative Council instead of Dan Dube.

I made that the introduction of my story, as a mere guess. The result was that my guess was a scoop, but by making the story ahead of the official announcement, I got into trouble with my boss. But then that was a time when there was too much rain, and people had very short, bad tempers.

Chapter 12

I was congratulating myself on my scoop when Bill Akium came to my table. I had the paper spread out in front of me.

'The boss wants to see you at once about that,' he said. He pointed at the story for which I was congratulating myself. 'Go there now – his office.'

I looked at him. 'What's the matter with it?' I asked, thinking he was kidding. He had given the story prominence.

'I don't know what's wrong with it,' he said. 'All he said was that you go to his office and see him right away. By the way, when you are there, remember that you are not obliged to disclose the source of your information about the story. He can't force you to disclose the source of information given you in good faith. You have an obligation, and are duty bound to protect him or them.'

'Thanks for the tip,' I said. I slipped on my jacket, folded the paper and put it into my pocket.

'Good luck to you, Jo,' Bill said.

'Thanks. I am sure I will need it,' I said and went out.

There was nothing false about the story, of that I was sure. I had pieced together various hints I had had, mainly at Dan Dube's Press Conference. I had reason to congratulate myself. My piece in the paper had appeared long

before the official announcement. And now the boss wanted to see me.

The office was large, well lighted, airy, and comfortably furnished. The carpet was so soft that it felt like a rubber mattress under my feet. The boss sat in a big brown leather chair, behind a vast desk, completely bare of papers.

He waved me into one of the visitor's chairs, and contemptuously ignored my 'good afternoon, sir'. I dropped into the chair and bobbed up and down several times like a cork in unsteady water.

I was still settling myself in the seat when he spoke. 'Where did you get the facts about this gentleman's appointment?' he asked.

I followed the direction of his finger, and to my surprise saw Kenneth Pasi. I had not noticed him when I came in. The situation was theatrical, and I began to enjoy myself.

'Pardon me, I didn't catch what you said,' I said. 'I can't get comfortable in this chair.'

The boss got out of his chair, and I thought he was going to kick me out of his office.

'Can't get comfortable, you say? What's wrong with you, Jozeni? Haven't you got a bottom, or are you out of your senses?' He started to pace the distance between his desk and Pasi's chair.

'The chair is too soft, I am afraid, sir,' I said. 'You know, I am used to hard seats.'

Kenneth Pasi giggled. The boss stared at him, then continued his march.

'Who told you in advance of official announcement that Mr Pasi was being nominated to the Legislative Council?' he demanded. 'No one knew about it. I had the Government statement with me, and I have not even spoken about it to anyone.'

'Pure guess,' I said. 'The right kind of speculation.'

'What! Fiction – and you wrote it in my paper? Do I pay you to write fiction?'

'It's not fiction,' I corrected him. 'The official announcement has confirmed my guess. Mr Pasi here is an M.L.C.

I looked at Kenneth Pasi. He sat quietly and watched the two of us, fascinated.

'Do you realize that the story had an embargo? What do you think the Governor is going to think about me when he reads this and knows it appeared in my paper before his statement came out? Just tell me that?'

'The Governor will think you have clever journalists,' I said.

'He will think that, eh? You must think better than that,' he said. 'I want to know who gave you the information? You wrote this earlier than the official time.

'As a result the Government thinks I let you have the secret official document. Don't you realize the news had an embargo?'

I said, 'I never saw, nor knew, there was an official secret document. I wrote what I said in the story purely as something that was likely to happen, and I was sure it would happen. Otherwise I would not have risked writing it in the paper, sir.'

'Looks as if somebody told you about it.' he said.

I looked blank.

'Mr Pasi, you got anything to say?' The boss turned to the other guest in the room. 'As far as I am concerned, I don't know how to treat this matter. I have a good mind to sack him, and I very well think I am going to.'

Kenneth Pasi, with a newly acquired air of importance said, 'You can let it pass. Jozeni won't tell you the source of his information, and as no harm has personally been done to me, you can let him go. Explain to the Governor

that I don't mind it at all. I shall also mention it to him.'

The boss produced a silver cigarette-case and offered a cigarette to Pasi. He treated me as dirt.

'You can go, Jo Jozeni,' the boss said after a long while. 'I must warn you before Mr Pasi that should you continue to use my paper for your guess-work, I'll have you thrown out of your job.'

I said, 'I will remember that, thank you.'

'Have you anything more to say?' He seemed uncertain whether to let me go or not.

'Nothing, except perhaps to point out that while I have a duty to you as my employer, I have also a duty to my readers,' I said and stood up.

He went back to his seat and quietly puffed at his cigarette, watching me at the same time.

I opened the door and was about to go.

'Jozeni,' he called out.

I turned round.

'When did you last have a rise?' He said in a more friendly tone.

'Can't remember, sir,' I said. 'Maybe a year ago, I don't know.'

'I'll see about that,' he said. 'How's your friend in hospital? We all miss him, you know.'

'Kachaso is getting on fine. I'll pass your kind word to him,' I said.

'All right, Jozeni, you can go,' he said, in his former manner.

I closed the door behind me, and went down the corridor whistling. I passed a messenger as I got into the lift.

'You look very happy, Mr Jozeni,' he said and winked.

'Sure,' I said and joined others in the lift. As we shot down, I told myself that it was a good thing to have both

power and money. A woman standing next to me was scratching her chest and appeared lost in herself.

Bill Akimu was waiting for me in his office.

'How did it go, Jo?' he said.

'He wanted to know from where I got the news about Pasi's appointment in advance of Government's announcement,' I said. 'I told him it was a mere guess on my part.'

'Did he believe it?' Akimu said. 'I don't.'

'And the interesting thing is that Kenneth Pasi was there in the room with us,' I said.

'What did Pasi say?'

'He is feeling big and important,' I said. 'Doesn't mind I made the guess. But the boss warned me not to make my personal speculations in his paper.'

Akimu laughed softly.

'The thing is,' he said, 'do not make guesses which for obvious reasons go directly against the boss's policy.'

I said, 'What do you mean?'

'Forget it,' Akimu said. 'We are printing a specially written leader by the boss himself in our next issue. Did he tell you about it?'

I was surprised. 'No, he didn't,' I said. 'Is he writing it himself, you say?'

'He has already written it,' Akimu said. 'I have it here. You will read it in a moment. What do you think of the boss?'

I looked at him suspiciously.

'What are you driving at, Bill?' I asked.

'What do you think of him as a person? Your personal impression, that's all,' he said.

'I think he is a clever business executive,' I said. 'He pays his staff well, but he also takes care not to offend his shareholders.'

'I think so, too,' Akimu said. 'Now, here is his piece of writing. Tell me what you think of it after you have read it.'

He gave me a well-typed article. I read it through, quickly at first. The second time I read it slowly. It was written deliberately to boost Kenneth Pasi. The adjectives used to describe him were fantastic. He was this, he was that: a great man with a great mind, and so on. His action in accepting the Governor's appointment was hailed as the action of a man with the true interest of his people and his country at heart – a statesmen. Zake Lukani (who had not resigned) was also showered with praise.

In the same article, the boss attacked Dan Dube, describing him as the devil's own brother.

Surprisingly, the Organization was not attacked, but only came in for mild criticism. The writer made a disguised suggestion that Dan Dube should be replaced by moderate and responsible leaders.

When I finished reading the article, I came to the conclusion that it lacked honesty. It failed entirely to take into account the reality of the situation. I told Bill Akimu so.

'It's intended to win the African opinion to their side,' Akimu said.

'Whose side?'

'The side of the privileged,' he said. 'What he fails to appreciate, I must say, is that most of the people who read the paper are capable of seeing through such a specious argument. This is a negative approach the paper is indulging in. We will very soon come under fire from our readers.'

'Why don't you tell the boss that?' I said.

'What purpose would it serve?' Akimu said, and suddenly he looked tired and old.

'In the long run your protest is bound to have some effect,' I said.

'Perhaps.'

'You don't agree with his line of argument, do you?' I asked.

'Of course I don't,' he said with vigour. 'The position of a journalist is very often an awkward one. Usually he has to serve on a newspaper that says things which are against his conscience, against his convictions, against his interests. But a man has to live; you can't blame him.'

'We are not the only ones who don't like what we do,' I said. 'The policeman, the doctor, the magistrate and what-have-you, they all have just as detestable jobs as we have.'

He laughed mirthlessly.

Back in my office I had a pleasant shock. I found my sister, Mary, with Elizabeth Chake sitting near my table.

'Hello, Mary,' I said. 'Hello, Liz.'

We shook hands. Elizabeth looked very beautiful and I found it hard to take my eyes off her.

Mary said, 'Jo, can we stay at your house for two days, please? We have a conference for women teachers at the Mission Headquarters.'

'You are welcome, dear,' I said. 'Where are your things?'

'At the bus terminal,' Mary said.

'We'll go and get them, then go to the house,' I said. 'It's nice to see you girls. This place can be so lonesome.'

They got up ready to go. I said to one of my colleagues: 'I am taking my guests home. Shan't be long.'

Mary, I noticed, was pregnant. She looked more rounded and good-looking. It would be their first child since they were married seven years ago.

'The country is doing you good, Mary,' I said in a hearty voice.

'I am happy there,' she said, and looked it. 'You look very happy for one who is lonesome, Jo.'

'It's because of you two,' I said truthfully.

In the street I walked between the two girls, attracting a good deal of attention. One cyclist coming from the opposite direction stopped to stare at us and bumped into a white woman who was crossing the street. We hurried away, not wishing to see the end of the affair. But even before we were out of earshot, a crowd of people started to gather around the spot.

'That's town life,' I said.

Mary said, 'I am glad to return to the country. It's quiet there.'

'I hear that the Mission can't give you a job?' I said.

'It's just as well,' she said without bitterness. 'Felix and I are very busy in the village opening a coffee garden. We've opened a big garden of groundnuts. If the crop is successful, we should be able to get enough money for buying sugar, salt and that sort of thing. We have plenty of the other things.'

I said, 'I shall come and collect some bananas and maize flour when it's dried a bit.'

'We'll love to see you,' she said. 'I'll keep you dried beans, and smoked meat as well. "Mary, you wasted your time in town," I keep telling myself.'

She laughed. 'Liz has paid us a visit twice,' Mary said, 'she was impressed with what she saw. We are new in the village, but Felix has worked hard in the few months we have been there, and already we are like people who have been there for many years. He is setting a good practical example to the other villagers.'

'Did Mr Webb ask you to leave Bangwe?' I asked.

'No. But when Felix said he was going back to the village and start up anew,' Mary said, 'I refused to wait with

father at Bangwe until he had fixed up something comfortable. I went with him, and the chief was a good man. He gave Felix a large piece of land to settle on. We also received, and still do get a lot of help from our fellow villagers. The place is a mile or two from the chief's court.'

'Have you a school near?' I asked.

'The nearest one is some seven miles away,' Mary said. 'You should see how the children from our village and surrounding area suffer in going there. It is particularly bad in this wet weather. When the streams flood parents of smaller children get very worried, and they are right. Very often when that happens, the children don't return home that night. Felix has spoken to the people around, and I think we may be able to start a small school in the area on a self-help basis next year, if all goes well.'

'They are very busy, and one wonders where they get all the energy,' Liz said in admiration.

We collected their baggage from the bus terminal and went by taxi to my house in Kumoyo. Mary gave the house a careful examination.

'He looks after the house and keeps it clean as if there was a woman at the place,' Mary said to Elizabeth.

'How do you find the time to do it?' she asked me.

'It still lacks a feminine touch,' I said.

Both girls laughed, and Elizabeth almost blushed when Mary said: 'You don't have to search far for a suitable girl, Jo. I thought you two were always good friends?'

I waited for Elizabeth to answer, but she said nothing. So I said, 'I seem to have missed the boat.'

Elizabeth blushed further. I felt sorry for having made the remark and would have said so, but just then visitors started to come, Mary's old friends from the houses around. The news of her arrival had spread round and reached her

friends, and now they came to greet her. The house was soon filled with chattering women. Their talk was of feminine interest, and I could not join them. It was as if they were having a private conference labelled 'For Women Only', like an initiation ceremony.

Benjamin Nyirenda and his wife, Agnes, also came to the house. Agnes brought with her cooked food. Several other women, too, brought with them cooked food, one of them a whole cooked chicken. This was to show respect for the visitors, Mary and Elizabeth.

The evening passed by unnoticed, and, with nightfall, the women went to their houses. Agnes and Ben stayed on, and we had supper with them. It was a big feast, and Mary was full of happiness for the respect she had received from her old friends.

'You are like a chief, Mary,' I said jokingly.

'She is, this good girl,' Ben said with his mouth full of chicken meat.

'I lived well with these people as if they were my own relatives,' Mary said in a voice that a mother keeps for little children, soft and understanding.

If we all lived like you, Mary, I thought, there would be true brotherhood of mankind in this country. I was brought back into the room by the arrival of Dan Dube and Mangani Phiri. No one at the table had heard the sound of the car.

'We'll wait in the sitting-room. Finish your eating,' Dan Dube said.

'Come'n and join us,' Mary said. 'There's plenty of food here. We can't finish it by ourselves. Come, don't be shy like a bunch of little boys.'

Mangani led the way and came to the table. 'I am hungry,' he said. 'Very hungry. What have you got on the table?'

'Chicken, beef. Everything,' Mary said. 'Just look at it.' She took in the whole table with a sweeping wave of her hand.

The two newcomers sat down. They washed their hands and joined in the feast. There was no formal greeting, and as the feast got into its stride there was less talking.

Somebody brought up the subject of Elizabeth and myself.

'These two single fellows shouldn't really be mixing with us,' he said.

'All in good time,' Mangani Phiri said.

Elizabeth was enjoying herself. I wasn't. I didn't like that kind of talk.

Mary occupied my bedroom. That was the most comfortable room, and it was where she and Felix used to sleep before. Elizabeth occupied the spare bedroom, and I made myself a bed in the living-room.

I had been wanting to talk to Elizabeth all the evening, but we hadn't been alone for a moment, and the party had broken up almost at midnight. Now, in my bed, I thought of her. I couldn't sleep. I got up and decided to go and talk to her.

I tapped at her door gently but loud enough for her to hear, as well as Mary. I particularly wanted Mary in the other room to hear.

I tapped a second time.

'Come in,' I heard her say. 'Push the door, it's not locked.'

I opened and went in. The lamp was still burning. She had been reading in bed. I looked at the book which she had placed on the bedside stool when I came in. It was a small New Testament. I felt as if I had stepped into a nun's cell.

