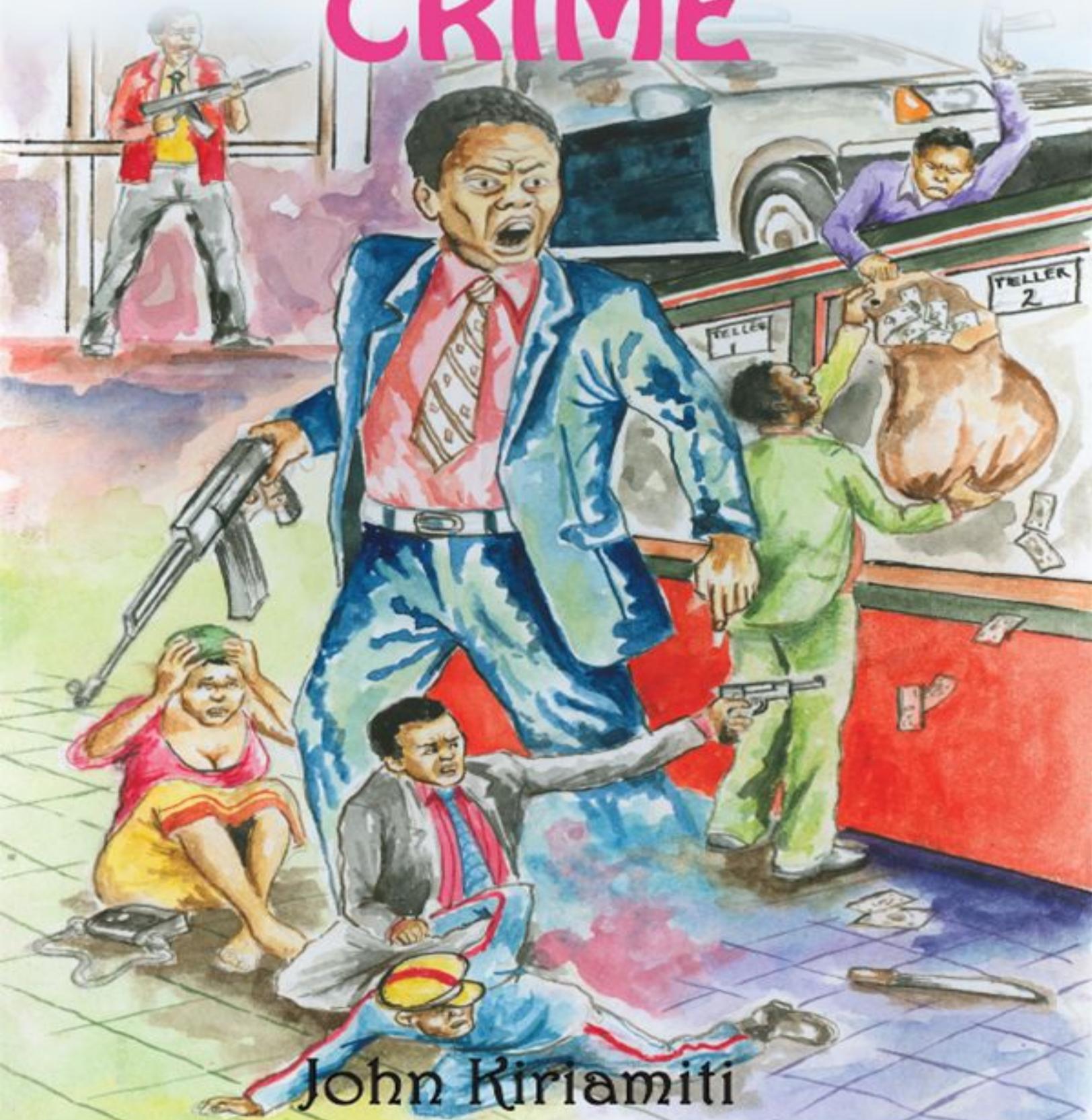


MY LIFE IN CRIME



John Kiriamiti

My Life in Crime

The late 1960s and early 70s may be remembered as the years of the great bank and other armed robberies in Kenya. This is the true story of one of the participants in some of those robberies, John Kiriamiti. In raw and candid language he tells the story of how he dropped out of secondary school when he was only fifteen years old, and for a time became a novice pickpocket, before graduating into crimes like car-breaking and ultimately into violent robbery. This spellbinding story takes the reader into the underworld of crime, and it depicts graphically the criminal's struggle for survival against the forces of law.

John Kiriamiti, who was imprisoned on 6th January 1971, after being convicted on a charge of committing robbery at Naivasha on 4 November 1970, left Naivasha Maximum Security Prison in August 1984, just five months after the publication of this fast-selling novel.

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My Life in Crime

John Kiriamiti



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CONTENTS

[Chapter One](#)

[Chapter Two](#)

[Chapter Three](#)

[Chapter Four](#)

[Chapter Five](#)

[Chapter Six](#)

[Chapter Seven](#)

[Chapter Eight](#)

[Chapter Nine](#)

[Chapter Ten](#)

[Chapter Eleven](#)

[Chapter Twelve](#)

[Chapter Thirteen](#)

[Chapter Fourteen](#)

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Except for the names of persons, the names of places and the scenes of the crimes referred to in this story, every other element is true.

The preparation and the plans of each crime really took place in one place or the other. I have tried to keep as much to the truth as possible. If any name of a person, or any place coincided with those in this book, the reader should stay aware that nothing of the sort had been intended.

Most of the characters referred to in fictitious names are serving from 14 to 45 years imprisonment; some are serving life sentences while others have been sentenced to death and some are dead. The escape to Congo and the return to Kenya is as true as the rest of the book.

As concerns my part in it, be good and forget it, I am already a reformed person.

John Kiriamiti

CHAPTER ONE



Before my life in crime, I never believed that a man or group of people could sit together and conspire to rob, blackmail, kidnap, murder or commit other acts of felony. But now I know.

I am about thirty, as I write this book. I was born on 14th February 1950 and I was imprisoned on 6th January 1971. So eight of those years have been wasted in prison. I still have others ahead of me. The judge who sentenced me knew exactly what he was doing. I always think in his life, he had never heard of the word mercy, and if he had, he did not care what the hell it meant.

I was born to a relatively well-to-do family. My father, Albert Kiriamiti, and my mother, Anne Wanjiru, were teachers, and therefore in my youth, I was well provided for. I completed my primary education in Thuita School. Thuita School is in Murang'a, about fifteen miles from the town. In the lower primary my mother was one of the teachers and I'll say I never enjoyed it because she used to beat me so hard that I often thought of escaping from school. As a mother, she was very sweet but I never brought myself to believe that she was the same woman when we went to school. When I went to the upper primary, I was glad to know that I would no longer be in her class.

In 1963 after I had passed my K.A.P.E. I went to St Mary's Secondary School in Murang'a town. I never liked the school and before the end of my first year, I applied for a place at New Nairobi High School, later renamed St. Mark's High School. I did not care what kind of a school it was, all I wanted was to be in Nairobi. If only I knew Nairobi would turn me into a helpless person I would have hated the look of it for good as I now do. My brother Sammy who had caught up with me in primary school was also in Nairobi, at the Prince of Wales School. He was a boarder but I was a day student, so mother took me to stay with her brother in Bahati.

After two years in secondary school, I did my K.J.S.E. and got good results, I did not want to go back to school but since I did not have anything else to do, I was forced by circumstances to go back. In 1965, before the end

of the third year, I was expelled from school for taking part in a strike. I was the ring leader and so I was expelled with my followers. I never reported this to my parents, since I needed the money they gave me for school fees and the daily bus fare I got from my uncle. I would therefore wake up early as usual, taking my bag and busfare, and I would go to town. Sometimes I was given money to eat out and sometimes I would go home for lunch.

It would have worked out all right, or so I thought, if my brother Sammy had not interfered. I think he became jealous of the fact that I was fitting myself better with my school fees. I have told you of that part of my uncle since I always think that it was the cause of all my troubles. I was then used to town life, going from this nightclub to the other and I was sure there was nothing better in life except may be the movies. I do not know even today how my brother came to know about all this but he knew. He wrote home and informed my parents without my knowledge. They must have written to my uncle to tell him they would come, for as I came to work out later, he knew they were coming. My aunt was not aware for she would have told me since we were on very good terms. She had arrived a week before my parents.

One bright Saturday morning, my uncle told me not to go out to town. He said he would come back soon and wanted a word with me. I should have guessed then but I didn't. At about twelve my mother arrived, at four o'clock my father arrived with my brother Sammy. I was not surprised to see them for they used to make such visits at least once every month. In the evening when we had all taken our supper, my father started. We were all seated around the table discussing one thing or other. He said, 'How are you doing in school young boys?' I said I was doing well. Brother Sammy said he was doing well too.

'You look very bright these days Jack, very smart too. Seems-as if your uncle spares you a lot of pocket money.'

I did not answer him and neither did the phrase surprise me as it had been said to me several times since I left school. After a short silence, he turned to me again. I did not want to meet his eyes for if I did so, I would not be able to talk myself out of his many tricks.

'Jack I don't see why we should beat around the bush. I know as well as you do that you are no longer in school. For almost one year, you have cheated me off a handful of money intended for your school fees. Anyway, I will forget about that, but your foolish tricks have come to a brick wall. Now

tell me, why did you leave school?’

‘I was expelled,’ I said.

I knew the game was up. I knew too that he had not come there to persuade me to go back to school but to take me home back to the reserve, a place I had come to hate.

‘Why were you expelled?’ he asked me.

‘They said that I had engineered a strike because we were not getting enough text books and fees were high, but I was not involved.’

‘Then why didn’t you tell me? Why did you keep on asking me for your school fees if you are as good as you pretend to be? I would have taken you to another school or found you something better to do. Now you have wasted a lot of my money for nothing.’

He was now very annoyed. I was afraid he would start something worse but the fact that there were many people restrained him.

‘Anyway, you know the penalty,’ he continued. Pack everything you have for at this time tomorrow, you will be at home.’

For the first time since my father started talking, someone else spoke. It was my uncle. ‘Jack, say something. I never thought there would be a time you’d have nothing to say. Persuade your father not to take you home. You know I want you around here. Since you came I feel my house is more secure even when I am out.’

I was very annoyed for I knew he was mocking me. I knew he liked me as much as he liked a rattle snake beside him in bed. I knew he wanted me as far away from his house as possible, only he could not be frank enough to say so. I therefore turned to him and said, ‘Look here Tom, do not think even for one second that you’ll be able to cheat me and these people. I know as well as you do that you don’t like me. I have been standing between you and a lot of things you have always wanted to do. I realised this the day I came home earlier than my usual time only to find the door locked from the inside. You have now forgotten the way you behaved when I saw the girl you had brought home? That girl who sells Kenya Charity Sweepstake tickets on Government Road?’

I said that to let the others know that not only did I know that he brought women home, but that I also knew which women. Not that that was the particular girl who was then with him, but I wanted my accusations to have some weight. I also knew how harsh his wife was especially where other

women were concerned so I continued, ‘You also seem to have forgotten the other one who came and . . .’

My mother here interfered by telling me to behave myself and not show off in front of them, but before she managed to quieten me completely, my aunt jumped in. She seemed to think that my mother was defending her brother and she told her that if she did not mind her husband fooling about with other women, my aunt did and that it was her business if... There was a lot of noise as the men joined in, each telling his wife to hold her tongue. I was smiling broadly and for the first time since we had started talking, I felt happy.

When all was quiet, I stood up and looked at all surrounding the table. I then looked at the photos on the picture rail on the wall. I stared at each as if it were my first time to see them. I looked at my brother once more and I hated him. I then went to the window, drew the curtains a little bit, and looked outside. I saw a bus come to a stop, pick up some people and drop some.

‘This is what town life is like,’ I thought and went back to my seat. I was very quiet and did not say anything. As I sat down I forced a cough, wondering what would be next. I was well aware that this would be my last day in Nairobi as long as I was to stay under my parents’ rule. I also knew that I had spoilt everything. Even if I escaped from home after being taken there, Tom would not accommodate me even for a night. I therefore pulled myself together and prepared for the worst. I came to a conclusion that even if I went home, I would go back to Nairobi with or without their consent. We did not talk more that night, and after a time we all went to bed.