'Sit down on the bed,' she said. She looked cool and beautiful.

'I am sorry for disturbing you,' I said. 'I couldn't find any sleep, and so I thought to come and chat for a while.'

She smiled, and proceeded to make herself comfortable in the bed. All that I wanted to say to her vanished as I looked at her profile on the bed.

She said, 'You must feel very lonely in this house, Jo. I wonder if I could live in here alone?'

'You would get used to it,' I said.

'Are you used to it?'

'No. That's why I thought to come and talk to you.'

She smiled. The two dimples played tricks. I shifted uneasily.

'Make yourself comfortable. There is plenty of room.'

One never realizes how lonely one is until suddenly there is somebody around.

Chapter 13

Benjamin Nyirenda stormed into the office. Still panting from his climb up the stairs to the third floor, he shouted, 'I want to buy all the copies of this issue.'

We turned and looked at him. He waved a copy of *Kawacha News*, and came straight to my table. He was angry.

'We do not usually keep any copies for sale in the office,' I told him. 'But if you would like, go and see the editor. He may have a few for his own use.'

It was the latest issue, and contained Akimu's editorial.

'Lead the way to the editor,' he ordered.

'What's the matter, Ben?'

'Just lead the way, man.'

I got up and took him to the editor. We found him talking on the telephone. When he finished, he turned to us and announced, 'That was the boss. What can I do for you, Mr Nyirenda?'

'I want to buy all the copies you have of this issue,' he repeated what he had just said to me.

Bill Akimu looked puzzled. He was like a doctor who encounters an unexpected reaction in his patient after a particular treatment.

'You want all the copies of the current issue, you say?' Akimu said slowly. 'That's strange. What's the big news?'

Ben was in no mood for friendly talk.

'Just sell me the copies, man,' he said.

'I don't have any copies for sale, Mr Nyirenda,' Akimu said. 'Jo should have told you that in the first instance. But I can give you one or two copies, if you like. Any more copies you want, you can buy them from the street sellers.'

Ben considered for a moment.

'We will buy them all. We will buy all your dirty copies of the paper.'

'But why?' Akimu demanded.

'Because of your leader article.'

For a while, no one said a word. The atmosphere in the room was tense and charged. Akimu reached for the telephone, but half-way there he changed his mind. He wiped his forehead instead. He looked like a man cornered.

I came to his rescue. After all he was my colleague. 'What's interesting in that article, Ben?' I said. 'You don't look as if you like it.'

'Don't you, Jo?' Nyirenda asked me. 'Don't you like it?'

'I don't,' I said, 'and I don't mind telling you so here before the editor. And speaking of the editor, I know he doesn't like that article at all either.'

Nyirenda sighed, and it was as if a safety valve had been opened.

'We don't like your leader article,' he said, 'and that is why we are taking the trouble to buy all the copies of this issue as we can within our resources. We don't like your newspaper because it is a vehicle of veiled propaganda which warps the thinking of our people, your people. Dan Dube only the other day came here to ask you to put in some correction about something you had wrongly attributed to him. The correction you put in was even worse than the original article. Well, well . . .'

He threw his hands in the air like one in despair.

'Al Kachaso was at that particular Press Conference,' Nyirenda said in reminiscence. 'But I don't believe he could have written such a doctored piece of writing. Now, this leader article. . . .'

'I think you should call in the boss to answer these complaints, Bill,' I said.

'You are right,' he agreed and picked up the telephone. 'What shall I tell him?'

Ben Nyirenda said, 'Tell him that I want to speak to him. Give him to me when you get him on the line. I know what to tell him.'

As Akimu dialled and waited to get the boss on the line, I said to Nyirenda softly: 'Don't blame Akimu or me, or any of us who work here, Ben. We only do what we are told.'

Bill Akimu said into the telephone mouthpiece, 'Akimu speaking, sir. Mr Nyirenda . . . Yes, Mr Nyirenda . . . he would like to have a word with you.

Here he is. . . . About the editorial, I think. . . . I don't know. Here he is . . .'

Ben Nyirenda took up the instrument from Akimu. He said, 'Benjamin Nyirenda. . . . That's my name. . . . Yes. . . . Your editorial. . . . You wrote it, did you? . . . I see. . . . Well, the game is up. . . . The game is up, that's what I said . . .' He handed the instrument back, and Akimu put it down on its place.

'He wanted to speak to you again,' Nyirenda told Akimu. 'You should not have put the thing down.'

Akimu looked at the telephone and seemed confused. Then the bell started to ring. Akimu seemed undecided whether to pick the telephone up or not. He looked at Nyirenda, then at me.

'Will you find out who is ringing, please, Jo?'

I got up from the chair and lifted up the receiver. 'Yes . . .' I said.

The angry voice of the boss shouted at the other end, and I almost dropped the instrument on the table.

'What the devil. . . .' he shouted. 'I said I wanted to speak to you. . . .' I did not know what to say, so I just mumbled: 'Hmm . . .'

'Is he gone?' he asked.

'Who?'

'You, fool. . . . What's wrong with you. . . .' I had never heard the boss in such a temper and using such language before. I quickly handed the telephone to Akimu saying at the same time: 'The boss.'

'Akimu here, sir. . . . It was my assistant, sir. . . . Jo Jozeni. . . . I am sorry. Yes, he is here. Just a minute . . .' He covered the mouthpiece with his free hand, then said to Nyirenda: 'He wants to speak to you, Mr Nyirenda.'

Nyirenda took the telephone. 'What is it you want to speak to me about, Mister?' he said. 'Better be quick, I am in a hurry.'

We listened tensely.

Nyirenda said, 'I am sorry, but I can't tell you that. . . . No, I can't. . . . Dan Dube has his own plans . . . that's completely out of the question. . . . Not at all. . . . Well, it's your newspaper, you can write what you please. . . . Oh, sure. We are going to act. . . . The funeral of your paper. . . .' He laughed softly, and continued: 'Funeral, yes. You will be duly invited. . . . Jesus, no. . . . What? Kenneth Pasi? Do you call him a leader? . . . Even Mangani Phiri can't accept. . . . Zake Lukani, oh, but yes. He's a stooge, a sellout, on the same bandwaggon as Kenneth Pasi. . . . Me, what do you think I am? . . . I am not interested. I have told you already, Mister, that your game is up. . . . Not at all. . . . Thanks, all the same. . . . Yes, here

he is. Good-bye. . . .' He handed the receiver back to Akimu.

Akimu said into the instrument: 'Akimu here, sir. . . . No, he hasn't. . . . We shall be here. I will tell him to wait. . . . All right. That's all right . . .' He hung up.

Nyirenda said, 'I am glad none of you wrote that filthy article. I hope there will be no time when you will be so over enthusiastic and stoop so low as to stab your own selves, your people, in the back.'

He stood up, and the anger seemed to have left him. 'I must go,' he said. 'Where are the copies you said you had here?'

'I only keep file copies,' Akimu said. 'Maybe you will be able to get unsold copies in the circulation department. But if you are going to buy every copy on the street, it's going to cost you a fortune.'

Nyirenda shot him a quick look. 'Whose side are you on, Bill Akimu?'

'I am sorry,' Akimu said.

'You surprise me,' Nyirenda said with a sigh. 'We will be able to gather the paper, don't you worry. Every person who has bought the paper will bring it for burial at the stadium on Sunday when we hold a rally. We will also be announcing the new cabinet. Tell your boss that. Come and see it, and don't forget to bring a copy of this silly rag.'

I said tentatively, 'What exactly is going to happen? It's good to know such things beforehand so that one has background information.'

'We are going to have a bonfire of this particular issue of your newspaper. We will cremate it,' Nyirenda said.

'And the new cabinet, can you mention the names, please?' I asked.

'That is our own secret until the day we announce it

publicly at the rally,' he said. 'But you should be able to guess. Well, I must go.'

After the visitor left, Akimu said, 'Get your coat, Jo, we are going to see the boss. He wants both you and me in his office.'

There were only the three of us in the room – the owner, Bill Akimu and myself – but for some unknown reason we all spoke cautiously, measuring each other, as if Benjamin Nyirenda was still with us.

'It seems our leader article is producing results,' the boss said. 'What did the man really want? You both know him, I take it?'

Akimu and I exchanged glances but said nothing.

'What kind of a man is he?'

Akimu said, 'He is a young man. A little older than Jo perhaps.'

'Do you think our editorial was good?' he asked. I did not like his saying 'our editorial'.

No one answered him. 'What do you think, Jo?' He said suddenly. 'I am sure you can write for us more editorials on those lines . . .'

He looked at me.

'Personally I think your leader article, sir, was mistimed,' I said and waited to hear him shout me out of the door. But he did not. So I went on: 'What I mean is that you took a negative approach . . .'

'Well, that's very interesting to hear,' he said with amusement. I did not see what he found amusing and I hated myself for having said so much. But he knew very well Akimu and I knew that soon he would have little amusement. That is why he had called us here, to find out how he could avoid disaster. He was no fool.

'What do you think is the positive approach, Akimu?'

He said eyeing the editor. 'You must have discussed this one.'

'The paper must support the legitimate aspirations of the people,' Akimu said. I admired his courage. 'If the paper cannot do that, I am afraid it will continue to lack support from the people whom it is intended for.'

'Ah, but the Africans buy the paper,' he defended. 'If you look at the circulation figures you will see that we have continued to expand. Surely that could not happen if the Africans didn't like the paper?'

He looked at each one of us in turn and when he did not get an answer he assumed he had won.

After a while he said, 'I can understand how you feel but you have a duty to perform and duty comes first.'

'I know we are paid to do what you want us to do,' Akimu said. 'But if our opinions count, sir, I think there must be some change in the policy of the newspaper – a progressive policy.'

'That is for the directors to decide,' he said. 'When the time comes to change the newspaper's policy, it will be done. Mind you, I am liberal in my outlook, but I am not the only man who owns the paper. You must bear that in mind. What's more I am prepared at any time to discuss matters about the paper with men such as Mr Nyirenda. I welcome constructive criticism.'

'These people also welcome constructive criticism,' Akimu said quickly taking advantage of the point. 'That is what our editorial comment ought to be.'

'Exactly,' the boss said.

The boss was anxious that we should agree, or appear to agree and have the same opinion. Again like a man with a mission, he was anxious to convert us into his way of thinking, for a start. After that convert the whole popula-

tion of our country. He gave the impression of being a man who thought he knew the secret of how other people ought to live, and, given the chance, he was determined to make them live that way.

I could imagine Ben putting up a strong opposition saying 'That sort of thing does not go down well in this country. You live as we live, or fold up your kit and goodbye'. I smiled to myself.

'I can see you are thinking hard, Jozeni,' I heard the boss say. 'No doubt you see my point. I have always thought you have brains. I have been thinking I'll promote you to leader writer. How about that?'

He had misunderstood me. 'I have no argumentative streak in my whole make-up,' I told him. 'And that is no good for a prospective leader writer. I wouldn't be able to write your kind of leader in any case. It's too high.'

'You can lower the standard,' he said, 'as a special case.'

'I can't manage it, sir.'

'Are you refusing the job?' he said aggressively.

'I am not refusing a job. I am merely making myself clear. I know how much I can do, and how much I can't. That is all, sir.'

'That is for me to judge,' he retorted. 'I know the limitations of each of my employees. Not only in the editorial department, but in all other departments of my firm. That's why I am where I am.'

I looked at him, and noticed his long, tapering fingers. They reminded me of a hawk I had once seen swoop down and claw an innocent chick with its ugly talons. I did not like the boss. Always, all the time, scheming. Even paying us such good salaries – by our standard – was part of his general scheme. Was he trying to claw us? Pay us good salaries and so put in his debt? Then

make use of us the way he liked, like a farmer and his hoe.

'All right, you can go,' he said, dismissing us suddenly.

Bill and I went to the Angel late that afternoon. Regarding the low level of his whisky, Bill said, 'I noticed you were very thoughtful in the boss's office. What was it that occupied your mind?'

'I was wondering about the offer the boss made to me,' I told Bill. 'Of all people on the *Kawacha News*, why had he picked me to be his leader writer? I think he doesn't understand me. I can't write that kind of rot. I can't. If he tries to force me, I will quit.'

'I don't think he made it a definite proposition,' Bill said.

'You know what I think of him?'

'What do you think of him?'

'A bloody hawk. Did you notice his claws?'

Bill laughed and gulped his whisky. I ordered another round.

'I think you have a first-class imagination,' Bill said.

'Hello, boys,' we heard a familiar voice near us. Both of us looked up. The speaker was Al. For a moment, I thought my eyes were playing me tricks, and that I was seeing a ghost.

'Al!' Bill and I said in unison, as we sat down.

Alaje Kachaso was back in circulation.

Chapter 14

It was a beautiful day, early in the spring. A very big crowd assembled at the stadium – the biggest perhaps that had ever assembled there so far. Nearly everyone in the crowd was holding a copy of *Kawacha News* like schoo children holding little flags at a ceremonial function.

In the centre of the ground a large platform had been erected on which chairs were neatly arranged for the V.I.P.s Loud-speakers were installed all round the stadium. The big shots would come into the field any time now and suspense hung in the air.

A short while later a voice crackled on the microphone, 'Ladies and gentlemen, our leaders are now just entering the ground and I ask you all to be quiet and attentive. This is a big day, a day marking the birth of our nation. *Uhuru*!'

'*Uhuru*!' The crowd shouted back in unison.

The cry was repeated twice more, and by the time the voices died down, the leaders had taken their seats on the dais which was roofed with a large striped cloth. My father took the chair in the centre of the front row, on his left Mangani Phiri, and on his right Dan Dube. Felix and Nyirenda and their wives sat in the back row. There were several others I did not know also sitting there.

The Old Man was wearing a new suit and he was in high spirits like all the others with him.

Dan Dube stood up and came to the microphone, 'My people – all of you present here, and all those who are not here – I wish to present to you our dear and respected Old Man Josiah Jozeni. You and I, and everyone in this country know that we have no better respected person than Old Man Josiah Jozeni. We respect him and love him because he is faithful, simple and trustworthy. Above all, he is a man of peace, of love, of goodwill. A good man, a brave man. A man who fears God, a man given us by the Almighty.

'My people, who else could we have as our leader other than Old Man Josiah Jozeni. The Old Man has no ambition for power. It is you and I – all of us in this country who ask him to lead us, free us from all kinds of ills. We say to you, Old Man, are you accepting our request to lead us, your people?'

He said the last sentence looking straight at the Old Man, and at that moment all eyes were directed at him. A foreign Press photographer pressed close to take a picture, and that too added to the drama of the moment. Silence dwelt upon the crowd.

The Old Man stood up and said, 'It is daybreak. *Kwacha*!'

'*Kwacha*!' The crowd thundered in reply.

'My people,' he went on slowly, 'old and young, men and women, I do not know what to say to you, for the trust that you have put in me is great and sacred. I will not let you down, and I pray God to lead us, to give us wisdom, tolerance and understanding, love and forgiveness. I am with you, my people, and I ask you to be with me. All of us must work together, like the water of a stream we must flow together, and in that way we will reach the sea, our destination – Freedom!'

'Freedom!'

The Old Man went on 'The job that you have given me is a very big one and I cannot do it alone. I will need other people, younger people, to assist me. Am I allowed, I ask you my people, to choose those assistants, or would you rather give them to me?' He paused.

'Select your team. We give you a free hand,' somebody in the crowd shouted and he was supported by a big chorus.

'Very well,' the Old Man said and smiled. 'I will mention their names here for your approval.'

He turned round and looked at the people seated. Starting with the back row, he mentioned each individual by name and explained about his background ending with the job that he was supposed to do. For Dan Dube, he said, he wanted him to be his eyes and his ears, and so he wanted him to be the secretary. Mangani Phiri was to be the treasurer, while Felix Tambala and Benjamin Nyirenda were to be organizing secretary and publicity secretary respectively.

Mary Tambala and Agnes Nyirenda were both given the job to lead and organize the women into a strong wing. Everything had been cleverly planned.

'These are the people who will lead you and me,' the Old Man said. 'We must all co-operate with them, we must support them, we must be one with them. From now and on, we will speak with one voice. Those who fall away with us or from us, they are *Akapilikoni* – the people who have excommunicated themselves from the community.' He laughed so as to make it sound like a big joke, and the crowd laughed also.

'I would like to say a few things in order to tell you some of the reasons why we have this organization, this society, this family – *Banja* – your organization, my organization, our organization, our *Banja*,' the Old Man

said, bringing into play his skill in oratory. 'These things we have asked time and again to be done for us. We have asked that these wrongs be righted. We still demand that something should be done quickly about them. . . .'

The Old Man harangued the crowd for three hours, and you could feel the atmosphere working up to a feverish pitch as he went on mentioning one thing after another. In the end he said, 'Well, we have reached the end. We cannot go further with it. Something must be done, now. And I mean just that. Now, now, now.'

He sat down and the field rang with deafening noise. The Old Man's performance astounded me, and I was seeing a new man, almost a different man from the man I had always known as my humble parson father. This new man was different. He spoke with strength and seemed to know what to do with his new position. This was a turning-point, and the stage was set for a new act. I was sure of that.

The burning of the *Kawacha News*– a huge heap a little distance away from the platform – the singing and dancing, the shouting, all marked the end of an era, and the birth of a new one.

It was just getting dark when the rally ended and the crowd dispersed. The V.I.P.s were given a big cheer as they drove away in a long procession of motor-cars and motor-cycles and trotting pedestrians who followed behind, chanting.

I got back to my house and found the lights burning. This was strange because I was sure I had closed all the windows and turned off the lights before I left. Now the windows were open and there seemed to be someone inside. As I entered I almost expected to meet a violent intruder. But it was Elizabeth Chake I found in the house, and a savoury smell of frying filled the place.

I remembered I had given the spare keys to her during her last visit. I was glad that I had done so because just now I wanted company badly.

I don't know how it happened, but in a moment she was in my arms and we kissed passionately.

'Jo,' she half whispered, 'do you really love me?'

'Of course, I do,' I said and drew her much closer. She submitted like a child, and seemed young, defenceless and innocent. It suddenly occured to me that I was taking advantage of her innocence and inexperience, and I was disgusted with myself. I released her. She looked surprised and pained.

Looking into my face she said, 'I love you, Jo. Just now I was afraid that you were perhaps not going to come home. . . .'

'I am here,' I said and kissed her lightly.

'Are you hungry?' She asked.

'I am, Liz.'

She went back to her cooking, and both of us regained our composure.

'What would you be doing now, after getting home late?' she asked over her shoulder.

'Sometimes I would just go to bed,' I said. 'Sometimes I would make a simple meal. But usually I leave cooked food before I go to work. That is for supper, but lunch I eat in the town.'

'What a life!'

'It can be lonesome at times,' I said. 'Now that Agnes is not with you at Bangwe, don't you feel lonely?'

'I am always busy,' she said quickly. She did not want to talk about herself, I thought, like a nun. But I knew she could never be a nun even if she wanted to be one. I was her stumbling-block.

Some time late in the night I said to her, 'If we had money we could marry, Liz.'

'We can't continue for ever behaving like this, Jo, and expect everything to be all right,' she said.

'But if we are careful not to . . .'

'However careful we may be, we cannot defeat nature,' she said. 'It's bound to happen sooner or later, unless we stop, darling.'

The son of a clergyman getting a girl into that kind of trouble; what would people say, I thought soberly.

I kissed her on the forehead and said, 'Go to sleep, Liz. I love you and will never let you down.'

'You won't, darling – you won't let me down?'

'No,' I said. 'Don't you trust me?'

'Ah, I do, darling. It's foolish of me to be so afraid.'

She went to sleep and I lay listening to her even breathing for a while. Then I also went to sleep.

Mass meetings were held at different places throughout the country in the weeks that followed. The Organization, now known as *Banja* – the Family – spread like wild fire, swept the towns and the countryside. The Old Man became a household name; even little children knew the name. Some knew him by face since he took trouble to travel and address meetings in remote places up and down the country.

Things were now happening, and happening fast. Many people had not dreamt that *Banja* would ever be such a force, and it seemed that the Organization was setting the pace and the initiative of events.

The Legislative Assembly passed a number of laws designed to meet the new situation, but this was rather like grappling with a whirlwind. Something had to happen.

The new laws, like a well-placed fish-net, soon entangled the Old Man, and many others followed him.

'I will see what I can do to help your mother,' he said. 'But she cannot go back to live in the mission house. Another priest is getting into it, and he has a family of his own.'

'But, Reverend, can't you allow her to stay there only for a few days while I organize alternative accommodation for her? Things are a bit topsy-turvy in the family since my father went to prison and because of the state of emergency in the country. We cannot move about easily. . . .'

'There is nothing I can do about accommodation. Absolutely, nothing, Jo,' he said. 'What I can suggest is that you should continue to keep your mother with you in the town. That is all I can suggest. I will see what the mission can do about financial help, but I shouldn't hold much hope, particularly as your father has been neglecting his clerical duties and instead has been behaving like an ordinary layman. Look where it has landed him. . . .'

My mother looked up and said to me in our dialect, 'What does Rev. Webb say?'

I translated it all to her. She showed no emotional change. Tactfully, Mr Webb decided to speak in the local dialect.

'You understand the difficulty, mother,' he said. Then not waiting for an answer, he quickly rang the bell on the wall and a servant appeared.

'Please make tea for three,' Mr Webb told the servant.

'Yes, sir,' the servant answered and went away.

'I have been with that boy for many years,' the minister said. 'A very faithful servant and a good Christian.'

Seeing that his remark drew no response, he seemed to

look for something different to say. My mother saved him.

'We don't want tea, Reverend. Thank you,' she said.

Mr Webb was at a loss, utterly confused.

'Oh, but surely . . .' he started, then changed his mind.

I said, 'The thing is, Reverend, we have stopped drinking tea because at present we cannot afford that luxury.'

We were sitting in the veranda of his house, and, as it was situated on high ground, the view was good. The land rolled for miles and ended where the sky seemed to meet with a line of blue hill. A little distance away a herd of cattle was feeding. The afternoon spring sunshine shimmered on the open expanse of different grades and shades of green. It was beautiful.

'The financial help you have mentioned, Reverend,' my mother said, 'that can wait until my husband comes back. Jo, and some other kind folk, give me enough assistance for the time being. There is only one thing I wondered if you could please assist me on. Since my husband went away I have not been allowed to visit him. When can I see him?'

Mr Webb got up. 'I will give you a note to the District Commissioner of Kawacha urban area. He should be able to get you permission to visit your husband in prison.'

'And the others?'

'I can't tell you that. The D.C. should know.'

He went into the house to write the note. Left alone, we both felt at ease.

'I must visit your father, my child,' my mother said. 'He is a sick man, an old man. Anything can happen to him where he doesn't get the kind of treatment he normally gets at home.'

I said, 'Maybe they are well looked after. Did you send him the new set of clothes?'

'I left them with that wretched man at the Boma,' she said. 'The D.C. was too busy to see anybody.'

It was getting late, and we had to get back to Kawacha Town before it got dark, when the sunset to sunrise curfew would be on, unless one had special permit of exemption. We had none.

We explained this to Mr Webb when he came back from writing the note to the D.C., and he offered to take us into town.

'I have to see someone there tonight,' he said. 'But before we go, let's have tea first.'

He was once again the same happy man, I think because he had done us the two favours: a lift into town, and the note to the D.C. He knew that the two acts of kindness had been recorded in his favour in heaven.

The tea was brought out, but mother refused to take it. I drank it merely to please Mr Webb, but somehow I did not enjoy it. It was like eating a thing that has been declared unholy.

Back at the house after supper and just before retiring to bed I asked my mother: 'You don't think by drinking the tea I am *Akapilikoni*, mother? I had to do it in order to please him.'

'You are not *Akapilikoni*,' she said and rolled with laughter.

Chapter 15

The Commission that was sent out from Britain to investigate the troubled state of affairs in our country and to report back with suggestions as to how peace could be restored, had a mixed reception. The main bulk of the population welcomed it, but a few did not want it.

The *Banja* said in its news-sheet: 'This is a step in the right direction. We welcome the Commission, and we will co-operate with it so that the truth can prevail. . . .'

But a white settler, voicing the opinion of his kind, wrote: 'We don't think the time is right for sending a Commission such as this one. We regard this as a sign by the British Government that she is prepared to give way to the noise of a few ambitious Africans. This is an unnecessary interference in our local affairs by people who live over 6,000 miles away and hardly know or appreciate our problems here. . . .'

The Commission undertook its task in such an atmosphere of controversy and clashing opinions and interests.

With the Commission also came many overseas journalists. Some of these came under fire because they sent back reports which favoured sweeping reforms.

The Honourable Zake Lukani, speaking critically of one of these journalists, said in the Legislative Assembly one day: 'I have read a recent report which Tom Woodhouse sent to his newspaper in London. It is a damaging

piece of writing – one-sided and strongly in favour of *Banja* and its activities. Obviously, Woodhouse has no time for moderates, be they African or European. This man must be sent out of the country because he is doing harm. . . .'

And yet Tom Woodhouse was a very nice chap – he was a good friend of Alaje Kachaso and me. As a journalist, he was very hard-working, very frank – too frank in a way – and unearthed things that others would not have the courage to write about.

Kachaso and I spent much of our spare time with Tom Woodhouse, and we soon discovered that not only our boss on the *Kawacha News* but some officials also suspected that Woodhouse had much of his information from Kachaso and myself. Very often we found ourselves being tailed or pumped by Special Branch boys or paid agents. This was amusing because, although we sometimes gave Woodhouse the information he asked for, neither Kachaso nor I ever engaged in any subversive activities.

Woodhouse came to our office one morning. He was a good talker and had many interesting anecdotes of his experiences during his world travels. He started telling us of an incident which occurred when he was representing his paper at the Treason Trial in Johannesburg.

'I went into a shop and bought some cigarettes,' he said. 'When I left the place and went to my hotel I discovered that my wallet had been picked from my pocket. Fortunately, I didn't have much money in it – I am always broke. . . .'

He chuckled.

'I think that's the trouble with most journalists,' Kachaso said. 'I am always without money, like you, Tom.'

We laughed.

'Well, I forgot about the wallet,' Woodhouse went on

with his story, 'and I returned to London at the end of my assignment. A few days later I was surprised to receive a letter with a South African stamp. I opened the envelope wondering who on earth could write me from that country. Mind you, I am a bad letter writer and I don't get private mail. So, I looked through this letter, and boy, what a surprise! The fellow who had stolen my wallet found in it later a photograph of a girl who must have looked very much like his wife. The chap took her to be his wife and came to the conclusion that she had been fraternizing with me. Said he: "This must stop forthwith. Count yourself fortunate in that you are a foreigner. If I ever catch you again, you are finished . . ." And I know he meant it, poor fellow. But what's interesting is that when I looked at the address, the man was obviously a V.I.P.'

'Was he an African?' Kachaso asked, laughing.

Woodhouse shook his head.

At that moment the boss entered the room. 'What's going on here?' he demanded angrily after noticing Tom Woodhouse.

For a moment we must have looked like little boys caught stealing sugar from a bowl.

'Why are you here, Mr Woodhouse?' the boss demanded. 'My men are very busy. Can I help you?'

'I don't need it, thanks,' Woodhouse answered coolly. 'I just wanted to talk to these friends.'

My God, they are going to fight, I thought. But they did not. The boss turned away and left, and he was like a cock that has turned away in flight from another cock.

Alaje Kachaso announced, 'I am composing a song, boys, based on this. Tomorrow, both of you come to my rooms and I shall play the new composition to you. Be there after 4 p.m.'

'I am afraid I won't make it, Al. I've got an appoint-

ment at that time,' Woodhouse said. 'What about later than that, say 7 p.m?'

'That's all right with me,' Kachaso said. 'What about you, Jo?'

'I'll be there,' I said.

'Good. That's fixed,' Kachaso said.

Coming out of sleep but not quite fully awake I heard a far-away buzz which sounded like many people saying the Lord's Prayer together. I rubbed my eyes and looked round the room. It was not easy to see in the dim light, but I was able to make out that most of my room-mates in the cell were kneeling down and facing towards the door.

I got up quietly and knelt down facing the door like the others. The buzz that had woken me was being made by these people. Someone led the prayer and the rest of us followed him. It was a simple kind of prayer and it went like this:

Leader: God of our forebears let us be
Answer: We cry before you to lift our troubles
Leader: God of the wind, the rain and the earth
Answer: We pray deliver us from worries
Leader: God of hunger we stole, we fought, we fornicated
Answer: We were hungry, so we stole. We were provoked, so we fought. She was beautiful, so we sinned.
Leader: God of mercy, what must we do?
Answer: We pray let us free, and hear the cry of our ancestors. . . .

And so it went on like that for hours until the morning light broke through into the cell.

The man who had been leading the prayer told us to sit in an orderly fashion as far back against the wall

as possible. He himself sat in the centre. Now that I could see him clearly I recognized him as the old man who was the night watchman for our office. It was strange to meet him here. Njoka Maki, that is what he said was his name.