I tried to sleep but I could not. I had so many thoughts in my mind. But eventually I fell asleep. I woke up very late the following day. I did not want to talk to anybody so I took my box and started packing. By twelve o’clock that day we were at the Machakos bus stop waiting for a bus to Murang’a.

I did not give a damn for I was doing all that to please them. A day or two after arriving home, I would board another bus for Nairobi.

At home, I was welcomed by my young brothers and sisters. They were very happy to see me. They did not seem to know that it was not through my wish that I was at home. They were only very glad that I would be with them.

It was not too long before the schools closed and I was joined by other students of my village from various secondary schools. Then life at home was not very bad. We held many dance parties. It was also a pleasure to go out in

groups hunting for dames at night. The cash I had saved, about three hundred shillings, and that type of life persuaded me to stay at home for about a month. When time came for reopening schools, I was among the group that boarded the bus at Thuita Shopping Centre. I had not told anyone that I would go. I decided I would write to them when I got settled.

When we reached Murang'a, many students alighted there. I also alighted and boarded a Peugeot for Nairobi. I did not even tell my brother where I was off to.

Within two hours I was back in Nairobi. And within the next two, trouble struck. My box containing all my belongings disappeared. That left me with only the clothes I was wearing and six hundred shillings that I had taken from my father's coat. This is how it happened.

When I alighted from the Peugeot at Tea Room Hotel, I took my box and went towards the O.T.C. bus terminal. That is the place where I used to pass time while I was at school. I had not decided where I would search for accommodation. But I knew that wherever I went and was known, I would get accommodation for a day. I was well aware that relying on anyone to accommodate me for a week would be expecting too much. I put my box down and sat on a form in the waiting room. I was not new in Nairobi but I looked like a stranger. After resting for about thirty minutes, I left my box and went out. I was carried away by my thoughts. Then I remembered just in time that I had left my box behind. When I went in, I found a smartly dressed boy, almost my age, sitting right where I had been sitting. I did not become suspicious. He greeted me cheerfully and I returned his greetings cheerfully too.

'Is this your box?' he asked me.

'Yes it is mine.'

'Are you new here? Next time, don't leave your box unattended. This is Nairobi and you can lose it any time if you don't take care.'

'I am not new here. I stay in Bahati and I am on my way there. I just felt tired and thought of resting a little. Our school is opening next week on Monday,' I lied.

'Which is your school?' he asked.

'Nairobi School,' I lied again.

'I am also a student, from Parklands School,' he told me.

I could have believed him had he not tried to speak English. I decided that

if he ever went to school, he did not go beyond standard seven. He was clean and I liked him. We talked about this and that for some time until he decided that we should have some tea. He picked up my box and I followed him. He left it with a shoeshine boy at the door whom he talked to. I did not hear what he told him as I was some paces behind him. He then led me towards Kamangu Hotel. We took our seats and he ordered tea and some buttered toast. He got busy eating. After finishing, he ordered for two glasses of milk. He drank half a glass then stood up. He asked me to excuse him for a minute, to go for a short-call on the opposite side of the entrance to the hotel. I knew where the toilets were and therefore, I was not suspicious. I continued with my glass of milk and the toast that was still on the plate. By the time I completed eating, I must have been there alone for more than three minutes. I instantly remembered the stories I had heard of people being tricked that way and stood up immediately, without even remembering that none of us had settled the bill. As I reached the door, I was grabbed from behind by an angry waiter.

‘Hey, young boy, what’s the big idea? Do you want me to play rough with you right now?’

‘Sorry I was in a hurry.’

I took out a one-pound note and told him to deduct his dues. I was glad to see that he noticed I had more money in my wallet, lest he should think that I had been playing a game.

‘I’ll come back for the change,’ I said and went out.

When I reached where the shoeshine boy had been, I was surprised to see that the one we had left the box with was not the one who was sitting there. Moreover, the box was not where we had left it.

‘Where’s the owner of this stand?’ I asked the new man.

‘I am the owner. What do you want?’

‘And where is the man who was here about ten minutes ago?’

‘No one has been here except me since morning. I don’t share this stand with anyone. What is wrong?’

‘If you are the one who was here about ten minutes ago, you are then the one we left my box with. Where is it then?’

‘Are you sure you left your box with me? Are you sure you know what you are talking about?’

I was scared. I knew that these town crooks were very tough. He started

shouting at me and people started gathering. I did not want to make a scene. I tried to persuade him to lower his voice but instead, he shouted even more loudly. He wanted a showdown, something I guess he knew I couldn't stand. 'What am I to do?' I asked myself. Some of the people in the crowd were sympathetic. I tried to prove my innocence by saying I was a school boy. When they asked me whether he was really the man I had left my box with, I told them he was not, but the one we gave the box to was sitting there. I gave them the whole story. Some of them laughed and went away, and others advised me to call the police. That idea pleased me. I entered the booking room right at the corner and going to the telephone, dialled 999. A certain man approached me as I was dialling the number. He advised me to say that that was the man I had left my box with. He told me that if I said so, the man would agree to show the police the man who really went with my box.

'Hello, 999,' a hard voice said. 'Can I help you?'

'Yes Sir,' I said. 'What is your problem?'

'I am a school boy, Sir and I left my box with a certain shoeshine boy here and he has refused with it.'

'Is that all?'

'Yes, Sir.'

'Where are you?'

'I am at the O.T.C. booking office, Sir. He is just at the front door, sitting on his stool.'

'Okay, hang around and I'll send some policemen there in two minutes. Understand?'

'Yes, Sir.'

He hang up and I went out. There were people still around who knew what was going on. I could see that they were very curious to know what would happen. The man was still sitting where I had left him. He did not seem worried at all, even though he knew that I had been advised to call the police. He probably thought I would give the story just as I had given it to the crowd. If so, he was underrating me. I could tell by the scars on his face that he had known trouble. Everyone around was looking at me, telling me to give the story exactly as I had given it to them. Within a minute, I saw a Police 999 car turning from Duke Street (now Ronald Ngala) to Race Course Road. It stopped abruptly after passing the bus stop. Two police officers jumped over the three-foot-high fence and came straight to where we were. The crowd

scattered and stood some distance away. I was left alone with my man. One of the policemen looked at me and asked,

‘Are you the boy who has just phoned the police?’

‘Yes, Sir.’

‘And is this the man you talked about?’ he asked me, pointing with his forefinger at the shoeshine boy.

‘Yes, Sir, he is the one,’ I said.

‘Okay, get up you!’

He got hold of the man by the collar and hauled him to his feet. The other one got hold of his right arm and twisted it until he cried in pain. One cop turned to me and told me to follow them. The shoeshine boy was thrown into the police car. He did not protest in any way. I entered the car too. I was asked whether there was any person among the crowd who saw me leave the box with that man. I told them the only person who was there was the shoeshine boy’s customer and I did not know him. The other policeman said it was not necessary. In a minute, we were at Kamukunji Police Station.

‘Sometimes, even the oddest thing can turn out to be funny,’ I said to myself. ‘Here is me, Jack, back in Nairobi, but this time on my own. Within three hours after leaving home, I’ve lost my box. Within four, I am seated in a police station writing a statement and giving a phoney story, a story that has been hammered into my head by a stranger!’

Anyway, that was only the beginning. The Swahili say that what you are not taught by your parents, you’ll be taught by the world. I think that was the time the world started teaching me, and it has really taught me.

At the police station, the shoeshine boy was taken to the cells. I then gave my story to a Police Inspector who sympathised with me. The shoeshine boy was then called and asked to explain. He rejected my version of the story and said that I had given it differently from the way I had given it to the crowd at the O.T.C. offices. He gave his own account but no one listened to him. He was then ushered into an inner room where I could hear him being ‘worked on’. He was beaten until he could not talk, but he stuck to his story. After some minutes, he was locked in the cells. I was asked for my address by the Inspector and I gave a false one. I also gave a false name.

By this time, I was convinced that I would not get my box back. I knew too that they were asking for my address so that they could later come for me to be a prosecution witness when the shoeshine boy was taken to court. I had no

time for that. I did not even know where I would be by then. Later, they asked me if I would like them to take me to my uncle but I said I was alright. I walked out of the office and out of the police station.

That night, I slept in a lodging at the Small World Night Club, drunk and with a whore beside me for the first time. I spent about one hundred shillings, including the ten shillings I gave her the following morning. After washing myself, I went out to the shops and bought myself a new box and some clothes. After buying the lot, I had only 175 shillings left. 'How long will that push me?' I wondered.

For some months after finishing all the money I had, I really got into problems. I would sometimes get very hungry until once I thought of selling the clothes I had. When I went to a man who was selling second-hand clothes, he told me he would give 3 shillings for a shirt I had bought for over 30 shillings. When I asked him how much he would give me for my watch which was worth 100 shillings, he said he would not give more than 7 shillings. I got annoyed and left him. I did not have a penny in my pockets and I had not eaten for almost two days. The previous night I had slept in the open. It made me remember the Prodigal Son. He, however, was better off. He had leaves to eat. But I had nothing except the stones on the roadside. Can you imagine someone swallowing a stone? I left Kariakor where I had gone to sell my clothes and went towards the town centre. On my way, a beggar by the roadside stretched out his arms with much hope. I nearly hit him. He was better off than I was. He had the guts to beg! I did not, and I was even tempted to pick 30 cents from the ground, between his legs. Believe me, I nearly picked the money. I did not meet anybody who could have mercy upon a dying man, I did not even meet those I knew. All the faces I met were new.

At O.T.C. I entered the booking office and sat down on one of the forms as if I was waiting for a bus. I still had my suitcase. The place was very crowded that day for it was the end of the month, and a weekend. Everybody, except me, seemed very busy. There was also a boy about my age who seemed busy too. He also had a box. What attracted me to him was the way in which he behaved. He seemed very uneasy. I watched him for lack of something to do and also to keep myself from the thought that I was hungry. I had not eaten two suppers and a lunch. This was yet another lunch-time and I still had nothing to eat. Suddenly, I saw him look from side to side and, satisfied that

he was not being watched, he pulled a wallet from the back pocket of an old, well-suited padre. The wallet was quite fat. For no reason at all, I was filled with fear, my heart skipped a beat, my hands started shaking and yet, I was not the one who was pick-pocketing. As the wallet left the pocket, the boy turned and saw that I was staring at him with my mouth wide open. The boy put the wallet in his breast pocket. He passed near me and signalled me to follow him. I knew he was afraid that I might raise an alarm, but he was wrong. That was one of the few things I could not do. I followed him to Kaka Hotel. When we were seated, he ordered food for both of us. People were very busy there and none seemed to notice the other. As we waited for our order, he told me, 'Next time, never stare at someone that way. You almost made the padre suspicious.'

'What do you do for a living?' he asked me.

'I am one of you,' I answered. When it comes to questions and answers, I am very good at them. I never hesitate answering.

'A pick-pocket you mean?'

'Yes, when I am badly off.'

'And why did you seem so surprised?'

'I wanted you to think exactly as you did and to do just what you did.'

'I followed that man for over two hours. He was given that cash by his own son at G.P.O. Since then, we have gone to a hundred and one places. He bought so many things that I was afraid that he would have nothing left for me. But he had plenty.'

'Bring my share so that I may pay for my plate. Things may turn hot and each run his own way. As you said, I also thought that the padre got suspicious. He may burst in here any minute.'

Thieves are very funny. They are cowardly. I did not expect this one to part with anything so easily. To my surprise, he looked left and right and satisfied that nobody was interested in our presence, he took out the wallet. The waiter brought our orders and the boy put the hand with the wallet under the table. When the waiter went, he unzipped the wallet, under the table. I bent to his side and made sure that I saw all the contents in the wallet. My curiosity had outdone my hunger. Brother, the wallet was not fat for nothing. My first sight told me that there was not less than 800 shillings. There was a small bundle of one-hundred-shilling notes and another of fifty-shilling-notes. The red ones were seven and the others were six. He gave me four of

the red ones and two of the fifty-shilling-notes. I did not even want to know what the inner pocket of the wallet contained. Five hundred shillings for nothing was too much. I quickly pocketed my cash and then I remembered that I was hungry. When I started eating, I did it at a rather astonishing speed.