When we were settled down, Njoka Maki proceeded to conduct a kind of preliminary inquiry, taking each person in turn. This is how it went when my turn came.

'Why are you here, young man?' He smiled. But he did not show that he remembered me.

'I was picked up in a car for travelling in the town at night without a night pass,' I said.

'Where were you coming from when this happened?'

'I had been to the house of a friend in Majengo.'

'Go on.'

I said, 'I had been to this house with another friend. Our host played us some music. We had a little drink, and the time went unnoticed. When we left Majengo it was approaching midnight. I was given a lift by this other friend in his car. We were stopped by the police just outside Majengo and when I was asked for a pass, and they saw I had none, they took me to the police charge office, and that's how I am here.'

'What about the man who gave you the lift – where is he?'

I hesitated.

'He is not here?' he asked.

'No,' I said.

'Because he is not of your kind.' It was a statement, so I said nothing.

'You don't answer, eh?'

I said, 'He is a good fellow although he is different.'

'I don't know about that, my boy,' he said kindly. 'I am not sure. . . .'

Must I tell him that Tom Woodhouse is a good man although he is different? Will he understand that it is because I was in Woodhouse's car at night, in Majengo – an African area where Woodhouses are not supposed to be on social intercourse – that I was arrested? 'Sir, but you are not supposed to be here at this hour,' the policeman had said to Woodhouse. 'Anyway, I will take your friend because he is breaking the curfew. He has no pass to travel at night.' Woodhouse had protested, 'But we are in a car. Jo is not walking.' 'That does not matter, sir. We are taking him. You, come out of the car. I am taking you to the charge office. Quick.' 'I am coming with him,' Woodhouse said. 'Look, sir. Don't interfere in the discharge of my duties.' 'I say I am coming with him.' 'That's up to you, sir.' But they told Woodhouse to go home when we got at the charge office. 'We have your address and we'll get in touch with you tomorrow,' an officer had said. 'Please go away.' That was that, and I was taken away to this cell.

'What will you tell the Magistrate?' The inquiry went on.

'Nothing. I'll probably be fined,' I said.

'Next,' the old man called the man next to me. 'Do be careful next time. We don't want our educated people to waste their talents in jail for foolish reasons.'

There was the sound of boots coming from the corridor, and Njoka Maki softly called out: 'Get mixed.' The cell was once again in disorder. The door was opened and a police sergeant peered into the room.

'Jo Jozeni,' he called out roughly. 'Stand up and come out.'

I struggled to my feet and the sergeant pushed me out of the door. He ordered me to stand at attention while he relocked the cell.

'Where are we going?' I asked as he led me along the corridor.

'That's none of your business,' he said.

If you want to be uncommunicative I can be just as uncommunicative, if not more so, I thought, feeling angry. In that mood I was brought before his senior officer, a big moustached white police superintendent who looked in every respect most unfriendly. His eyes were shifty and his mouth was shaped like that of a cat. I disliked him at once.

'You can go, sergeant,' he said from the big chair he was sitting in. 'And please close the door.'

The sergeant left the room and we were alone. For what seemed a very long time we said nothing. The man stared fixedly at me, and I returned the compliment in full measure.

'You know you are in a jam?' he said at last.

'I am not,' I said. 'There is nothing wrong that I have done against the law.'

'If that was so you wouldn't be here,' he said menacingly. 'You are in a jam.'

He was doing his best to frighten me out of my wits, and I decided to be on my guard. I knew he had nothing serious against me. My offence was that I had travelled at night without the official permit. But if he wanted, the man could frame me for a more serious offence and no one would be the wiser. This sort of thing was happening to many people during these days of the state of emergency in the country.

'This man you were with in his car at Majengo,' the police officer said, 'how do you know him?'

'He is a journalist and he comes to our office for help,' I told him. 'He writes for a newspaper in London. That is all I know about him.'

'What were you doing with him in Majengo?'

'But I have already said before about that,' I answered.

'I want you to tell me personally,' he retorted. 'I don't mind what you have already said or not said. Just answer my question.'

'We had been to see a friend,' I said. I was beginning to feel like a mouse that is being cornered by a hungry cat. A cold feeling went down the spine, and the stomach felt hollow and empty.

'What did you go to see this friend of yours about?'

'A chat and a drink.'

'Women? Did you have some women?'

'No. Why do you ask that?'

'Look, you must not ask me questions,' he said impatiently. 'This white man of yours, what's his name?'

'I can't remember it just now,' I lied.

'Try and remember it,' he said.

I looked up and scratched my head.

'The name comes and slips out of memory,' I said casually.

He mentioned several names. 'Any of those?'

'I can't remember,' I said.

'All right, we will come back to that in a minute,' he said. 'What did you say he was doing at Majengo?'

'Who?'

'I have already told you that you mustn't ask me questions, bastard. Do you hear! If you do it again . . .'

He lit a cigarette and looked at his pocket watch.

Time for going to the scaffold, I thought, and sighed. My questioner gave me a cold stare. Suddenly I was tired and hungry, and longed for the open air.

'Have you remembered the name?' he asked.

'No.'

He got up. 'All right, I will leave you for a while to

think quietly. I also want you to tell me about the activities of this man when I return.'

He went out of the room and I heard him lock up the door with a key. It was impossible to tell what time of day it was because there was no clock in the room. But I knew it was over lunch-hour break. My stomach told me that. I sat back against the wall, closed my eyes and tried to think. Several times I was tempted to go and read some of the papers on the table, but I was afraid of being caught red-handed.

Time seemed to crawl.

The boss said, 'This should teach you to be careful next time.'

'It was not really bad,' I said. 'I am glad to have had such an experience, really glad.'

He was surprised and did not conceal his disgust with me.

'You must be mad, Jo,' he said. 'If you were normal you should be ashamed of being in prison. Besides, you wasted valuable time for which I pay you. I don't pay you for going to prison.'

'No,' I agreed. 'But then I am going to make use of the experience, sir. I am going to write about what I saw there.'

'Not for the *Kawacha News*,' he said decisively.

'No. I will send it to other papers,' I said.

He was angry now. 'You are doing nothing of the sort. I pay you to work for my newspaper. I don't pay you to write for other rags. If you don't like that condition, you are free to go.'

'I will remember that,' I said.

'And remember, too, this,' he said. 'This should be the first and the last time for you to waste time in prison when

you are expected to be working in the office. I also don't want to see Woodhouse wasting your time.'

'I don't think he will be capable of doing that,' I said. 'He is being chased from the country.'

'Nobody is chasing him from the country,' the boss said. 'Woodhouse is going because he doesn't like the way the country is run.'

'But he's been told to go by tomorrow,' I said. 'He is literally being kicked out of the country. Everyone knows that, sir. It's as plain as daylight. . . .'

'You surprise me, Jo,' he said. 'I don't think your brain is working in the normal way. I don't blame you, my boy. I would probably be the same if I were in your shoes.'

'I can assure you, sir, you wouldn't last even for an hour,' I said.

He laughed. I wanted to continue and tell him what I thought would happen to him, but I kept quiet and swallowed my thoughts.

'All right, Jo, go and rest,' he said. 'Don't work too hard. I'll instruct Bill Akimu to give you light work.'

He acted with mock benevolence. As I went away, he said as an afterthought: 'And do remember that it does not pay to behave like you did with a senior police officer. Don't do that again.'

So he knew everything that we did – no wonder he acted like the Almighty's kid brother. What a life.

I got a telephone call from Tom Woodhouse at the airport just before he boarded the aeroplane to England. 'It's been nice to know you, Jo. Maybe some day you will come over to England,' he said. 'I thank you for everything.'

'It's me who should thank you, Tom,' I said. 'It was

kind of you to pay my fine, and very kind of you to call. By the way, did you see the Old Man?'

'I did,' Tom said. 'He's in good health. Don't you worry about him, Jo. He is all right, and we'll do all we can to rouse public opinion in Britain. You people are fighting a right cause.'

'Thank you, Tom,' I said with emotion.

'I want you to know, and I told the Old Man so, that you have many good friends in Britain. Don't lose hope,' he said.

I could hear the engines of the plane thundering.

'My plane is ready now, Jo. I must be along. Cheerio,' he said.

'Good-bye, and reach well,' I said. 'We shall always remember you.'

'I shall remember you, too. Always,' he said quickly. 'Tell Al that I enjoyed his company and his music. I will write to you both when I get back to London.'

I heard the click as he replaced the receiver in its cradle at the other end. For a moment I looked at mine, thinking of Tom Woodhouse who would soon be airborne – away from it all. I said into the instrument, still in my hand, 'Reach well, Tom Woodhouse.' Then I placed it back into position.

When I met Al Kachaso later that day and gave him his message from Tom, Kachaso said, 'Did he tell you about the articles I have given him to have them published for me in London?'

'No. He didn't,' I said.

'I will show you the carbon copies,' he said excitedly. 'If the articles do get published, boy. . . .'

He left the sentence unfinished.

Chapter 16

One bright morning several months later I got a letter from Tom Woodhouse. I had given up all hope of ever hearing from him because since he left neither Al Kachaso nor I had a word of him.

Tom's letter was roughly typed, like a news copy he had prepared for filing.

'Dear Jo,' he wrote, 'The report of the Commission which has been working in your country has now been published. It is as most people expected it would be, but I am sure it will not be liked by some people in your country. There is nothing they can do about it, though. The truth had to come out eventually. It won't be long before the next stage is reached.

'I thought I should thank you again for all you did for me while I was in your country. Without you and Al, I could not have managed to say what I said for the world to hear. I was amused to learn that you had been through a tough experience for my sake, but you had, despite threats, not said anything against or about me. That's great. I am sure one could have no better friend.

'I was not surprised to hear that Al had at last left *Kawacha News*, and was now devoted fully to music. I don't know the full story as to how he got into trouble with your boss. I understand it had something to do with the articles Al published in the *New Statesman* and the

Tribune. I liked your articles in the *Guardian*, Jo. Congratulations. You write well and I like your style.

'I gather the Old Man has not been very well lately. How is he just now? In your last article you exposed about the adverse treatment the people had been receiving in prison – no visitors, scant mail, hardly any good reading matter, etc., – has the position changed?

'I have been to see a team of artistes from Dahomey in action in the West End. I liked their dancing and drums. I think on the whole it was a good show. Some critics have been very severe, but then that is to be expected since many of them try to judge the visitors as if they were English or American actors. The fact is that many of us in this part of the world do not understand or appreciate any kind of art which is different from what we know. So because of this ignorance we call what we don't know, we don't understand, primitive. And that attitude, I am sorry to say, the first missionaries took with them out to Africa. They taught you to look down upon your native dances, etc., and went so far as to call it sin. What nonsense!

'I am being sent to the Far East in a month or so, and I shall be writing to tell you about it later. Meanwhile, tell me about your immediate plans. Do try to come over to London some time. You can do it through the exchange programme of Commonwealth journalists. If that does not work, let me know and I will try to see what I can do for you.

'Send me a few lines on the Old Man and all the others. I would also appreciate it if you could give me a few lines about the way the report of the Commission is received, and the general reaction.

'It's a long letter, I am afraid. But that's how I am. When I have to write, I do so in a big way. Normally, I don't write private letters. My regards to you. – Tom.'

I told my mother and my sister Mary about Tom's letter when I visited them.

'So you want to go to England?' my mother said.

'Don't, Jo,' Mary joined in. 'Who will look after us if you go?'

'I am not going tomorrow,' I said. 'It may be a year before I go.'

My mother was now living with Mary in the village. She had grown thinner and a little older since father had been taken away to prison. But somehow, I thought, she had become less dependent as a woman. She and Sleepy Aunt, Mary and the other womenfolk, had formed a strong wing and their activities gave men and other women courage and determination. As an adversary, the women were a formidable force. They despised the *Akapilikoni* bandwaggon, and sang many derogatory songs.

It became the fashion for the *Akapilikoni* to walk in the night and avoid the day, like hyenas. Some of them found it difficult to live in the same house with their wives. And now, looking at my mother and my sister, I found it difficult to understand how so seemingly weak women could frighten seemingly big and strong men such as Kenneth Pasi.

'But you are the only son your father and myself have, child. How can you go away and leave us alone at this age?' she implored.

'He will not go,' Mary said.

'You must think of getting a wife now instead of talking about going off to far distant lands,' my mother said.

Mary's baby started to cry in the next room. Mary got up and as she went to see the child, said, 'Jo is in love with Elizabeth, but you once told him to leave her alone.'

My mother looked at the fire around which we sat and appeared thoughtful. It was a quiet evening. The child

had stopped crying, only a cricket somewhere in the house made a lone sound. It was so different from the town, here in the countryside.

The house was new and not quite finished. The walls needed plastering and painting, the floor needed smoothening with cement. All this would wait to be done after Felix came back from prison. On her own, Mary had done a good job in establishing their new home, I thought.

Mary came back into the room holding her child against her breast.

'After you feed him give him to me,' mother said to Mary. Then in general said, 'I was mistaken about Elizabeth that time. She really is a good girl.'

'You have heard what mother has said, Jo,' Mary said, her child making noise while suckling. 'What do you say?'

Mother interrupted, 'I don't think there is anything your brother can do until your father comes back.'

'Oh, but he is free to choose a girl he loves, mother,' Mary said and changed the child to the other breast. 'These are modern times, unlike your time of youth, we choose our own partners. I for one could never stand a man in the house if I did not love him.'

Mother said, 'You are lucky, child, that you have a good husband.'

Mary said, 'Elizabeth is coming to live here as from next month when the new school term begins. She is going to help me to teach at our little school. She tells me that now that the Old Man is away and a new parson in instead, Bangwe is not the same as before. She doesn't like the place any more.'

She finished feeding the child and handed him to mother. Then she pushed her breasts back into her dress.

This is what Elizabeth would be doing if I married her, I thought. Well, well. . . . I shrugged my shoulders.

'What's the matter, are you tired?' Mary asked me.

'Oh, no,' I said.

'What then?'

'Nothing,' I said.

Mother rocked the baby gently until he slept.

'You were like him at his age,' mother said looking at the child.

'Who looked like him?' I asked.

'You did,' she said and stroked him with her finger along the cheek. He seemed to smile.

'Jo was thinner,' Mary pointed out.

'A little thinner,' mother agreed

I said, 'You seem to know how I looked like as a baby. Weren't you a little kid yourself?'

Mother looked up at me. 'I mean Mary,' I said.

Everyone laughed.

'She was a baby, but she has made a good guess,' mother said.

'I didn't guess,' Mary said, 'I know what he looked like, mum.' She had studied the family's group photograph that had been taken when I was a small baby.

I said, 'I know this about you, too, Mary. You used to have a running nose. Am I not correct mother?'

'Both of you are right,' she answered. 'Now, Mary, go and put the child to bed.'

Mary got up and took the child.

'You have been studying the group photograph,' Mary said.

'So have you,' I said.

The fire cracked, sending hundreds of little stars into the air. It was a quiet night, not even drums were sounded. This was because of the state of emergency in

the country. I listened to the wind whispering outside. We lapsed into silence until Mary came back into the room.

'Are you so tired, folk?' Mary said.

The fire was less bright now and the room had become a little darker. I stole a glance at mother. She seemed to have gone to sleep.

'Mother, are you unwell?' I asked anxiously, blaming myself for having let her drop into such a thoughtful mood.

She stirred. 'I am all right, son,' she said and sounded so distant. 'He is an old man and in poor health.'

She sighed, and it was a sad moment.

'When you get back to town, please convey my thanks to that kind woman. . . .'

'Jo calls her "Sleepy Aunt",' Mary said.

Mother smiled. 'Why call her that?'

'We gave her the name long ago, mum,' I said like one who is guilty of bad manners.

'Tell her that we got the money and thank her for me,' mother said. 'I have bought your father a new Bible, and a new pair of trousers.'

'I will tell her,' I said.

'I am coming to town next week when Mary will find time to leave the school for a day. We'll try to return the same day.'

'What day next week?'

Mary said, 'Wednesday. I am meeting Elizabeth in town that day, and we shall come here together.'

'I'll meet you at the bus station,' I said. 'I sent father and the others reading matter yesterday. The officials were rather co-operative this time. Since Woodhouse and his friends have spotlighted our country, the official attitude is changing.'

'Is Woodhouse the man who wants you to go to England?' Mary asked.

'Well, yes and no,' I said. 'He is not really the person who is inducing me to go there, if that is what you mean. I want to go there. He is merely arranging for me to get there.'

I did not want mother to start worrying about me, so I changed the subject. Somehow, the name of Njoka Maki came into my mind. Perhaps it was because I had been thinking of Elizabeth.

'We have a night watchman by the name of Njoka Maki,' I said looking at my mother. 'He is an elderly man and seems to know father.'

Mother smiled broadly and she looked young and pretty in that short time. I wished she went on smiling.

'Njoka Maki started all this,' she said. 'He travelled widely in his early days, first as a soldier and later on his own. He's always been elusive. They can't get him for what they want him.'

'I met him in prison,' I said. 'That was our last meeting.'

'He won't be there for long, son,' mother said. 'Njoka Maki has been in and out of jail almost at his will. He has done things, and your father is his disciple. Njoka Maki predicted about what is now taking place many years ago and we thought he was mad. Perhaps he is mad.'

'Is Agnes Maki any relation of this man?' Mary asked.

'Perhaps. Njoka Maki is a strange man. Nobody seems to know much about him,' mother said. 'Some people say he is a rich man. Others say he is a poor man. Some say he is mad, and others say he is a genius. Some will tell you that he's never married in his life, but others claim that he's married so many women some of whom even he himself won't remember. I don't think anyone can tell you something definite about Njoka Maki. If he is working at

your place, I am sure that there is something that he is after.'

'But he seems a harmless old man,' I said reflectively. 'Simple and likeable.'

'I have never heard of any enemies nor of any friends of Njoka Maki,' mother said. 'Perhaps that is why he has kept on his road for so long. It's no easy task, my son, to tread on their road. No easy task. That is why your father, her husband, and all these good men are locked in there.'

Outside the wind moaned. The fire was almost out. It became suddenly chilly.

'It's possible that Agnes Maki is a relation of Njoka Maki,' mother said. 'But it is possible that she is not. Don't be misled about the name Maki. Names are like fire.'

Mary wanted to put wood on the fire but mother said that it was time we went to bed. Before parting we knelt down and she prayed. I was so full of thoughts and did not follow what she said, but I think it was a moving prayer, because even when there was a knock on the door and loud requests to have it opened, she went on praying until she reached what she considered the appropriate end.

We got up after the prayer and exchanged looks of bewilderment.

'Who can it be, this late visitor?' Mary asked, obviously undecided whether to open the door or not.

'Sounds like a man's voice,' I said. 'I'll open the door.'

They all followed me to the door, Mary lifting up the lantern.

'Stand right back,' I said softly. 'You never know, it can be a mad person.'

I bolted the door open. I saw figures of two men, both

carrying a panga, a spear and a stick each. They were strangers. With them was a woman whom I identified at once. 'Elizabeth!' I said, unable to control my excitement. Mary rushed forward from behind me and cried, 'Really, is it you, Liz!'

I moved aside and let Mary pass to receive her friend. When Mary brought out the lantern, I noticed that there was another second woman whom I had not seen earlier because she had sat in the veranda where it was dark. It was Agnes, Benjamin Nyirenda's wife. The girls cried and clung to each other excitedly.

Mother brought them back to earth. 'Come into the house, girls. It's windy outside. Bring in the two gentlemen.'

I was slightly jealous at the thought of two men taking two good-looking girls out in the night alone. Perhaps mother shared with me my feelings, I do not know.

'We will not stop, madam, it is already late,' one of the two men said. 'We were travelling in the same bus as the two girls. There was a lot of trouble with the bus – breaking down so often – so that we delayed on the way. We come from the next village across the stream.'

Mary seemed to know one of them.

'Can't you stop for some food?' mother insisted.

'We shall eat it another day, madam,' the man said. 'We must get home before it is very late. Thank you.'

I said, 'I shall look you up some time tomorrow morning to thank you for bringing the women home.'

'Not very much early in the morning. We go to the garden at daybreak and come home when the sun is about overhead,' the other man who had not spoken before now spoke. 'Perhaps we can come a bit earlier to meet you.'

I said, 'I'll come a bit late in the day then. I must also go to the garden.'

They bade us good night, and went away into the darkness of the night.

The sun was already out when I got up. The day starts at dawn in the country. The men get up, wash their faces and go out to start their business of the day. Some go to the gardens to hoe. Some go to the bush to bring building materials. Some take produce to the markets for sale to middlemen who take it to the towns. Some meet in the shade of a huge tree in the village and sit there discussing until they agree, or hear the domestic complaints between husband and wife; between son and father; between friends or between neighbours. They try to settle these problems, and bring about reconciliation between the parties concerned.

The women wake up earlier to make fire, heat the water for the members of the family to wash their faces, make a simple breakfast, draw water for use in the house for the day and accompany the husbands to the garden. Some will have a special piece of work such as to pound maize into flour, or make and bake pots, or put new earth coating to the walls and floor of the house or take a sick child to the village doctor.

When you come to the village from the town, you must learn to live the simple open life of the villager.

I took the hoe ready to go to the garden. Mary looked at me and smiled.

'How will you till the ground putting on a tie, trousers and shoes?' She asked. 'Don't you have old, tattered clothes?'

'I didn't bring any with me,' I said. To her I must have seemed as raw as a child who cannot distinguish sugar from salt.

'If you are really going to the garden,' she said, 'take

off your shoes, trousers and tie. I'll give you a cloth to tie round from your loins. For shirt, you can keep on your vest. And don't chop off your toes!'

She laughed. I was not quite certain whether I really wanted to go to the garden after all. The prospect of walking bare-footed was not pleasant. I could step on a thorn and get hurt, or wound my toe by kicking against a stone unknowingly, or be bitten by a snake.

Mary saved me from further unpleasant imagination. She said, 'Look at her, Jo, isn't she so graceful?'

I followed the direction of her gaze and saw Elizabeth balancing a pot of water on her head, and holding other things in her arms. She walked so gracefully, and looked as fresh as the morning sunshine. She smiled when she came near us.

I said, 'Good morning, Liz.'

'Good morning to you,' she said.

Mary said jokingly, 'Jo is dressed up ready to go to the garden.'

Elizabeth stopped, still balancing the pot on the head. 'He's going to the garden did you say!'

The two girls burst into hearty laughter. I found myself laughing with them.

Chapter 17

We walked in a single file because the country path was narrow and winding. I did not know this path, but Mary, who did, kept directing me. Being a man I was at the head of the single file. The two girls followed me. That was our custom.

Elizabeth said, 'Agnes at first refused to come with the men. But I knew they could not harm us.'

'They were very kind to offer to escort you,' Mary said.

The chicken which she was holding in her hand made some protesting noise. She shook it up. I could hear it even without looking behind.

The chicken and the flour which Elizabeth was carrying in a basin on her head were gifts of thanks to the two men who had taken home the two girls the previous night. We were now on our way to the men's village.

'You were very lucky to meet such simple good men,' I said. 'Town boys could have not behaved the same way.'

'Wouldn't you have behaved like them, Jo, if it had been you?' Elizabeth asked.

Mary laughed. I thought, what a question. Then I tried to break the stalk of a dry grass. A loose blade cut me.

'Damnit,' I cried with pain.

'Jo!' Mary cried with indignation. She thought I meant Elizabeth by that remark.

'I have cut myself, Mary,' I said. 'I was talking to myself, really. Now, what was your question, Liz?'

I examined the cut. It was superficial, but blood was oozing out.

Elizabeth overtook Mary and said close behind me, 'Let's see the cut, Jo. You've hurt yourself badly.'

I stopped and turned round.

'It's bad – your cut?' she cried.

'It's not anything, really,' I said.

'Let's bandage it,' she said, putting down the basin of flour from her head.

'It's just a small cut, Liz. Don't bother.'

'Just put a little dust on it to dry the blood,' Mary said. 'That's the quickest way to stop the bleeding of a small cut.'

'You forget about germs,' I pointed out. 'Dust is full of germs.'

'Germs won't do you any harm if you don't think about them with concern,' she said. 'We don't boil our drinking water and yet we live!'

Mary is really a villager, I thought.

Elizabeth said, 'Don't take her advice. You will make the wound septic.'

The chicken started to screech protestingly. Mary shook it up violently. 'Quieten up, now, silly bird,' she said. Then to us, 'The baby is probably crying of hunger back at the house.'

'Mother will look after him,' I said.

'It must be a great help to have your mother living with you, Mary,' Elizabeth said. 'That means you have someone to look after the baby while you are teaching at the school.'

'Mother literally worships that baby. I think she will spoil him,' Mary said. 'But it is a great help to have her near, as you say.'

A mixed smell of waste matter hit our noses as we reached the verge of the village. A group of small barking dogs welcomed us at the first house. There were not less than a dozen of them, and they barked at different pitches and frequency. The result of this discord was like listening to an ear-splitting wail.

Some of the dogs had their tails curled upwards, their ears standing up like jackals, sharp nose and little sharp teeth which looked very dangerously exposed when the owners barked. I shuddered when I thought that some among them could be rabid. The owner of the house came out and called the dogs away. The noisy music suddenly died down just as it had suddenly started.

He was an elderly man with a friendly face.

'Are you strangers?' he asked after greeting us.

'We are,' I said. I asked him how we could get to the house of our friends. I gave him a rough description of the two men we wanted.

'You are not far. The house of the first man is in the middle of the village. There is a huge fig tree in front of the house. You will find some men sitting in the shade of the tree – there usually are – ask them to show you the house of this man. But even if you don't ask anybody, the man will probably be there in the shade and will see you.'

We thanked him.

'Keep on this path. It's not far,' he said. I thought he was going to recount again the instructions he had just given us. I led the girls away quickly. Some distance away I glanced back and saw the man standing where we had left him. He followed us with his eyes.

It was a big village and well spread out. Chickens, goats,

sheep and dogs were to be seen on the house yards. Little children darting from behind the houses were also a common sight. Adults were few. The women were probably resting in the enclosures at the back of the houses, talking and exchanging village gossip with each other.

Some of the men would probably be at beer-drinking parties somewhere. Others would be gathered under trees near their houses taking a mid-afternoon nap, or like the group we found under the big fig tree, playing a game of small pebbles in small holes carved on a specially prepared wooden board. The holes were arranged in four rows. The game resembled that of draughts.

Both men we wanted were there playing the game. The two of them got up and came to meet us.

'Well, well, this is a welcome surprise,' one of them said. 'Please stop at my house and have some refreshment.'

He led us to his house while his friend returned back to the game.

'One of my two wives is away to see some friends,' he explained, 'but you will meet the other one. She is the big wife.'

He laughed pleasantly.

'Are you married?' he asked me.

'No,' I said.

'That is good,' he said to my surprise. I had expected him to laugh at me for being unmarried at this age. 'Our people married when they were big and fully grown up in the olden days. Men marry while young these days. No good.'

He went round his house while we waited in the front. A minute later, the front door opened and he came out followed by his wife and a little group of curious children.

'Come into the enclosure at the back here,' the wife of the man invited Mary and Elizabeth. 'I have been grinding millet flour for sweet beer.' She took the girls away. I stayed with the man in the veranda. We exchanged greetings. His wife came and greeted me. Soon afterwards it seemed that the entire village was coming to greet us. One person after another came in turn to greet us. The greeting was something done solemnly, not curtly like it was done in the town. It was different here in the country.

Here time did not matter so long as things were done correctly. By the time the last greeting was done, the first instalment of food was laid before us. And food came in turns. You had to eat each instalment. In order not to be full too early, you ate each instalment as if you just wanted to taste it. When it was taken away it was passed on to others. So it went on to the end.

'We hear a lot from Kawacha,' one man in the group said. 'We are heartened by much of what we hear.'

We had now gone to sit under the fig tree – a large gathering – all keen to hear what I related to them on the situation in the town. I had become a human newspaper. Surprisingly, the men were well informed.

'Do you think we will get what we want?' one in the gathering asked.

'I believe so,' I said. 'In the Gold Coast the Africans rule themselves now. The same in Sudan. Many other countries are leading towards that way.'

The Gold Coast is Ghana now?' another observed.

'Yes,' I said. 'Nigeria, too, is getting independence soon.'

'And Tanganyika?'

'And Tanganyika, too, is fast going the same way,' I

said. 'Your present map of Africa is going to be useless in less than five years' time. We are in an exciting period. Uganda, Nyasaland, Kenya – all the countries on this side of the continent are following the example of their sister countries on the west coast and elsewhere on the Continent.'

Somebody shouted: '*Kwacha*!'

'*Kwacha*!'

He called: *Uhuru*!'

'*Uhuru*!'

The village headman reminded the group, 'Don't make noise. We have the police wandering all over the country. Don't get us arrested for convening an unlawful assembly. We have a state of emergency in the country.'

Someone added, 'We may even have a spy among us.'