My man then gave me the wallet and told me to go and get rid of it on my way home. That thing really gave me a hardtime. Before then, I had never held a stolen article or cash in my hands, except the 600 shillings that I had taken from my father's coat, but I counted that as my share. Mother had given my brother more than that for fees the same day I left home. I was fearing that after I had dumped the wallet, the police would find it and search for finger-prints. I thought that they could trace me anywhere as soon as the prints were detected. That was how naive I was then.

After finishing our lunch, we got busy talking. I learnt that my man lived at Makadara where he shared a room with two other boys. The room cost them 100 shillings per month.

'Can that room of yours take four beds? I want to shift from where I stay. The police are frequenting that area too much these days. I am staying in Eastleigh Section Two,' I lied.

'You are lucky Jack. One of the boys is shifting tomorrow. He is going to stay with his girl in Kangemi. His girl's mother, who owned a plot there, died last month and she asked him to go and stay with her. So tomorrow you can shift. That boy might have gone even today. We shall go together there and see what is going on.'

'Thank you. Let us go and have a bottle or two somewhere,' I told him.

We left the hotel and went to Kayu Bar. When we had taken about three bottles of beer each, there entered two gentlemen who made my friend turn almost stiff. He did not even want us to drain the half glasses of beer we had on the table. After paying the bill, we hurriedly left. He took me to Jamii Bar. We drank for some hours and at around nine o'clock, we went and hired a taxi to Makadara. Once there, he led me to a block of flats at the far corner of Makadara Avenue and opened his room. He lit the room and I saw that, although it had three beds, there was plenty of room for one more bed. I was not very drunk as I never take much when drinking with a new person. The room also had a table and three dining chairs near the window, at one corner.

The following morning, we woke up late. None of the other boys had come but I could judge by their belongings that they knew their way around. I also

learned that the boy who was shifting was a clerk with M.O.W., that is, the Ministry of Works. My friend, who I discovered was called Wanjau, told me to go and bring my belongings. He said that he would wait for me to come back, and also see if the other man would come.

In town, I bought myself a Vono bed, a mattress and two pillows. The bed was big enough for two and I knew that, at times, I would have visitors. I then bought three blankets, two sheets, and a bed cover. I was ready with cooked up reasons why I had to buy new beddings. I then hired a taxi and within a short time, I was back at Makadara. I found the man who was moving just about to go, and Wanjau introduced us. I took his former position in the room and I made my bed. Nothing more was necessary. For one thing, no one cooked there. None had a wife. So, at long last, I got a place where I could rest my limbs, after sleeping on the pavements for some days. The next day, we got information that the other occupant of the room had been arrested. He had then been in for two days. He had been arrested after a fight at night. He was taken to the police station and after his fingerprints were taken to the C.R.O. for checking, the results showed that those were the same finger-prints which were found on an abandoned car that had been stolen outside Ambassadeur Hotel, and which had been used as a get-away car in a certain robbery in South C. At the police station, when we went to see him, he told us the whole story but there was nothing we could do to help him. Months later, he was found guilty of stealing a car and was sentenced to five years imprisonment. He was discharged on the robbery charge, for the prosecution witnesses could not identify him. So the room now was for the two of us. The one thing with criminals is that they pay their house rent in advance. Right then, they had paid for over three months. Since one person was already in prison, and the other one had shifted, I was entitled to their share of the rent.

It was a very nice room and I enjoyed the time I stayed in it. I was now becoming my own boss and depending on myself, bringing women home whenever I felt like it. I had become so close to Wanjau that we never left each other's side. He was a well-behaved person.

So, now here I was back in Nairobi and on my own, but this time with a different occupation. I was now a pick-pocket under instruction. I had so far managed to pick the pockets of about six people and had got away with about I,500 shillings which I had shared with Wanjau. He was, of course, a

professional and I, only an amateur. Of those six times, I was almost caught thrice and so I had already started hating the job. Anyway, at the end of every month, we managed to make more than 3,000 shillings. So rent and clothes were no problem. The worst thing, and especially for me, was the risk involved. Most of the time, Wanjau did the picking but there were times when he would tell me to do it. But as I was very new at it, I depended on him very much.

Months and months passed, and now I had come to know several barmaids and common prostitutes in town. I had changed greatly. For over a year, I had not visited home nor had I got any reports from or about my people there. I did not even know the fate of my brother who, by then, had done his school certificate. Within that time, I had been in and out of various police stations more than ten times. I had been fined three times for being drunk and disorderly, and two more times for assault, and the other times, I was lucky to get away with merely entering the dock.

Within two years, that is, between 1965 and 1967, I had become known to many criminals, from robbers, car breakers, shop breakers to car thieves and racketeers. I had also come to be known by the name of Jack Zollo. I left the risky job of picking pockets and joined car breakers. This was risky too but not half as risky as picking pockets. Besides, the job paid almost twice as much as the other one. We broke into tourists' cars mostly, or cars that we had good reason to believe carried enough goods.

I had joined a group of three boys who had been in the job for some time. Later, I came to understand that these boys were tricky. We would break into a car and get three or four expensive cameras, pairs of binoculars, tape-recorders, radios, suitcases with dollars inside, and such. But when it came to selling them, the boys never gave me the right figure of the amount they had received. So they wisened me up. If one got cash which the others were not aware of, he would keep it for himself. So after sharing what you all knew about, he would disappear until he had finished what he had. The others would run broke far ahead of him. When a thief has enough cash, he will not take a job, however much it might pay. So if you have a job that needs four people, and you are only three, you are handicapped and you have to find other means to get some cash to push ahead until the fourth member of your gang runs broke.

One night, Wanjau failed to come home for the night. I was surprised, for

we had agreed that no one should sleep out without notifying the other. We had agreed that if one of us went missing, the other was to go to various police stations within the town to check. I, therefore, left home at around eight the following morning. I had a terrible hang-over but I knew that two pints of milk would do the trick. I had left him the previous night, in Rwathia Night Club, talking to a bar-maid called Jane Njeri. He had assured me, in front of her, that he would come home, and now that he did not come, I took it that the girl knew his whereabouts.

I alighted the bus at Tusker House and crossed the road towards Terrace Hotel. Outside the hotel, someone caught me by the right arm. It was the very girl I was looking for.

‘Zollo, did you go to see Wanjau in Central Police Station?’ she asked me before saying anything else.

‘I am not aware that he is there. In fact, I left home to come and see you so that I may know what happened. So he is in Central? What did he do?’

‘I don’t know for sure. He left me sitting at the very corner you left us last night and he went to the toilets. As he was coming back, a man and a girl, followed by three policemen, came and pointed at him and said, “This is one of them. They were three and I recognised this one because of the red polo neck he is wearing.”

‘But he was not wearing a red polo-neck when I left him. He had on a black V-shaped sweater. He also had a black corduroy coat. So when did he change into a red polo neck?’

‘Just about ten minutes after you left, a man he later told me was called Kaniaru, came in a hurry as if he had been chased. When he saw Wanjau, he told him to follow him to the toilets. When they came out, Wanjau was wearing the red polo neck. The other man was wearing the sweater and the corduroy coat and he went upstairs. Three minutes later, the police and the two arrived. He did not even try to defend himself. In fact, he did not even get the chance to. The girl was screaming at him and I noticed her dress was torn at the breasts. As for the man, he was not speaking but his forehead was bleeding slightly.’

‘My God, that is robbery with violence, and there is nothing I can do to help him. If I go to see him at the station, I will be arrested as one of the other two. Now, this is what you will do. I’ll give you some money to buy a Thermos flask, some tea and a loaf of bread, take them to him. He won’t be

able to eat but you must do it. He will then tell you what he wants us to do. I will come and see you at Rwathia at around lunch time. Understand?’

‘Yes I understand,’ she said.

I gave her the cash and we parted. I was quite sure that that was the end of the road for Wanjau. He would get no less than fourteen years. The new law on robbery with violence was by then at its worst and everyone arrested and charged under it was going in, whether he was guilty or not. There were two people to say that he was one of the crooks who attacked them. How was the judge to know that they were lying? At the same time I was quite sure that Wanjau was not going to tell the truth about what really happened. He would not say that he had exchanged clothes with a man he believed was escaping arrest. It would only prove that they were together. Wanjau was sentenced to fifteen years imprisonment with twenty strokes of the cane. He was given the right of appeal within two weeks. It was all useless to appeal, for nothing happened. I am with him in prison as I write this book.

Now, I was all alone in the house at Makadara. I was to pay 100 shillings at the end of the next month but that was not the problem. The problem was these beds and the boxes belonging to the two in prison. I did not know where any of them came from. When I went to Kamiti Prison to inquire about Wanjau, I was told that he was not there. When I asked where he could have been taken to, I was told he might be in Mombasa. Well, I was not going to go all the way to Mombasa just to ask a criminal where his home was. And for the other one, I did not even know his name. The M.O.W. clerk who went to stay with his girlfriend never turned up since his departure. So what else was I to do but to sell all their lot to the landlord? After all, I wanted to buy modern furniture for the room now that I was alone. I had to keep pretending to be a qualified clerk somewhere. I even had to bring more decent girls home.

All this happened within two years. And in those two years, nobody in my family knew of my whereabouts. I had never even met one accidentally – not even Tom, my uncle.

CHAPTER TWO



One day, a few weeks after I had cleared the house of my mates' property, I lay on my bed thinking of how I would fill the room with better furniture. I wanted to buy at least one or two sofa sets as the room was large enough to hold them now that it had only one bed, about three tables, a small wardrobe, a kitchen cupboard and a charcoal burner, a stove, cooking utensils, a carpet and better curtains. When I estimated their total cost on rough paper, I found that they needed something close to 2,000 shillings. But right then as I was holding the pen, I had only a little over 100 shillings. That was 1,900 shillings less.

'From where do I get the rest?' I asked myself.

I felt hungry and got up. I put on my shoes and my coat, and I decided to take my lunch in town. So after locking my house, I boarded a bus for town. I went to Terrace Hotel and I was about to finish my lunch when a friend of mine called Captain Ngugi entered. He was with another man whom he introduced me to. I ordered some lunch for them. These boys were so natty that they made me feel a little inferior, smart as I was. Over the lunch at the lonely corner where we were, Captain told me a story that entered my veins.

'Zollo, this friend of mine and I want a man we can trust,' he started.

I could see that he was looking from side to side to make sure that no one was listening. There wasn't anyone near so he continued.

'I am well aware of the job you do and most of you guys are too cowardly to take on a big job. A job like robbery I mean. But what I want you to know is that whether you like it or not, you will once be in the job. Anyway, as you can see, two of your gang members are now in prison. I understand that Wanjau was imprisoned for fifteen years, yet he has never robbed in his goddam life. He was your friend and you know that he would not have robbed anybody or connected himself with anybody who would go for robbery. So I guess, as a wise boy, you must have learned a lesson there. Now then, we would like you to join us in a certain job. Are you going to take it?'

I considered all the facts silently and quickly. It was true I feared robbery as it carried a very severe sentence. But then, I considered Wanjau's case: fifteen years for nothing? Then two of my members had been caught red-handed breaking into a car. When they tried to escape, one was shot in the leg and the other in the neck. The latter almost died but he was lucky because the bullet passed through the muscles of his neck and went out without severing any artery. Still it had made him fall down flat as if he had been hit with a one-ton cosh at the back of his head. Fingerprints from the cars they had broken into were brought up in court. They got eleven years with thirty-three strokes. The third fact was that I needed money to furnish my house. I was sure that I could get money on my own, but right then, I had no plans. The amount I wanted this time was quite a lot and after all, I could not expect things 'to fall from above' as people from my home-area used to say. I would do it whatever the consequences, I concluded. "What was more risky than picking people's pockets?" I asked myself. Captain knew I was thinking about it and he gave me time to do it. I knew one of their gangsters had earlier retired after sharing a total of 80,000 shillings from a robbery. He had bought a Peugeot 404 family saloon for road services.

'What is the job?' I asked Captain.

'I told you it is robbery with violence.'

My heart skipped a beat when he added the words 'with violence.' Where violence was concerned, the court was very strict.

'You told me that before, but where is the job?'