A general uneasy laughter followed.

'*Akapilikoni*!' shouted another. I looked at the village headman. He seemed ill at ease. Was he the *Akapilikoni*? I wondered.

The one who had spoken last said, 'We must contribute some money for our people languishing in jail. We'll give it to this man to take to them.'

'That is a good idea. Here is my coin,' my host said and placed some loose money on the ground. He was soon followed by others.

The village headman painfully said, 'It's illegal to collect money without an official permit, my friends. This can get us into trouble.'

My host said hotly, 'If you don't stop this ridiculous talk, you will be alone in this village. We can all leave this place and settle somewhere else. You cannot be a chief without people in your village.'

'You are right, man,' said the man who had shouted *Akapilikoni*. He seemed the most talkative. 'Chief, you

have not placed your money here? I have been watching you, sir.'

The village headman said, 'It's up to me whether to contribute or not. You don't have to force me.'

'This is money to help our brothers in prison,' my host said. 'It's an obligation for each one of us here to give the necessary help. Those who don't pay are not with us. They belong to a different camp.'

The talkative man hummed a familiar tune which Al Kachaso had recently composed for singing at private meetings in order to whip support from doubters and those sitting on the fence.

The village headman got up and left. He looked lonely, and I felt sorry for him.

'He's a bought man,' my host said sadly. 'He used to be a staunch supporter of the Organization before he became a chief.'

'All chiefs are not with the people,' the talkative man said. 'They are under the White man's employ.'

'You must not generalize,' somebody said; 'some of the chiefs are with their people.'

'They are no longer chiefs, though,' my host said. 'They have been removed from office by the Government. Only those who support it at the cost of their own people remain in office.'

'A chief who is true to his people is always a chief no matter whether he is in office or not,' the talkative one said. 'The people make a person chief. The Government does not make anyone chief. It can declare a man chief, but if the people do not recognize him as such in their hearts, then he is no chief.'

'Hear, hear!'

'Now, friend,' my host said to me, 'take this money and give it to the Old Man and his colleagues. It will help

them to buy cigarettes. We are poor people and this is all we can contribute today. But we are rich in support for them and the Organization. We know, we shall be free.'

'*Kwacha*!'

'*Kwaaacha*. . . .'

It was a sad thing to part from these friends. During the short time I had been with them, I had tasted a true warmth of village hospitality and human love.

And that night I had a dream.

I was a little boy, and was tending my father's herd of cattle. There was a big beautiful bull in the herd which was lent to my father. It did not belong to the kraal of our cattle, but the bull seemed to boss the place like its own.

One of the cows had a young male calf. I wanted to milk the cow, but the calf suddenly gave me a kick as I knelt down. The kick sent me high and I tried to fly because a lion was chasing me. Somehow, I could not fly high or fast.

The calf set upon the big bull. The big animal seemed to get it bad. The little one was by far the better fighter, and the bull had to run for his life. He left the kraal to the young bull.

The lion got hold of my leg. I kicked, and shouted.

I opened my eyes and the morning sunshine blinded me. I blinked and when I was used to the light, I saw Elizabeth standing beside the bed.

'You have been talking in your sleep,' she said smiling. 'I pulled your toe and you kicked.'

I laughed. 'I had a terrible dream,' I said. 'You are so beautiful, Liz.'

'Is that part of the dream?' she said smiling.

I reached for her, but she gracefully moved away,

smiling and looking at me innocently. I followed every movement of hers with my eyes, and I was assailed by longing and desire.

'Please don't go away,' I said, my words stumbling over each other. I felt I was being silly. 'Come to me, Liz.'

'Now, be your age, Jo,' she said as if addressing a naughty child. 'We have got a long way to journey back to Kawacha. The sun is already up. Get dressed while I go and make your breakfast.'

She went out of the room before I had said anything further. I dressed up and was about to go when I noticed a thing like a belt lying on the floor close to the spot where Elizabeth had been standing a short while ago. I knew it was no belt because it was moving very slowly.

A snake. The realization was sudden and my first impulse was to shout a warning. Somehow, I managed to restrain myself. I looked round the room for a stick. There was none. Just then I heard my mother's voice near the door to the room.

'Are you awake, Jo?' she called.

'Yes, mother,' I said.

'Have you dressed up?'

'Yes,' I said. 'But don't come in there is a. . . .'

'There is what?' she asked anxiously.

I was afraid to mention it was a snake because the belief is that once you mention it by name, it is bound to take interest in your doings and can become offensive.

'Come in, but be careful,' I said.

She entered into the room, and I indicated to her where the snake was with a nod. She looked at the snake from where she was standing.

'That is a harmless reptile. It's a rare thing,' she spoke of it reverently. 'Never kill it wherever you see it.'

I said, 'Elizabeth almost trod on it.'

'She saw it?'

'No,' I said.

'It brings you luck,' she said. 'Leave it alone, it will go the way it came. It has brought the house good luck.'

As I went out, I gave the snake a last glance and I thought there was a slight suggestion of a smile on it mouth. Maybe I was just imagining it. But one thing I was certain of – I had never seen such kind of a snake before.

My mother was in a happy mood – a rare thing these days since the Old Man had gone to prison. I failed to discover the reason for her newly found happiness. She also seemed to treat Elizabeth with exceptional fondness.

I overheard her once saying to Elizabeth, 'You don't worry about it, my child. Everything will be all right.'

Later, when I had a chance I called Mary aside.

'I want to talk to you in private, Mary,' I said. 'What is wrong with Elizabeth?'

Mary said, 'Hasn't she told you anything?'

'No,' I said. 'What is the matter?'

'Well, I am not supposed to tell you, really,' she said.

'Has it got anything to do with me – her trouble?'

'But, yes,' she said and started to laugh.

I said impatiently, 'Tell me, Mary, please. . . .'

'I will tell you in confidence,' she said. 'When someone mentions it to you later, pretend you are ignorant. Okay?'

'You are teaching me to be a liar, Mary,' I said.

'You are bound to know about it anyway,' she said, 'so I may just as well tell you now that you are going to be a father one of these fine days.'

I was shocked at first.

'A father – me?' I said half to myself.

'Don't you like it?' Mary said looking at me speculatively.

'I do.'

'Then why are you complaining?'

'I am not complaining. It is just that I was not ready for it,' I said. 'Are you sure about what you are telling me, Mary?'

'As sure as the daylight,' she said. 'She is coming to town with you. Treat her kindly. And mother is coming there in a day or two to make arrangements about you two. Do you love the girl?'

'You know that I do, Mary,' I said. 'Well, it had to happen some time. We must get married soon, I suppose.'

'Exactly so,' Mary said. 'Now, it's time you two started for Kawacha.'

The country scenery looked so serene and beautiful – so peaceful and quiet. I wished I could stay here always.

Chapter 18

There was a beautiful garden in Kawacha Town which really was a small park. It was called Coronation Square. During lunch-break on working days, Coronation Square served as an ideal resting-place for those workers in the town who could not go home for lunch, nor could afford to eat in a restaurant. Nearly all of them were Africans because they were the most poorly paid.

Usually, the people sat in little groups and played cards or some other game, or gossiped. For the latest information about what was going on in either official or private circles, Coronation Square was number one. There were some men there who could very well compete with any first-class news agency for collecting and imparting news, or for predicting and interpreting news and events.

Since the declaration of the state of emergency in the country, the convening of meetings was restricted by the Government. But somehow, the officials did not seem to realize that important meetings took place every day in Coronation Square. It was the safest place to meet – safer than even inside the churches or other places of worship. Big plans went on in that garden. If you were not in the know, however, the crowds there seemed ordinary. But for those who knew, they knew that each single group was for one particular purpose.

In each group there was only one person as the contact.

Usually he sat a yard or two away from the little circle. You just went to him and talked like old friends. In the end, you finished whatever business you had. One group would be for giving out information for the Movement. Another group for taking in information, or giving out instruction, or message, or taking collections.

The next day after getting back to the town from the country, I went to Coronation Square at lunch-break. I had with me a small simple parcel that any person could have thought contained a few sandwiches. I had put the money there which the villagers had asked me to send to the Old Man and his colleagues. Luck was with me because my contact man was Al Kachaso. He sat down smoking a pipe, seemingly watching with great interest a game of cards.

'Hello, Al,' I said, keenly watching his reaction.

He looked genuinely pleased to see me. He said after I sat down beside him: 'Boy, this is wonderful. How was your country trip?'

'I am mighty glad to see you, Al,' and I meant it truthfully. I was glad to see him. I had so much I wanted to tell him besides my other business. 'I had a grand trip, man. Liz has come with me and is staying in town for a few days.'

'Are you going to marry that girl?' He asked.

'Looks like it,' I said. 'As a matter of fact, I will marry her. Want to be my best man?'

He scratched his forehead. 'I won't bring you luck in the house,' he said and we both laughed. 'When are you going to the altar?'

'I don't know yet,' I said. 'But I guess it will be pretty soon.'

'Why such a hurry?'

'Well . . .'

'Are you in a fix?'

'What do you mean by that?' I said quickly.

'I was just wondering,' he said simply. 'Aren't you waiting for the Old Boy to be there and witness your first wedding – it's just a matter of days before he is out.'

'I guess I'll wait for him provided you are definite,' I said.

'A matter of days to wait,' he said quietly.

I felt pleased with the information, and only caution stopped me from dancing. I said, 'I am marrying in a hurry because there is a new Jozeni on the way.'

He nodded. 'I thought so, my boy. I'll be your best man if that's what you want. But I would prefer to be the bandman. That's going to be your first wedding and we all would like to rejoice. I want to play you a big hit, man. My band will be at its best.'

'We'll make final plans in due course,' I said. 'Are you coming to my house this evening? We'll have supper together.'

'I see you have some lunch for me,' he said and indicated the little packet in my hand.

'Sure. That's for you,' I said. 'Here you're.'

'Can I start to eat now?'

'You better keep it,' I said. 'When I write, I will pass your regards to the Old Man and his friends. They will be glad to share . . .'

He fondled the packet. 'Doesn't feel like there is bread inside,' he said smiling.

'There's money there from the villagers near my sister's home,' I told him. 'Pass it to the Old Man and his colleagues. An impromptu voluntary contribution.'

'I know the people in that village. They are one hundred per cent behind the Movement,' Al said. 'The only unsafe character is the headman.'

He pocketed the packet. 'Well, that's fine,' he said. 'I think it won't be possible for me to come to your house tonight because of this thing you've given me. I have got to deliver it. The man who can take it to the Old Man starts duty late this evening. I've got to meet him before he leaves his house.'

I got up, and Al did the same. Another man quickly came and took his place. It was so well planned and cleverly done – never conspicuous. Al walked with me up to the edge of the park. We stood there for some time talking. When at last I looked at my watch, I found I had barely a few minutes to get back to the office.

'My time is over, Al,' I said. 'If you can't make it this evening, then come round tomorrow evening.'

He smiled. 'I am a busy person now, Jo,' he said. 'I very much like to come to your house and see your fiancée. But I can't promise that I will find time to do so tomorrow. I don't get much time for playing around these days. It's different from what it used to be when I was an employee. Being self-employed is time-demanding. Besides, I work hard for the Movement.'

'Do you like being self-employed?'

'I do,' he said. 'There's plenty freedom of action. How's your job doing – the boss – what's it like?'

'Still lousy,' I said and meant it.

'Never mind, it's just a matter of days now,' he said, gripping my hand and squeezing it.

'You sure, Al, they are coming out in a few days' time?' I asked anxiously.

'I have no reason to doubt that it will be so,' he said. 'You know Njoka Maki?'

'I do,' I said. 'Isn't he there, too?'

'He came out this morning,' Al said. 'He gave us the latest information. Somehow, the people there are better

informed than we who are out here. They know almost everything that's going on in the country. One thing you must know, Jo, is that the people almost to the man are with the Movement. We are a God-fearing people in this country, but our patience can run out if the Government continues to lock our people indefinitely. The Government is unable to rule us just now. The people want those men back, and there is nothing the Government can do except to comply, unless – well, how can I say it – unless....'

He left the sentence hanging unfinished.

'Come round tonight, Al, how late it might be,' I said as I left him.

'All right, my boy,' he said. 'Keep me a big meal. I'll be there some time before midnight tonight.'

I was late by nearly half an hour in getting to the office, and I found a note stuck in my typewriter. It said: 'See me at once . . . Editor.'

What was it *now*?

The editor said, 'Jo, there is an important announcement coming from the Governor late this afternoon. The boss will bring our copy personally and he has asked that you and me wait for him, here in the office. The rest can go. So if you had any engagements, such as shopping, you'd better make other alternative arrangements. We may have to stay late.'

'It sounds mysterious. What is all this about, Bill?' I asked.

'I don't know, my boy,' he said. He seemed to be happy. 'Are you worried?'

'Sure, I am,' I said. 'I have a visitor staying with me, and I have asked Al to dinner tonight.'

'Job comes first, my boy,' he said and lit a cigarette. 'Want to smoke?'

'No,' I said. 'You don't have an idea, Bill?'

'None,' he answered. 'How's Al, by the way?'

'Working hard,' I said. 'He's happier now than he used to be when with us on *Kawacha News*. I don't think I am happy here either.'

'Who is happy working for someone else, tell me?' he retorted.

'You,' I said.

'Me? Do I look happy, Jo – be honest?'

I said, 'At least you get a fat cheque for the sins you commit.'

He laughed loudly, dropping his lighted cigarette on to his trousers. His laughter was infectious. The trousers started to burn with the fire of the cigarette.

'You are burning your trousers,' I told him.

He jumped up and the cigarette rolled to the floor. He rubbed off the burning spot on his trousers, putting out the fire. There was a little round hole, like a ring-worm on a human skin.

He sat down and the mirth had gone. 'This is one of my best suits, and I go and ruin it like this,' he said looking at the hole in the trousers.

'Your wife will mend it,' I said.

'I know she will,' he said. 'But it will never be the same. The patch will always spoil the suit.'

Like a scar on the face, I thought. Whenever I saw the patch in future it would remind me of this day, I told myself.

'Get your shopping done now, and return in an hour's time,' he said dryly.

'Can I shop for you, too?'

'Buy me a packet of cigarettes,' he said.

I went to the market and later, to my house.

I found Elizabeth busy in the house, already playing

the role of what she was soon going to be – a housewife – and seeming to enjoy it.

'I am going to be delayed at the office, I'm afraid, Liz,' I told her. 'Al is coming to dinner. You, two, don't wait for me – go right ahead and eat – if I am very much delayed. But I think I'll be here in time for supper. I will try.'

She smiled, and I liked her smile.