'It is not a tough job, Zollo, so stop trembling. It will need only four of us, and it is not in town. It will be outside a certain bank in Westlands. A certain white man will be taking his money there with a big bag and your only job will be to snatch it. I will be covering you, and this man here will be covering the driver. Simple as that. Now the question is this, are you taking the job?'

'Supposing I do, when will it take place?'

'No suppositions! Are you taking the job or do we go and find someone else?'

'Okay! You win. When do we pull it off?'

'Tomorrow morning at half past nine. Where do you stay?'

'In Eastleigh Section Two,' I lied, for I did not see the reason why he should know where I stayed.

'I see. You know Westlands very well, don't you?'

‘I do, yes.’

‘Alright. We will meet at Agip Motel in Westlands, four of us, so that we may all know each other. So far, it is only the driver you haven’t met and I guess you know him. Everything is ready and all you have to do is to come early and arm yourself with a simi.

‘What the hell do I need the simi for if my only job is to snatch?’

‘Things might go wrong, you fool, and you may need to defend yourself with it. Or do you think it is your father’s money we are going for? He may play it tough and refuse with the dough. You have never dealt with these white people. You wait and see.

Now he was making me really sweat. If the white man played it tough with me, then I was sunk. And Captain talked as if he was sure that the white man would not part with the bag easily!

At the bar, Captain ordered three bottles of beer for each one of us. There was no more to be discussed, so I drained mine in haste and excused myself. Captain went out with me to rebrief me.

‘Come at around eight so that we may have time to arrange our positions. Our driver is working on the car so I cannot tell you for sure its registration number. All I know is that it is a Cortina GT. You will know the rest when you come. Remember the simi, for it can turn out to be very helpful sometimes. You may need a newspaper too to keep you busy while waiting. Not for reading though, because if you take too much interest in it, you might not notice him. I will point out the European to you long before he goes to bring the money, so it will not be hard for you to identify him. Is there anything you don’t understand?’

‘Well, I guess not. I’ll be ready with everything. You can rely on me Captain,’ I said.

That pleased him very much. The way in which he had briefed me made me like him. With his education, you would not have thought he could be a robber. He had lost three responsible jobs. Then he had thought it wise to try the other side of the law. When he was sure that I was well informed, he wished me a good time and went back to the bar. I was feeling very nervous and I wanted time to rest and to think.

I boarded a bus outside Terrace Hotel and in thirty minutes, I was in my house resting and thinking. This was the first time that an idea of going to rob had been put into my mind. The thought of the prison sentence it carried

broke my heart into pieces. But now that I had agreed to participate, there was no turning back; if I cared for my peace, which I did.

‘Well, if this room is not filled within a week from now, it will never be filled,’ I said to myself.

Then, still deep in thought, I got up and went outside to the place where I kept my simi. I took it out, wrapped it in a sweater then I entered the house with it. I was sure no one noticed. I unwrapped it and saw that it was as fine as I had kept it months back. I had not bought it for committing robberies. Most criminals keep simis for self-defence. We were always in trouble, either with the police, or with the other criminals. It looked very new and sharp too. I put it on the bed, then lit a cigarette. As I lit it, I heard a steady knock at the door. ‘Good God! What am I in for now?’ I asked loudly, hiding the simi under the pillow. As I did so, and before I had admitted in the knocker, the door opened, and a girl I recognised as one of the tenants in the same plot I was living in, came in. I had never talked to her before, despite the fact that we were staying in the same block. It was her first time to enter the room as far as I knew.

‘Welcome, Miss. How do you do?’

‘Oh thank you. How do you do? When I noticed you were in, I thought I should visit you for you never invite us here and neither do you talk to us.’

She said this as I pointed to the bed for a seat. There were no chairs. The only ones that had been there had long gone with the M.O.W. clerk to his girlfriend’s. The seats I could now provide were a suitcase, a wooden box and a bed.

‘I have no chairs here Miss, so please select the place that most suits you.’ She sat on the bed.

‘Then tell me, you and who else don’t I invite, or didn’t I hear your remark well?’

‘You heard me well Zollo. I am talking about my room-mate and me.’

‘You know my name then? How did you come across it?’

‘Wanjau was a friend of mine, though you did not know. Not much of a friend anyway,’ she said as an after-thought. ‘To put it more correctly, he was an acquaintance. So he told me of you when you came to live here.’

‘Well, that takes care of that. Now we come to your problem. I guess you didn’t come all the way to introduce yourself or just to make me know that you know me. Isn’t that so, Miss?’

I was being rude, deliberately. One thing I never liked was getting too acquainted with whores around my residential area. Supposing I came home with a new girl and they made a scene? Moreover, I was breaking most of my connections with prostitutes as a whole, and especially such as this one. But the most important reason for my rudeness was that, right then, I wanted to be left completely alone. I could see that she was about to notice the simi under the pillow, as part of it was protruding. She wasn't even sitting still on the bed, and kept on wriggling her buttocks and in the process, moving the pillows from their positions.

'Don't be rude, Zollo. Must you be that way even to a visitor?'

'I am not rude, Miss. That is the way I talk if you must know. Talk business and I guess that way we will understand each other. If it is about being broke and you want to give me a ride for a pound, I am sorry to inform you that I am impotent. For as long as I have stayed with you here, you will have noticed that I never bring women home. If you have seen one, know that she is here for other businesses. I wonder why Wanjau didn't tell you this.'

'You must be very naughty, Zollo, or maybe I came in at the wrong time. I'll excuse you for the time being, but count on it that I'll come back one of these days when you are in the right mood.'

'Save your calories for future use and for someone else, baby. I never want company and if I ever do, I know where to get it from. Anyway, I wish you a nice time. Don't see me again if you want peace.'

When she had gone, I took the simi and locked it in the wooden box. I went back and lay on the bed. I felt so uneasy, until I began to think the girl was right when she suggested that I needed company. I even wondered why I had turned that girl down in such a hurry. May be her presence would have made me forget this thing that was stinging my head. I really needed company. I must have fallen asleep without knowing, for when I woke up, I was in total darkness and my watch claimed it was ten minutes past eight. I felt hungry. I put on the light, put on my coat and I went out in search of supper.

Back home after supper, I selected a Drum magazine and tried to read. I couldn't. I took the day's newspaper which I had bought, but that too couldn't do me any good. I felt that I couldn't stay alone that night so I went out and boarded a bus for town.

I went to the New Rwathia. As I was taking my second bottle of beer, a

girl invited herself and sat on a chair beside me. She refused to take any intoxicants and I ordered some soda for her. We introduced ourselves, me giving a false name. After some bottles, I proposed that we should go to some place if she did not have any more business around. She agreed on the usual terms, and so we left.

Back in Makadara, I sat on the bed and started thinking: 'Here I am, back in my house, sitting on a bed with a girl who, no doubt, will demand a pound tomorrow morning, and yet, some hours earlier, I turned down one, who I was sure was offering herself to me free-of-charge. Now the trouble is, I must wake up very early tomorrow so that I can get rid of this one, and then prepare myself for the greatest risk I have ever taken.' I thought of praying, and in the darkness, I said the Lord's prayer. That was as much as I could do. I was not going to pray to God to help me as I was about to fornicate, and I was not going to pray that God help me because the following day I was going to rob a white man of his money. 'My God! What should I do?' The girl touched me and all that faded away. She was definitely earning her pound. Before I slept, I asked her to make sure she woke me up early, in case I overslept.

When I woke up the following morning, I felt very fine. I took a bath and selected a suit. I then took my Kimono and wore it. The girl was ready. I took her to the bus stop and I went back home.

I now took the simi and placed it against the outer side of my left thigh. I then tightened my belt, to hold the simi in place. I noticed, as I lit a cigarette, that my hands were very steady. I went to a nearby tea kiosk where I could only stand, and ordered a pint of milk and some buttered toast.

'If all goes well, I will be a rich boy when I pass here again,' I thought. 'But then, if it turns out the other way round, this is the last pint of milk I will have for years.' An instinct told me to hope for the best but to be prepared for the worst.

At about a quarter to eight, I was at the Agip Motel. I had a Daily Nation newspaper, and I pretended to be busy reading and waiting for somebody.

Through the corner of my eye, I saw Captain Ngugi and his friend. They seemed very happy to see me, as if they had not expected me to turn up. They led me to where the driver, David Mwangi, was. We knew each other and I was glad that he was our driver. It was going to be my first time to travel in a stolen car after a raid and I felt very uneasy. I knew Mwangi had done a good

job to get the car but that did not make me feel any better. A few yards from where our car was, a white man came and parked a Citroen. Captain told me to look at him very closely. He closed his car and entered the Motel. After about thirty minutes, he came out and went off in his car.

Captain said, 'Now when he comes again he will be carrying a large brown bag. In it will be not less than 30,000 shillings. Mwangi, you will park the car facing the road. When you see the white man, you start the engine. Sammy will be somewhere near you in case you are suspected by a pedestrian. You, Zollo, will be reading the paper near the bank as if you are a customer, waiting for it to open. He will come facing you and I'll be behind you. You'll start walking as if you just remembered something you ought to do before you get into the bank and as you pass him, you will snatch the bag, jump forward and take out your simi. And by the time you do that, I will have worked on him pretty well. I assure you he will not try to hold you after what I'll have done.'

'Only make sure you don't cut him to death. I can't stand a murder trial,' I said.

"I have got better ideas than cutting up young people. You are new in this, you wait and see. And Mwangi, as we come make sure all the doors are open. Zollo and Sammy will use the back seat, and take care you don't drop that bag in fear.

We went to the bank and each took his position. Mwangi was not there. He was to bring the car when he saw the Citroen. I got busy reading the paper or pretending to read. A man passed by and I saw him stare at the paper I was reading, and then at me. I thought he could see what I carried inside my coat. Some yards away from me, he looked at me and stopped. He was a Luo. I got frightened. I looked at myself closely to make sure that there was no visible sign of my carrying a simi, then satisfied, I looked at him. He smiled at me and went away. As I looked at my paper again, I noticed that I had been reading it upside down. I also smiled as I turned it the right side up and I knew then that it was the reason the man thought I was phoney around there, if that is what he thought. The bank had just opened.

The red Citroen arrived just as I was turning over another page. My heart increased its beats by one or two. I felt heat all over me. At the corners of my eyes I saw Captain, who had not changed his position, then I saw Mwangi parking the car as agreed. Sammy came up to him and greeted him joyfully as

if they had not met for years. I then saw Mwangi light a cigarette. I turned round and looked at Captain who winked at me. The white man was by then locking his car holding a large brown bag with his left hand. He then started coming towards the bank. I closed and folded my newspaper and put it in my coat pocket I also felt for the simi and satisfied myself that it was there. I was trembling but not too much to be noticed. When he was about four meters away from me, I started moving towards him pretending not to notice him. He had shifted the bag to the right hand so I kept left. Just as I was about to pass him I snatched the bag so strongly that instead of the bag being in my possession, I fell down some yards away from it. I had not expected a gun shot. I did not even know that we had one. The first thought that entered my mind was that it was the police. I gripped the simi very tightly then I heard Captain's voice, 'Don't you dare touch that boy, put your hands up and face the other way.'

It was then that I took the bag and fled into the get-away car, which was then in the centre of the road with its doors open. Captain fired some more shots in the air as we entered the car. The pistol shots frightened me so much that I did not notice that I had dropped my simi. In fact, I only came to know it was lost as we were abandoning our car. We drove off towards town, passed Central Police Station, then entered Government Road until we found our way to Eastleigh Section II. We abandoned the car and went off with our bag full of money. On the Thirteenth Street, Mwangi opened a room and we went inside. I was sweating. I did not mention the loss of my simi for if I did, I knew they would all be as restless as I was and there could be none to ease the other's burden.

The cash was all poured on to the bed. So many hundred shilling notes, fifty, twenty, ten and five. I was given the job of counting as I was regarded as being fresh from school. I did it but it was with a great struggle that I managed to hide my shock. I had never seen so much money before and had never expected to. A total of 33,000 shillings.

Captain said, 'Okay, divide the cash between five people and keep it in bundles.'

'No!' Mwangi said. 'First take out the 3,000 shillings on top. Then keep five heaps of 6,000 shillings each.'