'You are very beautiful, Liz,' I said, patting her. 'Dad is going to like you, I am sure.'

She brushed softly against me like a cat.

'I must go back to work,' I said.

She said, 'I always liked the Minister – the Old Man. He's such a nice man, very kind.'

'He may soon be out,' I said.

She said, 'That will be very good, darling.'

I had expected her to bombard me with questions, but she did not and I loved her for it. She was discreet – something that very few girls I knew were. We'll get on very well, baby, I thought.

I refused tea and went back to the office.

It was very late in the evening when the boss came into the office. He was carrying a brief-case, which was very unusual. Bill Akimu and I were sitting in the general office chatting.

Bill stood up and asked, 'Do you want us to go into my office?'

'It's more airy here,' the boss said, 'and we have the typewriters, as well. We'll sit here. Now, you will type this thing in pieces – I want to give each of you a piece to type simultaneously. This is embargoed until 8 p.m. tonight when it will be announced on the radio. But I shouldn't think you will have got back home by then. I

want it all typed tonight and sent down to the machine-room for setting, and included in the newspaper tomorrow. Understand? That means one of you will have to stay here until midnight. I will give each of you half of the statement to crack on. I'll go out for an hour, but I shall be back. I have ordered meals for both of you at the restaurant across the road. You can go there one at a time.'

He fished from his brief-case a lot of papers. He divided them into two, giving one half to each of us.

'That's the statement,' he said. 'It's embargoed till 8 p.m. tonight.'

He remained long enough to see that we had started working on it. Then he left, leaving his bag behind. Bill took it into his office.

'I was afraid because he could have left a tape recorder in the bag to record whatever we conversed while he was away,' Bill said. 'These people are very clever.'

'Is that the reason why you have taken it away from here?'

'Exactly,' he answered.

'I don't think he is coming back like he said.'

'Why do you think so?'

'The brief-case,' I said. 'He must have left it to convince us that he is coming back, and therefore, we must work hard.'

'May be you are right,' Bill said. 'He never carries a brief-case when he goes about, that is why I thought he must have planted a tape recorder in it.'

For a while we typed in silence – the machines making a monotonous tapping sound.

Then Bill looked up from his work. 'Jo,' he called.

'Yes,' I said and went on typing. I was really absorbed with the statement.

'Do you know, Jo,' he persisted, 'we don't have to type this thing, really. There is no need. The thing is already in printed form, and all there is to do for us is to sub it up and send it down to the machine-room for setting. We have actually laboured for no point at all. Give me your lot. I will sub it quickly.'

I stretched my back. 'You should have discovered that point earlier, Mr Editor,' I said.

'You don't have to be sarcastic,' Bill said. 'After all, you should be very happy that he is out.'

I said, 'You, too, Bill.'

'Of course, I am very pleased,' he said. 'This is the beginning of great things for our country.'

I looked at my watch, and it said it was twenty-three minutes to eight, evening.

'Where do you think they are now?' I asked.

'What's the time?'

I told him.

'I should say they are flying over Sudan or Egypt, now. They left by the 2 p.m. plane this afternoon, presumably,' he said.

'Perhaps,' I said. 'But the Government could have chartered a special plane for the party.'

'That is possible,' he said. 'They will be having breakfast in London barely a day after leaving home. The world is indeed small now!'

'When does the Governor go?' I asked.

'Day after tomorrow,' Bill said. 'And the *Akapilikoni* leave tomorrow.'

'This is a very unexpected thing,' I said. 'It will take everyone in the country by surprise. I know everyone knew they will be coming out soon, but not so soon as this. I wonder what is behind the sudden move?'

'The pressure from the masses,' Bill said. 'There is

nothing the Government could do but relent – let the people out, and talk with them. That is why they are all going to England to talk over the next stage of the country's progress with the leaders of the people taking a full part, unlike in the past.'

I said, 'If it's just a matter of subbing, then you don't need me here?'

'Well, just for company,' Bill said. 'It will not take very long to get it all done. Give me half an hour. Meanwhile, you can go and have your supper at the hotel.'

'I'll eat at home, but I will just go across and have a cup of coffee,' I said.

When I got to the restaurant, the news was just starting to come on the radio. The Government statement came out first. So it was true the Old Man and three of his colleagues had been flown to London for constitutional talks to start in a few days time with the British Government. I wondered who the three others with him were? It was easy to guess, of course.

The statement made it clear that the state of emergency was still in existence, and that nothing had changed. The Governor and his advisers, the statement added, would leave in two days' time, but the two African Members of Legislative Council, who were also Members of Executive Council, and two other similar persons from the European representatives would leave the following day for London to take part in the talks.

As soon as the statement ended, there was great noise of joy all round the restaurant, so much so, that the news that followed was drowned in the uproar. I went back to the office and found Bill taking the statement down to the machine-room.

Al Kachaso lifted me high, saying, 'I told you, boy, the

Old Man is coming out. Didn't I? Oh, this is great! Great, great, great, I tell you!'

He bounced me up and down until my ribs hurt.

'Come'n, boy, leave me alone,' I said. It was difficult not to feel excited. Everywhere in the Location there was noise of joy – tins being whacked, drums sounded, women shrilling – all very exciting.

At last, Al stopped lifting me up and down, and panting he said, 'This is great, Jo. Do you know what it all means?'

'No,' I said.

'Living at a time when history is being made,' he said. 'Right now, man, we the owners of the country are moulding the destiny of our country – shaping the future of our children, and of their children – of posterity. Isn't that something to be proud of? I am thinking of the future, not of the immediate benefits to us, although that is important naturally.'

'It is good to think of the future,' Elizabeth joined in. 'Now, aren't you boys going to have some supper? It's ready, and probably getting cold.'

Al who had been still holding me as if a dancer and his partner, took away his arms from around me. We all went to supper.

'Al, you'll stay the night here then,' Elizabeth said. 'Don't I hear that the curfew is still on?'

'It is there, girl,' Al said, 'but I happen to have a special pass. Jo has one, too. I'll be all right, don't worry.'

Someone knocked at the front door. I went to investigate and found Bill Akimu and his wife. They were carrying some bottles of beer.

'Sorry for the intrusion, Jo,' Bill said, 'but I thought things being what they are now, perhaps we could get together and rejoice in a small and poor way.'

'Come on in,' I said and took some of the bottles from Bill's wife. She was pregnant, I noticed. I wondered if it was now the season for women to be in that way.

From the other room, Al shouted, 'Who's there, Jo? I can hear Bill's voice. Am I right?'

'It's me, old boy,' Bill said. 'This is really something. Didn't know Al was still with you, Jo. Look, I'll go and get some more booze.'

But there was no need for him to do so because there was plenty more of it in the house, brought by Al as soon as he heard the Government statement on the radio.

'You're going to have some more visitors, Jo, in a few minutes' time,' Al announced later. 'I have invited them. Zake Lukani is one of them, and the other is Njoka Maki. I want us to decarbonize Zake Lukani's thinking before he goes to this conference in London, so that what he will talk there will be something in line with our demands, instead of talking smoke.'

'You are cute, young man,' Bill's wife said. 'How are you going to convert Mr Zake Lukani at the last moment when in the past that has failed?'

'You will see, old girl,' Al said. 'At least I will try to decarbonize him – his way of thinking, I mean.'

We all laughed. The party had started with a happy note.

Zake Lukani was a bit tipsy. He shouted, 'No, we will not have this dictatorship. . . .'

Al, also tipsy, said, 'Just a minute, sir. I think you are slightly wrong. . . .'

'I am not wrong,' Zake said emphatically, 'I know what I am saying. . . .'

'All right, then. You are right. The point I wanted to make was this,' and he leaned forward, raising his finger

as if he was about to play a note on the saxophone. 'The point is this,' Al repeated, 'you are an experienced parliamentarian. You are talented. We have few of your experience, and as such, we all need you – need your service. Now that we are nearing our goal to rule ourselves, all who are experienced like you are needed. Don't you see, sir, that the more you can throw your lot with the rest of your people, the better for your point of view. . . .'

'Well, I can, of course, work with the other leaders, but. . . .'

'The chance for you to prove that you really mean to do the country good is there – there in London. You pull together with the others and you will see that all the people and the country here will respect you,' Al said.

'I will see what I can do in London, but I am not . . .' But Al cut him short.

'We understand your feelings,' he said, 'now, let us drink one for the road. Mr Lukani can then go home to bed since he has to get up early and catch the plane to London about 10 a.m.'

We wished him success for the London talks. When they were all gone, Elizabeth and I were left alone like the last actors on a stage. The noise in the Location had now died down, and it was all very quiet.

Chapter 19

The airport was six miles from Kawacha Town. It was just beyond the non-African suburban residential area. From dawn, people had started to pour there in big numbers. Some on foot, on bicycles, in cars, in buses and in lorries. Others flew in. This was a big day. The day when the Old Man and his party was arriving from London after a three weeks' stay there.

Smaller crowds gathered here and there along the road from the airport to the town. Nearly everyone was in good humour, and dressed colourfully. The people were giving the Old Man a hero's welcome back in his country.

The Governor, who had returned a few days earlier, had not been given such a colourful welcome.

The world Press was there to witness the occasion. The airport officials had given the Press special permission to go along the apron and await the aircraft there. As time approached for the plane to arrive, we jostled and pushed each other, in an effort to get a better position than our neighbour.

Out of the clear sky, the aeroplane droned and burst on the horizon like a silvery speck.

The cameraman near me said, 'Here comes the plane, boys. Get yourselves ready.'

The crowd outside the tall terminal building, now

numbering over 50,000 yelled into a thunderous noise, drowning even the sound of the aircraft's engines.

The aeroplane touched down perfectly, and the yell of the multitude reached its peak. It was a yell of joy. The big man-made bird pulled up a few hundred yards in front of the building. The engines stopped, and it became suddenly quiet. Cameramen pushed towards the aircraft, and those of us who had no cameras followed behind, watching and listening.

The ladder was pushed into place and the doors were opened. Pressmen travelling in the aircraft burst out and joined us on the ground. The crowd was now chanting softly, and clapping hands with a thud in a slow rhythm. This was the home-coming of a Chief.

'This is very impressive, Jo,' somebody said from behind me, and I recognized his voice. I turned round and saw Tom Woodhouse.

Quickly, we shook hands because the passengers were now coming out and Woodhouse had a camera.

'Here comes Dan Dube,' he said, aiming his camera at the door of the aircraft. Dan Dube stood and lingered on the landing long enough for the cameramen to take quick shots, and for him to wave at the swarm of people on the balcony of the building, and those behind the wire fence. As he stepped down, Benjamin Nyirenda came out of the plane and performed the same exercise as Dan Dube. He was followed by Felix Tambala who also did the same thing. It must have been well planned.

Then the Old Man came out. The crowd yelled into a long and loud cheer. He stood on the landing, stick in hand, and with the free hand waved at the people.

'*Kwaaacha*,' he shouted. '*Uhuru!*'

The crowd answered with even noisier cheers. He stepped down with a deliberate slowness, almost in step with

the slow rhythmic chanting and clapping of the people. He joined his colleagues on the ground, who immediately flanked all round him like bodyguards.

He, like the younger men, was wearing a well-cut London suit of a light, dark material. I thought he looked younger and handsomer. He waved at the crowd as he approached the building.

Tom Woodhouse was right. This was a very impressive show. Near the entrance to the V.I.P.'s lounge, the Old Man and his colleagues were received by the Movement's official welcome party. The Pressmen followed them into the building like wolves. He was going to hold a Press Conference. After that the Old Man was to be driven to the town where a rally had been arranged.

He said very little at the Press Conference. As he spoke, I noticed that he had fitted himself with a complete set of teeth which looked almost natural. His cheeks were now rounder than before. He spoke with confidence and was master of the situation. My father had changed very much, I thought. Several times I tried to attract his attention to me; as his son, he should have shown more interest in me. After all, we had not seen each other for many months. That was what I thought, but my father gave me no preferential treatment over the other journalists. I could well be no relative of his, for all it seemed there.

He is not just my father. He is a father of all of us – of the country.

'The talks in London concerning the constitutional changes of this country went on very well indeed. My colleagues and I have been able to make the case of our people here, in this country, not only heeded, but accepted in a big measure,' the Old Man said. 'In a few words, I will tell you, gentlemen, that the results have been even better

than we expected. We have been able to get an arrangement whereby we will have a qualitative franchise, but of such a kind that I prefer to call it a milder form of one man one vote. I shall not bore you with the details as to how this will be done. It will all be announced at the rally at the stadium in town this afternoon.

'Now, we hope that my Organization will be able to sweep the elections that we are going to have later in the year. The new franchise – the new constitution gives us a chance to return a majority in the Legislative Council. As the only Organization of the people's wish in this country, I have no doubt of getting my boys into that House. We mean to rule ourselves.

'The composition of the Executive Council will reflect the numerical composition of the majority or otherwise of the Legislative Council, in the first instance. But we will, as an interim measure, retain certain Civil Servants as Exco members, as *ex-officios*. This is an interim measure.'

The Old Man was interrupted by a man who came in with a message from outside. The man whispered in his ears, then he went out.

'I am afraid, gentlemen, that I will not have time to answer questions,' the Old Man said. 'My people are getting impatient out there. They want to see me. They are wondering what's holding me here.'

There was general laughter.

'But I think I have told you the basic facts that you really need for your stories,' he said as he got up.

Somebody asked, 'Will you quit being a minister of the Church, sir?'

'How can that be, my friend?' The Old Man retorted. 'What you seem to suggest is that I shall cease to serve God's children because I am a politician. That is really a

wrong way of looking at it.' 'As a minister, I serve God through the Church,' the Old Man said. 'You, myself and all the people in this country and elsewhere, are all the children of God. If you helped me in my troubles – say I was sick – you are serving God. But if you let me suffer when you could easily render help, you are not fully serving God even if you were a minister, a sheikh or a patriarch.

'My African people in this country suffer many disadvantages,' he said. 'They do not enjoy many of the things that God has given us, and yet, these things are there and being denied them, although other people enjoy them. I am not accusing anybody. But all I am saying is that besides serving God in the Church, I also will serve Him by helping my people in their struggle to regain the right to enjoy with the others what God gave them to enjoy.'

The Old Man briskly walked out of the room, and the rest of us trooped behind him. Out in the open, the Old Man was lifted by the people shoulder high, and was conveyed that way to his waiting car.

Tom Woodhouse who came and stood next to me, said, 'The struggle is now near its end.' He spoke almost to himself. 'I must get to the nearest post office and file my story to London.'