I did that. I was not asking any questions. All I wanted was to get my share and run as far away as I could from that house. After getting my six thousand,

I did not even want to know where the rest was to be taken though it was explained to me later. The information had come from the white man's chauffeur and he was entitled to a share. Then the one who had given us his gun would get the other six thousand. I filled all my pockets with money in a hurry and stood up. Captain looked at me and asked, 'Where is your simi?'

'I have got it here,' I lied, indicating where it had been before.

'I told you there would be no trouble. Now look, you have got six grand of your own. You would never get that much in your former job. Now you have teamed up with us and we admit you in our company. You acted a bit frightened but it was alright since it was your first robbery. Next time, you will do better.'

'Okay boys, I want to run along. I have other things to do,' I said. They all stood up and we went out. Once in the street, each went his own way. I took a bus to town and at Tusker House, I alighted, crossed Duke Street (now Ronald Ngala) and outside Terrace Hotel, I boarded another bus for Makadara. I was feeling every eye on me. I thought everyone I met was suspicious and I thanked God for not letting me meet a cop, for I would have given myself away. The money was feeling pretty hot in my pockets.

At Makadara, I passed the very kiosk where I had taken milk and buttered toast earlier and I smiled when I remembered my thoughts. One of the thoughts had come true: I was very rich. I opened my house and entered. I took off my Kimono and my coat and hung them on the wall. I went to the bed and sat down. I noticed I was sweating a lot. That was my first time to have such an amount of money and I was a bit confused. I thought of buying a second-hand car, then I remembered that I would have to employ driver. I thought of buying a plot, then I remembered that it cost over 30,000 shillings. I realised that that money had confused me completely. I took out a cigarette and lit it. As I was putting the lighter back, it fell down and as I was picking it up, I saw a piece of paper under the bed and I took it. It had the estimate of the house furniture I was planning to buy. I had completely forgotten all about it.

'What kind of a man am I proving to be?' I asked myself. I had agreed to take the risk because I wanted to furnish my house and now that I had more money than I wanted, the idea had vanished from my mind. I thought of going to town right then but remembered it must be hot. If I went out buying all those things so soon after we had pulled a job, I would look suspicious. So

that must wait until tomorrow or the day after. Again, it was some days to the end of the month, and most people were broke, but that did not matter much. I could be taken for a businessman, and those always have money. Even at the time when people say 'the month is at the corner', money is always circulating. It does not mean that all the money is locked up somewhere and taken out only at the end of the month. So I decided to buy the furniture the following day. I would also buy a radio and a record player. 'A tape-recorder too would do, if all goes well,' I said to myself. I opened the suitcase and arranged the notes there in order of value, from five-shilling notes to fivers. I took two fifty-shilling notes and went out. I felt I needed something to cool my body. I was sweating too much for my comfort. I did not want to go to town and I did not even want to meet anybody who knew me. So I thought the best thing was to go to a location where I was not known. I decided to go to Jericho and I set off on foot. At Jericho Social Hall, I stopped for about three minutes to read some adverts on movies and dances. I decided I would see the movies and attend the dances when their time came. In any case, I would not miss both. I entered a bar, went to the hotel-room and ordered for some food. It was a bit too early for a beer. So I ordered a pint of condensed milk from the refrigerator and started relaxing.

As I was draining the last drop of milk from the glass, I felt someone touch me at the neck. A very soft hand that I knew, even before I turned, belonged to a female. That was the greatest surprise I had had for the past three years. Behind me stood my sister. When I looked up, she was staring at me with her mouth wide open. I guess her mouth could see better than her eyes! I was surprised to see her alright, but not half as surprised as she was to see me. Behind her stood a very natty, medium-aged man, about five feet ten, brown, with a shallow face. There was something about him that made my heart skip a beat. He also came forward and looked at me, smiling broadly. My sister spoke first. 'Jack, it can't be you. All those years . . .!' She could not go further. She started weeping. The man comforted her and then asked me to follow them out. As we went out, she stopped weeping and started sighing. I remembered that I had not settled my bill and I went back to pay. Then I joined them outside.

'Sony Connie, I didn't mean to run away from you but I had to run away from home.'

'We will talk about that later. Let us go to my place.'

So I followed them. She was not even able to introduce me to the man she was with. The other surprise was that she was telling me to go with her to her home, and the last time I saw her, over two years back, she was at home, teaching in Thuita school. Now she was talking about her home in Nairobi!

Ten minutes later, we stood in front of a house in Uhuru Estate and she was knocking at the door. A maid opened it and we entered a very well-furnished room with a heavy carpet and a very fine double sofa set. I selected a seat and made myself comfortable. The man spoke. Mary, so this is the brother you are always talking about, eh?’

‘Yes, he is the one.’ Then turning to me she added, ‘Jack, meet Kamau, my husband. We have been married for over a year now. You can see these photographs.’

She picked two different wedding photos from the picture rail on the wall and showed them to me. The first one was of her and her husband, the other was of both families. I looked at my mother closely and saw she was somehow excited. My father was lifting his right hand with the forefinger up indicating peace. He was grinning. Brother Sammy had his whole mouth wide open. Three of my younger sisters were wearing the uniform of brides maids. Everyone else in my family was there except me. Satisfied, I looked up. I saw then the shock on her face had vanished and she looked herself again. We stared at each other until I looked away. In fact I was not enjoying myself. I loved that girl so much that I hated the thought that she got married in my absence. But then who was to blame? None of us, I concluded.

I then shook hands with my brother-in-law. I was glad to meet him. He appeared to me as one of those characters you feel safe when he is around. Then the endless questions and answers started. ‘Why did you run away? Where do you stay? What do you do? When will you go back home? Would you like any help?’ and so many others. But as I have told you, I am very good at answers and reasoning. I gave them such a story that I almost believed it myself. At last I said to Connie, ‘I am sorry you got married in my absence, but anyway there is nothing I could have done to make it look better than it appears in the photos. I wish you happiness and best wishes. Now that I have known your home, I will be visiting you.’ What else could I say? The radio started playing ‘Kanu Yajenga Nchi’ which meant that it was time for the news. My mind had been so occupied with the encounter with my sister that I had forgotten everything else. When the reader started the news in

brief, we kept quiet. But my mind was not on the news. There was nothing in my mind except the happiness and confusion after meeting my sister Connie whom I loved more than any other member of my family. I was not in any case very good at listening to radios. I preferred newspapers though they are always twelve hours late. Then I heard it. "FOUR BANDITS GOT AWAY WITH 33,000 SHILLINGS OUTSIDE A BANK IN WESTLANDS THIS MORNING." I almost jumped out of my seat. I had forgotten all that. I now listened more attentively.

'Four bandits armed with a pistol and simis got away with 33,000 shillings outside KCB in Westlands this morning. The money was being taken to the bank by the manager of Lava's Wool Ltd. After snatching the money, they fired a bullet in the air, forcing the manager to put up his hands and to turn round facing the wall. A young boy estimated to be between 18 and 23 and smartly dressed snatched the bag. While struggling to enter the get-away car, he dropped his simi. The police are working on his prints. An early arrest is expected.'

You can imagine how I felt. The simi for instance had gone out of my mind. Now there it was, in the hands of the police and they were sure to get my fingerprints. I felt heat replace the cool atmosphere that was in the room. I felt sweat on my face. I felt my sister's eyes on me. I had to go, for if I didn't I would give myself away. My brother-in-law stood up and went to the toilet. I told my sister I should go. I was only trying because I knew she was not going to release me so easily. If I was to go, she was to go with me, if only to make sure she knew where I stayed. My quick decision to go so soon after the news and my darkened face had made her suspicious. She asked her husband to excuse her and I wished him good-bye.

We went on foot to my place. On the way, we talked a lot. At one point she asked me, 'Jack, are you sure you are not the young boy who has just been described? Be frank with me. You know I cannot tell even my own mother. You ought to know me better than that. I am sure Jack you are concerned, and if you won't be frank with me, I am going to search your room as soon as we arrive there. I have known you too long to be wrong.'

'I have never been in Westlands in my life, Connie,' I lied. 'Believe me. Furthermore why the hell should I do such a thing I...'

'For money, and you need it pretty badly. Have you forgotten our father's six hundred shillings? If you can steal your father's, whose can't you? I am

very sure you are the one, but anyway it won't be long before I know everything.'

As it turned out, she was right. I liked her too much to prevent her from searching my house or doing whatever else she pleased. I offered her a share but she would not take even a penny. I tried to convince her that it was not the money that was being talked about but she was too clever for me. 'Anyway if she is as secretive as she used to be, there won't be any leakage,' I told myself.

I then told her how I wanted to furnish my home and the other things I wanted to buy. She volunteered to help me buy them and reminded me to get a spare bed.

As she was on maternity leave, we spent that and the following week buying the furniture I needed and other necessary things. At the end of the second week, which was also the end of the month, I was enjoying the art of my own hands. I had a sofa set, a carpet, new curtains, coffee tables, a wardrobe, a kitchen cupboard, a charcoal burner, a stove, a set of tea utensils, a radio-gramme and a tape recorder. The last two I bought from a black market dealer.

CHAPTER THREE



Connie kept on visiting me after our meeting and I kept on seeing her at her home. I became her husband's friend. About six months after our meeting, Connie asked me if I would like to shift into another house that had two rooms, a bathroom, a toilet and a kitchen. I was to add only fifty shillings per month over the rent I paid for my present single room in Makadara. I agreed with her even before I knew where the apartment was, and when I realised later that it was in Wood Street in Eastleigh, I was delighted. That was a very nice place for a man with my kind of job and I liked it better than any other place I stayed in Nairobi. A week later, I shifted to that place and arranged my house with Connie's help. She liked the place better than where she lived. She even suggested that I should get married because the house was large enough for two. None of my friends knew where I stayed and I intended never to let them know. If I let them know, the police would also know.

Within six months after the Westlands job, I was completely broke. Most of the money had gone into the furniture I had bought and in the advance payment of rent for my former house in Makadara. I had spent the rest on whores in night clubs, and on cinemas.

I woke up early one morning to go and see if Connie would spare me at least a pound before she went to school. At around seven, I knocked at the door of her house in Uhuru Estate. She was awake and in the kitchen preparing breakfast. Her husband had slept out that night. There was a bed in the sitting room which I was sure never stayed there, and in it was a person asleep. The shoes on the floor told me that the occupant was female. I talked to Connie and when the occupant of the bed heard my voice, she jumped up as if she had just realised a snake was lying beside her. It was my mother! I did not know whether to cross over that short distance to her or to turn and run away. I only stayed where I was, my mouth semi-open. But she came straight to me and held me so tightly that I was afraid she'd break my limbs. She seemed to think that I would just vanish and stay for many more years without seeing her. After some time she managed to speak: 'Oh! my lost son!

Bless the Lord for bringing you back to me safely. Why on earth did you have to run away from home and never once think of coming back? ‘Can’t you be at least kind to me? I have missed you dearly and I am glad to see you after all those years.’

As she said these words, tears were flowing from her eyes. I had gone there to be helped out of the financial trouble I was in, but instead, I was being wept over. Then when Connie saw her mother weeping, she too started weeping. This earth is full of surprises! Now here was my mother; fate had made me meet her while I had not a penny in my pockets. The last shilling I had was taken by the merciless Kenya Bus conductor for taking me from Wood Street to Uhuru Estate. I had bought two Sportsman cigarettes with the twenty cents they had spared me. ‘What a hell of coincidence! No! I must do something to wash away this shame. No matter what type of something, but something, whatever the risk. Why hadn’t she come when I had the 6,000 shillings? At least I would have given her 2,000 shillings to prove myself a gentleman! She wasn’t a poor woman, yes, but supposing she asked me to buy her a dress with the money I had been earning in those years I had been away from home?’ I asked myself all these questions as she talked to me. I did not even hear most of what she said. She was telling me things without a comma; how if I agreed to go home with her, everyone would be delighted. She made me promise that I would go home with her to see the rest of the family and she added they would at least expect a share of what I had been earning. That alone made me almost run mad. I hadn’t a penny on me and I had agreed to go home with her. I knew without being told that going home empty-handed, after such a period of time, was antisocial. I left her after promising that I would take supper with them there.