The car taking the Old Man led a long motor procession to the town. This was something that we had never seen in the country before. It was the mark of the end of one era, and the coming of another.

I took hold of Tom's free hand. 'Come with me,' I told him. 'I have a car. Let's get to town where you can send your story in the post office there. Here, the post office is only a small one. How was the trip?'

'Wonderful,' he said. We weaved our way around the

crowded moving mass of people, and we got to the car sweating. Inside the car it was also extremely hot, having stood in the open for nearly five hours.

'I am getting married soon,' I told Tom to whom I left the job of driving the car.

'That is good news,' he said without much enthusiasm. 'How soon? I am here in this country for the next three weeks. Shall I miss the wedding?'

'Maybe not,' I said.

'Well, I also wanted to tell you that I was able to get you a place on the editorial staff of a national daily in Fleet Street,' he said. 'But I think you will not be able to come to London soon because of the wedding?'

'Very good of you, Tom,' I said very pleased with the news. 'Surely something can be arranged. I shall speak with Elizabeth so that we can make some satisfactory arrangement. Can't she come to London with me? She should be able to study something useful that she can teach her people here in this country later.'

'I suppose that can be arranged,' Tom said. 'I know of some West African friends of mine who live with their wives there – all of them undertaking some kind of courses. Certainly, we can arrange something. I will tell you what,' he glowed with interest, 'I can arrange so that your wife can stay with my people in Surrey while I fix you with a flat in London. You can actually stay with me in my flat during the first few weeks while we try and find a flat – a suitable flat for a married couple, I mean. That should be easy.'

'I don't know what to say, Tom,' I said. 'I am just simply overwhelmed. I can't believe my luck. I want to study there, Tom. I want to learn and equip myself for the task here.'

'I can understand that, Jo,' he said. 'Your father is a

great man. He badly needs trained people to build this country. I have faith in the emergent Africa. . . .'

We sat silent, each with his thoughts, as he drove the remaining two miles into Kawacha Town.

At the Stadium, the Old Man refused to take credit for the success of the constitutional talks he and his friends had just returned from in London.

He said, 'The credit goes to you, my people. Your strong unity, your solidarity, your strong determination of purpose and your love for this country and your love for freedom, my people, these things have brought about our success at the talks.

'This is our only country,' he went on, 'and we have nowhere else to go. We are a God-fearing people. We are full of human love. In our hearts, we are full of generosity. We give a place to sleep and food to eat to our guests in our houses. We treat them like members of our own families. Good guests ask no more than we can give. But a guest who wants the best that can be had in our house at the expense of us – such a guest we will ask to leave our house. We cannot have him. We don't want him,' he said amid laughter, and added, 'We are not the kind Bedouin who was kicked out of his tent by a camel he kindly gave cover. It is asking us too much to be that Bedouin. . . .'

After listening to his speech, and seeing the way it was received by the mammoth gathering, I was convinced the speed at which events were moving was tremendous.

Traditional dances were held openly, and the Old Man took part in them just before he left the ground.

'This is strange,' I told Felix Tambala. 'Weren't we taught that some of the traditional dances in which he took part just now were heathen?

'There is nothing bad in our dances, Jo,' Felix said.

'Our dances are just as good, just as entertaining and just as clean as any other forms of dances practised by any other nations.'

'Won't they expel him. . . .?' I started to say, but Felix interrupted.

'They can do what they like,' he said, 'but the Old Man knows that what he is doing is right.'

We went round the arena and watched the various dances. Some had intricate steps with expressive movements. It was so beautifully done that you found yourself shaking and making movements in accompaniment like a football fan would do when the ball was beautifully kicked.

Later, we met Benjamin Nyirenda and his wife Agnes. They had just taken part in one of the dances, and were now sweating, but full of joy.

'Hello, Jo, man,' Ben said. 'I must congratulate you. I hear you are getting married soon?'

'Yes,' I said. 'If things work out the way I want, I should be leaving for London soon after my wedding.'

'What for, in London,' Agnes asked.

'To learn,' I said.

'We want good journalists, Jo,' Nyirenda said. 'We want writers who will write about us, about our culture in the true light. Writers who will write with the feelings of their people. That is what we want. We need you with your profession. Go and learn as much as you can there. We want that, Jo.'

We left the ground just before nightfall and went to my house in Kumoyo Location. My parents were in the house drinking tea. So father has not abandoned his favourite brew, I thought. We shook hands for the first time since he had arrived. Elizabeth who was serving them, I knew, was watching father and son keenly.

'Well, well, son, this is God's wish that we should all

meet in your house,' he said. 'I am glad to see that you are keeping well.'

We all sat down after greetings had been exchanged all round.

'This is a great day,' Mary said. I knew she was excited to see her husband again, and I was sorry that just now they could not be alone, the two of them.

'We will try to arrange about your wedding quickly, son,' my father said, 'I am very pleased with everything – everything, my children.'

I did not know what to say because I was overcome by joy. But I heard Ben Nyirenda tell them, 'Jo tells me, sir, that he is going to London for studies soon after his wedding. It's great news, indeed.'

My mother said, 'That's not so, surely, son?'

I said, 'It's so, mother. A friend of mine, Tom Woodhouse by name, has managed to get me a place on a big newspaper in London. I shall use my time to learn – to learn useful things that will help me when I return home. My friend tells me he will try to arrange for me to take Elizabeth with me there. She, too, can learn something useful which she can teach her fellow women later at home.'

I heard mother say, 'Oh, but surely, son, you don't mean it? How can you leave us who are old by ourselves? How can you go far with a new wife – two young people so far away by yourselves, and no relative near you? I just don't see the reason why you want to do such a thing.'

I looked at my father. He knew I was appealing to him for his help. He said, 'We will discuss – your mother and I will discuss – this matter, son. Give us time, will you, to decide what course of action you must take.'

That night I slept at Al Kachaso's house in Majengo because I had to leave my house for my parents to use.

Elizabeth stayed with Ben and his wife. Felix, too, was their guest.

Next day I went to see my boss at his office. He was wearing a dark suit, and an overcoat was placed at the back of his chair. An air ticket lay on the shiny, bare table. Every now and again, he looked at his watch and there was some impatience in his movements. I knew he was about to go somewhere. This must be a sudden journey, I thought.

He said, 'You wanted to see me, Jo. What have you got on your chest?'

'I wanted to come and tell you that I have decided to go and study,' I told him. 'I want to leave in a couple of weeks' time.'

'Is this part of the whirlwind just now blowing in this country?' he said almost to himself. 'Well, I'm glad I am clearing out. Anyway, that's none of your business.'

He looked at his watch for the tenth or eleventh time in less than five minutes.

'You have heard, I suppose, that Zake Lukani has just shot himself dead?'

'No,' I said, very much taken by surprise by the news.

'Well, he has,' the boss said. 'He's left a note saying he couldn't go on any further cheating his people. Damn him. He puts his friend Kenneth Pasi, in a damnable spot. He just telephoned me a moment ago.'

I had not come to hear all this. Besides, I did not know whether he was telling me the truth.

I said, 'So, I wonder if you can please release me at short notice? I would also like a certificate.'

The telephone bell started to ring. He picked up the receiver and said, 'Who? Kenneth Pasi, oh, yes. In ten minutes' time. At the airport. All right.'

He replaced the receiver. He had said all right, but I knew things were not all right with him somewhere, somehow.

He turned to me and said, 'Well, if you want to go, you are free. I will instruct the accountant to give you your last pay. He will give you also the certificate you want. Now, please go, I have no time.'

I left the room unceremoniously – something I had never done before. When I went to our office, Bill Akimu confirmed that Zake Lukani had killed himself.

'He has been contemplating doing it for a long time,' Bill said. 'That's what his wife says. Well . . .'

'Politics?' I asked.

'That's what some people will say,' Bill said, 'but we know he was a sick man all these years. He couldn't face slow death, and so killed himself. But he's done it at a time when he knew some people could put the blame on politics for his action. It isn't politics at all.'

'The boss suggested it was,' I said. 'He said the man had left a note behind.'

'It is all lies, I tell you. The note simply tells lies,' Bill said.

'Where is the boss going?' I asked. 'I found him about to leave.'

'Perhaps to South Africa,' Bill said. 'Why didn't you ask him?'

'He was in a terrible temper,' I said, 'like one who is badly rattled.'

We laughed.

'So you are leaving,' Bill said at last, 'how soon?'

'Tomorrow I am not coming to the office,' I said. 'I have finished with the company.'

'So soon?'

'Yes,' I said.

He looked sorry. 'I shall feel very lonely. This is rather saddening.'

I, too, would feel sorry to leave him. We had got to know one another well. But things were changing fast, and there was nothing one could do. I could not spend all the best days of my life on the *Kawacha News* when there was a chance for me to see the world and learn.

'You have been very kind to me, Bill,' I said, 'and I am very thankful for all that you have done for me. I shall always remember you, as well as your wife. I am leaving the country soon after my wedding in a few weeks' time.'

'Where do you intend to go?'

'London,' I said. 'With luck I may work in Fleet Street.'

Bill got up and shook my hand with admiration. 'All the best of luck to you, Jo, in your new undertaking. Remember when you are there to work hard and to learn much. Don't forget you will be our representative – the representative of our emerging nation – so don't let us down.'

So that is how I left the *Kawacha News*.

I did not attend the funeral of Zake Lukani, but I understand many people did. The Old Man delivered a speech at the graveside, praising the deceased and regretting his passing. But the most moving tribute was made by Sleepy Aunt. People openly wept as she spoke, so I am told, and no one even with the hardest heart could fail to forgive him for his misdeeds committed when he was alive – even his last act of taking his own life.

She ended her speech, I hear, by saying: 'We must not accuse our adversaries, nor must we point a finger at them. For every finger that you point at someone, there are three others pointing back at you.'

I knew – and it was an open secret – Sleepy Aunt like all the others in the Movement did not see eye to eye with the late Zake Lukani and his friends. That is why they were dubbed as *Akapilikoni* – those who have side-stepped from the main line, and no longer belong to it. It was a term applied with sympathy – the kind of sympathy you would have for a man or a woman in your family who decided to join a different religion from that of the rest of you.

I met Rev. John Webb at the Mission House on the afternoon of the Sunday that followed the Saturday on which Elizabeth and myself had been married. He had sent for me.

Mr Webb looked old and lacking good health. Instead of us sitting down to talk, he preferred us to walk to and fro in the small garden at the back of the house. It was a beautiful garden with the flowers in full bloom, but the afternoon sun was still too warm.

'Why didn't you bring your wife along?' he asked in the fashion of a good uncle addressing a nephew he has missed for some time.

'She is busy packing our things,' I said. 'I gave up my job a few weeks ago, and we plan to live back in the country. Elizabeth wants to help Mary, my sister, at her new school.'

'I thought I heard she is going home with you?'

'That's home we are going to,' I said.

'Well, I meant my home in Britain,' he said. 'We always tend to call Britain home even when we have really left the country and settled abroad. A very peculiar habit.'

It was peculiar all right, particularly when the white men who had been born in Africa and had never seen Europe nor ever expected to see it, still referred to it as

'home', and at the same time claimed that they were white Africans when it suited the occasion.

I said, 'I am leaving her here. My parents and her people have ordered that she should remain behind for the time being.'

'What will you be doing in Britain?'

'A friend of mine has been able to get me a place on the editorial staff of a big newspaper in London,' I said. 'I want to learn as much as I can during my stay there.'

'What particular thing do you want to learn?' he asked, and I felt he was trying to pump out of me some information he wanted. What it was that he wanted, I didn't quite know.

I skipped his question and said, 'I gather you are about to go to England, Reverend. When do you leave the country?'

He smiled painfully. 'Are you chasing me out?' He asked, trying to make it sound light.

'I am not chasing you, Reverend,' I said. 'How can I when you have done so much for me? I owe my education to you, and, of course, my religion.'

He stopped walking and placed a gentle hand against my shoulder.

'I am glad to hear that, Jo,' he said. 'I love this country and I love the people. But there are times when I wonder if I really am wanted.'

'I am sure your service will always be needed in this country,' I said. 'My father and all the other leaders have repeatedly said that one of the things we badly need in this country is education. And we must have teachers to give us education. You have been and still are an educationist, so we need you.'

He resumed his walking. 'I must talk to your father one of these days. I must talk to him.'

We now made for the house. For some time we sat in silence in the veranda. Mission houses had verandas – all of them – which served as sitting-rooms. Tea was already laid on for two, but I told him I did not want it because the weather was rather warm for me and I did not want to sweat.

'You must have a cup,' Mr Webb insisted. 'Tea is one thing you will drink most in Britain. So it's just as well that you start getting used to the tea-drinking habit here and now.'

He laughed as he poured it out.

'It's true I am going home next month,' he said, picking up the subject. 'I shall look you up. Where will you be?'

'London,' I said.

'I shall look you up in London when I come over,' he said. 'You must get yourself known to the Church there. I will give you a letter of introduction. I have got it all ready for you. Look after yourself when you are there. You must remember always that you have a good wife waiting for you in your own country, here.'

After tea, he gave me the letter. He also gave me a small prayer book in English. Inside it, on the cover, he had written: 'To Jo Jozeni. All the best of luck. God bless you. From John Webb, Makwasa.'

It was a moving gesture of friendship, and I was very touched.

'I shan't be at the airport to see you off, Jo,' he said as we shook hands. 'But I shall remember you in my prayers.'

As I left him, my mind was heavy. Perhaps it was the last time I would see him.

I stepped into the aeroplane nervously. This was my first time ever inside one. It looked like the white-only bus which ran between the town and the white-only residential

suburb. The white stewardess politely told me to sit anywhere.

The plane was half full and I went and sat at a window on the left side. Looking out I could see the people who had come to see me off still standing on the balcony of the building where we had just shaken hands. Mary saw me and waved.

I waved back. A lump rose inside my throat, and I was on the point of tears. I saw Elizabeth look away and take out a small handkerchief from her bag.

The engines of the plane came to life and it moved forward, gathering speed. Somebody gently tapped me on the shoulder. It was the stewardess, carrying a tray of sweets.

'Would you like one, sir?' she asked.

'Yes, please.' She held the tray in front of me. I picked two sweets. 'Thank you.' I almost added 'madam'.

'Fasten your belt, sir,' she said and moved away. I did. Now I could not see the building. The plane had made a U-turn and vibrated violently as the engines revved up. The elderly white woman in front of me closed her eyes and her lips moved, perhaps in prayer. Now the plane was racing forward with ever-increasing speed. I was sweating. I shut my eyes. When I opened them again, we were airborne.

A minute later, we were flying over Kawacha Town. It looked like a toy model.

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