I went out prepared for the worst that would befall me in my search of what I was to take home with me. I went round the whole town without good results. I did not even meet anyone I knew. Everything was against me and I decided not to give myself more trouble but to go and rest until tomorrow. I did not eat anybody’s lunch that goddamned day. At around five, it started raining heavily. I suddenly decided to go to New Rwathia to demand back two hundred shillings a friend owed me. But it was all in vain. The best he could do was to order four bottles of beer for me instead, and when I demanded cash, I couldn’t get it. What a pity? A man is prepared to buy you as many bottles of beer as you can drink but not in the least prepared to give

you half their cost in cash! I will never understand people. After the four bottles, I decided to go so as to get prepared for the supper I was to take with my mother at my sister's. The rain still fell heavily as I descended the stairs. Outside, I turned right, then crossed the road towards Nyanza Bar. The street lights were on as it was dark. At the far corner of the road, I saw a car with brown mud on its body. I noticed it had Uganda registration numbers. I noticed too that it had just been parked as its body was still warm despite the heavy rain. I stood beside it and saw a canvas bag and a large suitcase in the back seat. Then on the driver's door, I saw a sticker that told me that the car belonged to a tourist club in Uganda. Whoever had parked it there was new in Kenya and was probably searching for a lodging, or had left it there unaware of how Nairobi operated. Thinking quickly, I took out a bunch of keys I used to use when breaking into cars. A criminal friend of mine had advised me to use keys to open a car instead of a screw driver which would force me to break into it, and I had found it a sound idea. I tried all the keys I had and was about to despair when the last one opened it. I entered the car as if it belonged to me. I was very calm. I took every step deliberately. First, I took the canvas bag and opened it. What I saw inside justified my action. The suitcase could not be broken into there and then, but its weight made it worth taking away. I then opened the dash board compartment to see if I could get something to smoke as I carried my luggage, but what I saw there almost made me stop dead. Kept, as if for show, was a pistol. At first, I feared its sight and wouldn't dare touch it. Then I remembered how we had used one of that type in Westlands, and with lightning speed, I took it and put it in the left, outer pocket of my coat. It fitted as if the pocket was made to carry it. With the same speed, I shot out of the car and that place, and found my way to River Road. As I put my luggage down, a route No. 10 bus for Wood Street arrived. Within ten minutes, I was opening the door of my two-roomed apartment.

I did not remember until the following morning that I had promised to have supper with my mother, at my sister's place and neither did I remember that I had not eaten the whole day. The contents I had found in the car had satisfied my whole body. In the canvas bag were books, novels and some educational material. There was also an encyclopaedia. All had the initials G.E. Maxwell Jr. Then I took out two pairs of binoculars, a very large camera and a carton which had about forty rounds of ammunition. This made my heart increase its beats by an excess of one or two. There was also a pouch that had a pair of

sun goggles plus a lot of other things.

The suitcase was the one that carried what I was in need of. After breaking into it, the first sight was that of a camera-stand that I knew would not have fitted in the canvas bag. Then I took out all the clothes one at a time. The owner of the suits I took out must have been as huge as Hercules. I tried to fit into one pair of trousers but it sprawled on to the floor, a length of one and a half feet. As for the waist, it would have taken me and another man of my size to make it hold a little.

Anyway the clothes did not matter much, I already had too many to care for more. At the bottom of the large suitcase is where I found what had made me risk my life. There were various envelopes and I took one at a time and opened them. The first one had over 10,000 shillings in Ugandan currency. The second had some travellers cheques which turned out to be in great demand by Indians around town. The third and the fourth had nothing of importance to me, but the fifth had a little over 4,000 shillings in Kenyan currency. That was what I was looking for and truly speaking, as it was my last envelope to pick, my heart was beating a bit faster than usual.

The following morning I woke up early and after preparing myself I set off for Uhuru Estate. Everyone was awake and ready for breakfast and I was welcomed to it. I was pretty hungry but of course I did not tell them so. I was not, under any circumstances, going to let my mother know that there were times when I slept without eating. Brother-in-law Kamau was nowhere to be seen as he had gone to work. My sister Connie and mother were not going anywhere as it was a Saturday, a free day for teachers, so I was to be engaged the whole day. They told me I would go home with mother the following day, if only for a day. Then I told them to accompany me to town, to help me buy presents for those I was going to find at home. I bought everything that they asked me to and a lot more for the children at home. Then when we were satisfied we went back to Uhuru Estate.

The following day we took a Peugeot at Tea Room and in less than an hour we were in Murang'a. I almost thought the town was deserted. The fact is that after staying in big towns, when you go back to the small ones, you find a great change and you might find yourself wondering how a decent person could agree to stay in such a tiny town. I hate to remember that when I was young, I once stayed awake the whole night after I had been promised a visit to that very town. Within twenty minutes I was being welcomed home.

Things were very different from how I had left them. The first surprise I got was that my family had shifted from our old home to another farm they had bought. That meant that if I had gone home alone, I would have had to ask where I belonged! The second surprise was that when I left, our shopping centre had only one shop and one butchery. Now there were four shops, one butchery, a hotel and a bar and even a posho mill, each standing on its own ground. I looked quite a stranger around there and people stared at me wherever I passed as if I was a zombie.

That and the next day were nice and I enjoyed staying with my brothers and sisters who were very glad to see me. But when they all went to school and left me with the maid and the labourer, I started getting tired and restless and on the third day, I guess they were surprised to find me gone without prior notice.

Back in Nairobi I got busy getting rid of the over-size clothes. Believe me or not if I had known where to contact the owner through the phone, I would have kept them somewhere and told him to collect them. I then changed the Ugandan currency for Kenyan shillings. But as I knew the dough was hot, I had to employ a go-between for a fat fee. The travellers cheques were hot too, and they too needed a hired hand. Then something funny happened. One late night I took the canvas bag and the large suitcase to get rid of. The clothes were not there as I had already got rid of them. I had kept the camera for myself. But the stand was in the suitcase plus the other things I did not want. I had taken a shortcut from Wood Street to Kariakor, through Race Course Primary School, my idea being to abandon them between that school and Kariakor, when, as I was about to abandon them, three people attacked me. They robbed me of everything including three hundred shillings, leaving me with only my underwear. They did not beat me much as I did not bother them. As I knew the routine, I did not report anywhere. But two days later, I saw with my own eyes, two of the people being arrested at Kariakor while trying to sell the suitcase and the canvas bag with the pairs of binoculars that I unintentionally left in the bag to a man I very well knew to be a C.I.D. officer always stationed at Kariakor posing as a buyer of black-market items. Well, you can guess their charge without being told and if you don't, then you don't follow me either. That C.I.D. officer and another one around there have put hand-cuffs on a lot of people and I am sure they will yet put more handcuffs on more people.

The problem with me was that with all the cash I had, I did not buy a thing I could live to remember. Instead, I spent it on beer, from this bar to the other, making sure that every prostitute looked my way. Within a short time I was known almost everywhere beer was sold, and within the same period the cops had come to know me by name. They also put me on their list of the wanted criminals and that was one of the things I later came to regret. My sister Connie always asked me to look for a girl to stay with so that she could be saving whatever I got but I had never come across one that attracted me. One thing I wasn't going to do was to stay with a termagant. She'd have me arrested so as to get the house. I have known many do that. Connie would introduce me to several of her girlfriends but none attracted me. Some were teachers she had known, some were secretaries in various offices and the like. But I never felt like loving any of them though I went around well with whoever she introduced me to. I would sometimes go home from town and find two or three girls waiting for me. I have been a referee of several showdowns by my girls when they met at my house and each claimed me for a husband.

Then one day I got what I was really looking for. It was a Monday and I took a friend to his home at Bahati after drinking with him in the evening. When we arrived there, I felt that I couldn't leave him alone so we spent the night at his home. The following morning we woke up early as my man was to report on duty at Standard Bank on Kimathi Street. The man left me behind but I followed soon after. As I was going towards the nearest bus stop, instead of going all the way through Bahati Social Hall, I decided to take a short cut between the two blocks to reach Heshima Road. At the end of the plot on the left, I noticed a thing that looked like a driving licence on the ground. I picked it up and saw that it was a student's bus pass supplied by Kenya Bus Services to pupils who went to schools away from their homes. Inside it I saw a photo of a girl which made my heart beat exceed by one or two. For no reason at all I felt I liked the owner of the photo. She was a student at Sharda High School and I saw that she was doing her final year in the school. The name was Miriam Nyambui. I had nothing else to do that day but to go and booze so I decided I would go and take that bus pass to her, not forgetting to introduce myself.

At about quarter past twelve that day, I was standing at the gate of Sharda High School waiting for the girls to pass by me so that I could pick her out,

and if she consented, take her out for lunch. Anyway at last this girl came in a group often. I called her. She almost ignored me but then she thought the better of it. The others did not stop and I liked it for I wouldn't have liked them to see how contemptuously this girl was looking at me. I almost decided not to talk to her. But when I took out the pass and showed it to her, she smiled for the first time.

'Thanks so much. Where did you pick it? I knew I dropped it somewhere but I only realised it in the bus and I couldn't go back.'

'I guess it would be a better idea if you asked me to introduce myself. Suppose a friend of yours comes, what name would you give her or would you admit that you are talking so happily to a stranger?'

'Sorry,' I was so overjoyed. I am Milly as you can see in this pass.'

'And I am Jack Zollo, working with Hughes Limited.'

'And to what tribe does that surname of yours belong I wonder?'

'I am a typical Kikuyu. By the way, I could buy you lunch if you do not mind.'

'Thank-you. I don't mind.'

So we went out for lunch. One thing I have just forgotten to tell you is that when I saw this girl, I realised the photo had not contained her whole beauty. She was the most attractive girl in all the groups that I had set my eyes on that day. She was about seventeen, with bright intelligent eyes, and a structure that matched her five feet four. When she smiled, it was then that she showed her whole beauty. I liked the way she spoke in English, and the way she stole glances at me when I was not looking at her. On the way to the hotel, I felt for sure that I had at last met my Hellen of Troy. This girl looked feminine! After lunch I escorted her back to school and I went my way. She had told me where she lived and we promised to meet near Bahati Social Hall where she always went for evening classes. She did typing in her free time.

Days passed and I went to see her now and then until we became very intimate friends. She lived with her mother on Heshima Road in Bahati, opposite Morrison Primary School. Her mother, Salome Wangari, had rented a room for her and her two young sisters and two rooms for herself. One room she used for selling unlicensed beer. A very nice woman Salome was but if you wanted to know that she carried a Somali knife, all you had to do was to pretend to be very intoxicated and on your way out, go in the direction where her daughters slept! If you did not get a stab in the back, she admired

you, but at least you would have found yourself getting up from the ground where she would have thrown you. This woman knew me and I believed she liked me as I used to spend a lot of money at her place but whenever I went out of her room, she would make sure of the direction I had taken. One day she caught me red handed outside the door of her daughters' room and I received a stern warning, the Somali knife held tightly in her left hand. I think I got away with it because of my age. The year passed and Milly sat for her Cambridge School Certificate. She passed in Division II and started work with the East African Airways at Embakasi.

When she got this job with the E.A.A., I got better chances of seeing her. I would phone her and request her to have lunch with me and she never turned down my request. On the days she was off duty, I would also take her out of Nairobi to other towns she had not visited. But she wouldn't agree to sleep out. Her beauty and good behaviour encouraged me to stick to her and to do away with whores who were craving to own me for themselves. She always said that if it had not been for her mother, she would not be what she was and she believed she owed her mother everything. She used to say, 'If I don't do whatever my mother advises me to, God himself will punish me.' Well I couldn't blame her. 'If she believes in superstitions,' I thought, 'let her do so.'

'If you really feel you want me, talk with my mother as a gentleman. Her biggest fear is the possibility that we could lead the same type of life she has gone through,' she told me one day.

But approaching a woman like Milly's mother on such a topic was one of the hardest things I ever had to do in my life. First, I wrote her a letter asking her to allow us to wed but I realised she could not read, so I tore it up. Then an article I had read some place came into my mind. It said: Our doubts are our traitors and make us lose the gain we often might win by fearing to attempt. So one day I went to see her about the matter hoping for the best but prepared for the worst.

We were alone in the room where she sold beer. I tried to bring up the matter, then realised that I could not confront her with the issue. Even after taking four bottles of beer, I could not do it though I had expected to after being a bit tipsy. When I left I decided I must get an experienced person to do it for me. I was then sure that I could not do it on my own. That same day, I went straight to see Joseph Mwangi, a friend of mine who worked with the

Government Printing Press. He was a bit older than me, married with two children. One of them had been born the same month of his wedding. At home in Murang'a, his family and mine were very intimate. I gave him my story and the next day we went to see Miriam's mother. There was no other customer and when we took our seats we asked for beer for us and for her.' When we had taken three bottles of beer each, my friend talked to her.

'Mum, there's something bothering us and we feel that we ought to ask you. Will you please allow us?'

'What is it young men? Feel free and ask me.'

'This young man here, I guess you know him as he tells me he comes here for drinks now and then. The only new person to you is myself and my name is Joseph Mwangi. Now, together with his coming to take drinks here, he has had a question to ask you but as he tells me, he has found it hard to ask you personally and so asked me to ask on his behalf. In fact, as you know according to our traditions, he is very right. To make it short, the request is he wants to get married to your daughter, Miriam. We would be very grateful if you personally gave us your answer to the request.'

Tipsy as I was becoming, I could not bring myself to face her wholly but through the corners of my eyes, I did not fail to notice that her smiling face had darkened soon after the question was asked. She kept quiet and we thought she would hate our presence for life. It was after about seven minutes that she decided to talk, but as she was about to say something, there was a knock at the door and she opened it to admit two smartly dressed men. As they took their seats, she turned to us and asked us to follow her. Once outside I was very surprised to see her leading us to the room where her daughters stayed. If what I knew of her was true, and I am sure it was, we were the first men to be allowed to enter that room. No one was there as the children were out and Milly was at work. When we were seated she told us she would not be long, and she went out, closing the door behind her. About three minutes later, she came back carrying ten bottles of beer. She told us, 'One of those men is Miriam's father, the one with a bald head if you noticed it. I'll not forget your request and I will give you an answer before you leave. It needs some thinking and I must of course know what Miriam thinks about it. I guess you must have talked before you decided to see me. She is about to come and if you need more beer, just send her. Feel alright here young men.'

At the door, she turned and told us that she would see us before we left. An

hour later Milly came followed by her young sisters. They all knew me. I introduced them to my friend. Milly was surprised to find us in her room as she knew how strict her mother was about it but when she realised that it was her mother who had brought us there she was overjoyed. We then sent her for more beer to make her mother remember that we were still around, for she seemed to have forgotten us. Our trick worked for, about five minutes later, she came and called Mwangi outside. Milly got suspicious and wanted to know what was going on but what I told her satisfied her.

Thirty minutes later, Mwangi came in and the sight of him made my heart beat faster than usual. I could judge from the look on his face that whatever they had talked about had not satisfied him. An hour later when we decided to go he told me that things were not very bad on my side and that she was not as harsh as he had imagined. That was how far things went, neither no, nor yes. I did not for some time take further action. But one day I thought I should see her again. I had phoned Milly's place of work and had been told that she had not reported for duty. It was around four when I arrived at their place in Bahati. When I knocked at her mother's door, the only sound I got was something like a groan. I thought she had a man in bed so I decided to go to her daughter's room and wait. But even there no one answered. I tried the door and it gave way instantly. The picture that I saw will never run away from my mind. Milly's two young sisters lay on the floor. Milly herself sat on a dining chair, her head resting on the table. I knew straight away that something was wrong. First I went to her and when I pushed her a little, she managed to open her eyes and she tried to speak but she could not. Her hands were on her stomach. The maid was nowhere to be seen. I bent down to look at the two young girls and I noticed that Milly had vomited on the floor under the table. I at once thought of calling an ambulance and went out. Within a minute I was on the phone calling the police. I told the man at the other end to send an ambulance around Bahati Social Hall. I told him that they would meet me there and I would take them to where the people lay unconscious. So far I had not seen Milly's mother but I guessed the groaning I had heard was caused by pain. To my surprise, within less than two minutes I heard a siren of an ambulance followed by a Police 999 car. I waved to the driver who followed me a short distance to where the patients were. The mother was lying on the sofa and had also vomited. I heard a nurse say that it must be food poisoning and, as it turned out, she was right. They were all taken to

Kenyatta National Hospital and I was left in charge of their rooms. The hospital reports said that they had been poisoned with food. I was told that had I delayed for more than thirty minutes they would have all been dead. The maid was arrested three months later but as she was a young girl, she was only put under probation for a period of time. Milly was the first to recover. She left the hospital after a month looking very thin. Then the two young girls followed her. When at last the mother came out, she did not even wait to know whether I had done any arrangements about wanting to have her daughter. She was so happy with me for saving their lives that she consented to my living with Milly if I wanted to and prepare the rest later. All the same, I did not go with her then. But some months later she came to stay with me in Wood Street.

The trouble with her was that as long as we lived together she never forgot that day. I really enjoyed living with that girl. She is one of the rare type in any country.

Life in my apartment in Wood Street soon after Miriam shifted in changed. Everything was re-arranged. The kitchen for one came to constant use. The sofas got covers. I never again took my clothes to the drycleaners, except the suits, and I felt as if I was married. Having the right girl in your apartment is about the most tremendous experience a man can know. Since that time I was never without a packet of cigarettes.

CHAPTER FOUR



I don't remember very well how long I stayed before pulling another job, but I know that for a time after Milly shifted to my place, I did not. I was therefore feeling unhappy for not having bought her at least a present since she came in. While at her mother's place in Bahati, I had done a lot for her but that did not count in my heart. I had a gun now but not the least knowledge on how to use it. But I had studied it for a long time and I could now manage to load and unload it. Milly did not know I owned one but she had accidentally come across the rounds of ammunition I had put in my suitcase. Fortunately she did not know what they were.

Early one morning I woke up just as a vehicle from E.A.A. was hooting outside our apartment for Milly. My aim was to go and see Githinji George alias G.G. who owned a second-hand clothes shop at Kariakor. I had met him at the Central Police Station while I was under arrest for fighting in a public place. He had been arrested as a suspect in a certain bank raid but when a police informer gave the names of the right people who had pulled the job, G.G. was set free. He had sent me to his place of work when I left him at the police station and I had helped to have his advocate know he was arrested. So after that we had become friends. As I alighted from the bus, I saw him entering a car. I crossed Race Course Road in a hurry and was just in time to stop him. When he saw me, he opened the car door for me and I entered. He told me he was off to see a friend in Thika and if I did not mind, would I accompany him? So we both set off for Thika. On the way we talked a lot. He told me he had borrowed that car from a friend to go and see another friend for some business. He told me there was a European who owned a big farm fifteen miles from Thika and he used to draw money from the bank each end of the month. He wanted to get information on the man so that he could stage a hold-up a few days later. There were only four days to the end of the month.

At Thika we phoned the man from Mongo Bar. After fifteen minutes, the three of us were seated in a private room. He told us that the white man drove

a Peugeot 404. He gave his labourers their wages on the dot, at the end of the month, and he drew the money twenty four hours before.

‘Does he carry a gun?’ G.G. asked.

‘Not at all. I am sure of that. I would have noticed it within the three years I have served him,’ Kariuki replied.

‘You can stage the robbery at the bank as he leaves or attack him on the way.’

‘Better leave that to us. Your part is only to keep us informed. You told me he phones some hours to warn you that he is coming?’

‘Yes, he does it these days. That is since he became my permanent customer. He is a very nice sort of a character but looks somehow tough.’

‘Forget about his being tough! We have met tougher guys who would never part with their cash easily but we always have a method of persuading them. Where exactly did you say his farm is?’

‘About ten miles from the roundabout towards Nairobi. You’ll find a mud road on the left. The mud road runs for ten miles right to the gate of his farm. From here he drives straight home and phones back to let us know he arrived safely. I have never known him to change his route all the years I have served him.’

‘How does he carry the money? I mean does he use a bag or a box or many bags?’

‘He carries the whole lot in one bag. A large hand-bag. I hope that is about all. You will excuse me now as I must report back. You have only three days now if you are planning to pull the job this month. I’ll depend on you G.G. to bring me my share if all goes well.’

‘Well, we wish you good luck,’ I told him as he prepared to go.

‘You are the ones who need it,’ he told us and went away. I was feeling so happy that I could not get any words to thank G.G. I had left my home early to see him precisely for such an idea, and to my good luck, which was also someone else’s bad luck, I found him with the same ideas.

When we left Mongo Bar we drove towards Nairobi and from the roundabout we found our way towards the farm. After ten miles we reached the mud road and we took it. We drove at a slow speed until we reached a gate. We learnt that this particular farm belonged to another person. His farm was about five miles from that point and so we started off again. We were glad to find that the rough road was used by different farms. The man would

not be very suspicious to find another car on the same road. The road runs through coffee plantations. It was a narrow road and it would be difficult to overtake a car ahead of you.

The coffee plantations were so close to the road that it would be easy to ambush the car from both sides. Minutes later we reached the gate to his farm and investigated the area. We could not stage the robbery there so we dismissed that area. The mud road still went on and we followed it a short distance where we came to the workers' quarters. Satisfied that we could not take that route after committing the crime, we turned our car and went back. On the way back, between the two farms, we saw some bumps we had earlier passed without noticing and stopped. On either side of the road were short cement posts indicating that there were culverts underneath. A wire fence divided the two farms. There was also an uncultivated portion. It was a nice place in which to stage the robbery since on either side there was a little bush in which to hide. On the way back to Nairobi we discussed how we would pull the job. We had only three days and there were many things to be done. I had a gun but G.G. did not know. I did not tell him, because I knew if I did he would be reluctant to look for another. We had to get a car. By that I mean we had to steal one. We had to find two other people to join us, but that we regarded as simple. We needed a competent driver though. Then we would need a day in which to show our driver and the other man the road and the stage of the crime.

Back in Kariakor, G.G. parked the car. But before we got out he asked me whether I had a particular person in mind who could join us and I told him I had one. He then asked me if I could borrow a gun and as I knew that this meant another share, I agreed to try my best not forgetting to tell him to try too in case I failed. I did not want him to know I owned one, but he came to know some months later. It was on a Tuesday and we were to pull the job on Saturday. We decided to meet the following day at his place of work to work out the details.

Back in my apartment, I took out my gun and loaded it. It carried fourteen rounds. It now felt heavy.

I had never used a gun before but by the way I had seen it handled in films and by some other people I knew, I felt for sure that I could use it. I am not the type to stay with a thing and fail to know how it is used. I even learnt how to dismantle it and to fix it back without anybody's instructions. I unloaded it

again and put it in the box. There were still three days to go and hence no need to panic. The following day, at eleven, I was at G.G.'s shop. He was not there but had left a message that I should meet him at Jamii Bar at lunch time.

As I had an hour or so to myself, I decided to contact the man I had promised Githenji that he would join us. He worked at New Rwathia and so it was not difficult to get him. He had been a driver with Kenya Bus Services for a period of time. He had been sacked for careless driving but to me, he was the most competent driver I knew then. He had been a get-away driver in various robberies and many on the other side of the law knew him. At about half past eleven, I was sitting with him in a private room discussing the matter. His name was Joseph Thuku Kagwaci but we knew him in short as Kagwaci. After giving him the lay-out, I asked him to accompany me to Jamii Bar to meet the rest of the boys.

We saw Githenji as he was descending the stairs and together we went to a private room in the bar. He introduced us to Laban Kamande, the international car thief. I needed not introduce my man as he was known by all of them so we sat down to talk business. Kamande was a new person to me and I was surprised to hear that he knew about me. In a borrowed car we went to the scene of the intended robbery and after we were all satisfied we drove back. We decided that Kagwaci and Kamande should steal the get-away car while Githenji and I would do all we could, to secure at least one gun, which was regarded as the best tool in such an operation.

The following day, we met at around three o'clock in the same bar. Kagwaci and Kamande had secured a car, a Cortina 1600 G.T. Githenji had not yet got a gun but he had been promised one early the following day. On my side, I had been told to go for the one I was borrowing that same evening. We all agreed two guns were better than one. After settling all that, we decided to hold a final meeting on the 29th in the same bar at around six in the evening. We agreed that we should all sleep around the same place so that when the time came there would be no delay. That day we parted late and as I boarded a bus for Wood Street I felt uneasy.

That night Milly had a lot of questions to ask me but I did all I could to evade them. Christmas was approaching. She had a lot of plans for it, but I had no penny in my pockets. 'If we succeed, her dreams will come true but if we bungle it, that will be the end of me,' I told myself. By now, she had known for sure that I was not employed at Hughes but she did not know that I

was a criminal. She believed I had some sort of business somewhere but was reluctant to let her know. That night, though I did not bother her, she did not know that I did not sleep. My mind was occupied on how I would use my gun for the first time and the amount I would get after pulling the job and getting away with it.

In the morning, after she had gone to work, I managed to snatch a little sleep. I woke up at about one o'clock feeling tired and very hungry. I went to the bathroom, took a bath and after selecting a suit and dressing, I took a twenty-shilling note that I found on the table and went to the nearest hotel for lunch. Back at home, I felt better. I took out the gun and some rounds of ammunition and put them in my pockets. There were four hours before our meeting and I needed something to keep me busy and to stop me from trembling.

The weight of the gun and the ammunition in my pockets made me sweat. Not that they were heavy but because of the sentence their possession alone carried. 'If I can sweat in my own room with nobody around simply because of carrying a gun, what will happen when I go among people?' I asked myself. I prayed that I would not meet cops wherever I went or I would get so scared that I would give myself away.

I was reading a newspaper when Milly knocked at the door. I had heard a car stop outside but I had not realized it was Milly who was being dropped. The knocking almost made me jump out of my skin. It was the cop's style of knocking and it forced me to warn her against knocking in such a manner. I could see she was very surprised to see my fright and I looked away. When something is slightly wrong with you, be sure that your wife will notice it immediately. I tried to cheer up after realising my mistake in order to make her less suspicious but it was useless. At half past five I told her I was going out to town and I might not come back as we had a meeting in Thika. She went with me as far as the bus stage and as I boarded a bus she wished me good luck as if she knew I needed it.

At Jamii Bar I found the rest of the boys waiting for me. They were all ready with everything. They were drinking beer and they ordered a bottle for me. I really felt I needed one if I was to stop shivering and sweating at the same time. I ordered a brandy to see if it would make me a little braver and it worked wonders. Then we decided to go and spend the rest of the night in Thika and so we went to where Kagwaci had hidden the stolen car, and we

set off for Thika. We parked the car at the back of Twelfth December Hotel. We decided it was advisable not to go around in a group of four. We decided to split into twos until the following morning when we would meet at the same place. G.G. went with Kagwaci and Kamande with me. I had no money and so before we parted I asked G.G. for some and he gave me 100 shillings which was to be refunded immediately I got my share. There was a dance that night at Thika Social Hall and we went there. Before long, Kamande told me he did not feel safe there and we left immediately. I tried to take him from this place to that as I knew Thika inside out but nowhere did he find rest. He was so uneasy that I felt very brave in comparison. At last we decided we should sleep and I took him to Kirimambogo Bar where I had earlier booked a double room. I was a little drunk and after undressing and placing the unloaded gun under the pillow, I immediately fell asleep.

I woke up several times in the night after dreaming the police were knocking at the door and each time, I found Kamande sitting on his bed covering his face with his hands as if supporting it from falling down or as if praying. That whole night Kamande did not sleep and as we took breakfast he confessed to me he felt pretty bad. Outside Kirimambogo I bought a Daily Nation newspaper and after briefly glancing at the headlines, I folded it and went to the place we had parked the car. The driver was there but G.G. was not. He told us that G.G. was waiting for us inside the hotel. We found him in a corner reading a newspaper. There was nobody near there so we went over the final details. After making sure the white man arrived in the bank with his bag we would give him about fifteen minutes, then we would startoff; ahead of him. We would go to the place we had selected and wait for him. Our car would be a few yards from the bumps facing the direction we had come from. G.G., wearing a mechanic's overall, would pretend to be working on the car's engine, so the bonnet would be open. He would be carrying his gun. Kagwaci, the driver, would be in the car pretending to be the stranded owner of the car. Kamande and I would be on either side of the road in the bush and we would come out as soon as we heard a gunshot. We would force the white man to hand over the bag and once in our possession we would all go into the car. I was to carry the bag and Kamande was to take the keys of the white man's car so that when we left, it would take him some time before he reached a phone or any help. By that time, we would be miles away.

At about nine, we took positions outside the bank. At ten o'clock the car

arrived and a huge figure with a long moustache came out after parking. He looked tough alright. After fifteen minutes we entered our car and set off towards his farm. We passed the scene we had selected for the set-up to a place where the road was a little wider and turned our car. Back at the scene, we got out and after final instructions we took our positions. Kamande went to the left and I to the right. G.G. put on an overall and opened the bonnet. He then went into the boot and took out a jack, lifted the car in such a way that you would have noticed it at a distance and got busy working on it. The driver was inside, hidden by the bonnet so no one could see him from far. I lit a cigarette and as I smoked I took out my gun and loaded it. I was trembling and I hated myself for it, but when I thought of Kamande I felt braver. We waited for a considerable time. Two cars passed, one from the farms and the other from town, but none of the people in both cars took any interest in us.

At about half past eleven the car appeared. I could see it clearly from my position. I could also see Githenji busy working on the car. A little distance away, the white man stopped and put out his head through the window as if he was suspicious. Then he seemed to think G.G. was harmless and at a slow speed he approached the trap. As the front wheels of the car left the bumps, Githenji turned round, a gun in his hand. As soon as I heard the gunshot I jumped out of my position towards the car as a cat leaps towards a rat. The windscreen of the 404 broke into pieces. The white man's hands were in the air, his eyes wide open. He asked us not to shoot him but to take the whole cash. I took the money from the back seat and then turned to go into our car just a few yards away. Kamande had not taken the keys of the car and as we passed the car, he suddenly remembered, and G.G. asked our driver to stop. The driver stopped some yards from the white man's car and Kamande, a simi in his hand, went back to the white man who was still stranded in his car, too shocked to do anything. Suddenly we heard a gun shot that we had not expected, followed by a terrible cry from Kamande, and the roar of the car starting. I acted in a way I never thought I would. Before Kamande fell to the ground, I was out of the car, my gun in my hand. I shot two consecutive shots at the white man's car and the only results I got were the sound of the rear glass splintering into pieces. It was my first time to use the gun and I nearly dropped it because of its loud sound. It was louder than the white man's or G.G.'s. As the car disappeared, I went to Kamande, who was trying to stand up in pain. He had a bullet hole in the centre of his chest. I have

never felt so angry in my life and had I caught up with that white man, I would have shot him at exactly the same point he had shot Kamande and I am glad right now that I did not reach him. All this happened in less than forty seconds. As I helped him up, Githenji came to aid me and we laid him on the rear seat of our car. As we did so, Kagwaci turned and in a soft voice in English said, 'Let the dead bury the dead. One of these days he was going to die.'

Before I realised what I was doing, the pistol I carried was in my hand, pointing and pressing its mouth against his chest and with a voice I could not have recognised as my own, I told him, 'Listen old boy, before you open that stinking mouth of yours to yap, think twice and be sure of what you want to say. Right now I'll feel content to shoot that stinking breath out of you. Can you explain why he was to die one of these days?'

I have known myself to lose my temper several times but never to that extent. Right then I felt like pulling the trigger. Githenji exclaimed, 'Sweet Jesus! What are you two doing? The white man will have reached the cops through the phone by the time we leave here. Relax young boy. What has Kagwaci's words to do with Kamande's death?'

I put the gun back and in the next second we were busy on the road. I never forgot that driver's words even once in the two months that followed. Had I done something to make him sorry that same day, I would have felt a little bit contented. I must have been born of an unforgiving disposition. They say that to forgive a wrong is the best revenge but then you shouldn't believe all what you hear.

Before we reached Kahawa, Kamande was dead. We did not get any trouble on the way and after reaching Nairobi, we left the car with Kamande's body in it and we went away. What else could we have done? We did not know where he came from, we did not know his people and we did not know where he hung around. I for one did not know anything about him except what he had told me the day before his death. Githenji knew Kamande's prostitute but going to tell her that Kamande had been killed would mean asking for a hell of a lot of problems.

We went to Githenji's apartment in Jericho and locking ourselves inside, we got busy counting our take. It was the second time in my life to see so much money. It was twice as much as I had expected. Had I known Kamande's parents, I swear I would have taken his share to them. As it was, I

had no idea and I was not about to go out investigating as I knew it would raise too many suspicions. After I took my share, including the gun's share, I left Githenji's well-furnished apartment, my pockets bulging with 21,000 shillings. Some I put in the inside of my shirt and pushed it to the back. As I left the room Githenji called me, 'Zollo.'

'Yes, Mister,' I said.

'When things are as they are now, one is better off with his mouth shut. Keep cool until the heat is over.'

'I thought you knew me better than that. If trouble comes, it will have been caused by either of you but not by General Zollo. I can assure you that old timer. So long.'

'So long,' he said as I closed the door behind me. Opposite Jericho Hall I took a bus for town and at River Road I took another for Wood Street. Every minute I was in town seemed an untouched hour to me. I kept on feeling a finger of suspicion pointing at me. But whenever I turned, there was not a single soul behind me. After a few minutes I was back in my apartment, 21,000 shillings richer. Brother, to get money is tough, but to spend it is quite another story. Robbery is very risky. Drinking the whole day and doing other big things immediately after you get the cash is a another risk but most criminals don't realise it and never will. I spent my 21,000 shillings in that manner and truly speaking, I never once uttered a word concerning the crime we had committed and yet in two to three weeks' time the cops were looking for me day and night in connection with the crime. Kagwaci was already in remand awaiting trial.

Milly was not at home, though I had not expected her to be as she never came for lunch. I took out the gun and the money and arranged it in my suitcase. No one knew where I stayed and so I was the least worried that someone would surprise me. The sight of all that money in my suitcase almost made me crazy. In the evening I heard an E.A.A. car stop at the back of our apartment and when I drew the curtains a little fraction, I saw Milly accompanied by another girl. 'What an odd day to bring home a visitor,' I asked myself. She later introduced me to the girl as Miss Mary Mwangi, her former classmate and also working with E.A.A. She was to spend the night there as they had other arrangements for Sunday. To me, that night was one of the dullest for years. I did not talk much as they were engrossed in their Sunday arrangements, and to my surprise, I was at the centre of their plans. In

one place I was to pose as a husband of one and a brother of the other. Women, you never know with them. Anyway they made me do it. There are times it pays to pose and other times when it does not but that time, according to the girls, it paid surprisingly well. They needed my presence at Jericho clinic.

Well, to make a long story short, out of the 21 grand I had, I remained to remember only 5,000 shillings. I gave some to Milly to put in her account at the Bank of Baroda which was to be robbed the following day, but after she had already received her receipt; the amount I paid for one year's house rent; the 2000 shillings I sent home; and the amount I spent on fittings for Milly and myself. As for where the rest went, I guess East African Breweries would explain better. Where they take people's money, no one can tell but themselves. Rumours were flying from this to that corner of the town that we had shot Kamande so as to get his share. Whoever had told them we were the ones in the job I did not know for sure but I had a rough idea that it was probably Kamande's girl who of course knew Githenji and what he did for a living.

The town was too hot for me and I avoided it as much as possible and for a month, when it became hotter than iron, I ran out of Nairobi and came back only when my gains had started dwindling.

Months passed since pulling off that job without my thinking of another big job. I was still with Milly and the more I stayed with her the more I loved her. There surely must have been something she did to me to make me love her to that extent. Miti shamba, for instance, or am I becoming a bit superstitious? And in all those years, she never conceived and I didn't like it. This clinic she had been visiting every now and then had something to do with it.

I had enough money from the small jobs I had been pulling off almost every two months as I waited for the town to cool. Time passed and as it cooled, I forgot that I was among the most wanted criminals in Nairobi. I would go out to town now and then, meeting my old friends who were now almost forgotten. There was one important thing that I learned at that time about forgetting. The sooner you forget a wrong you did in the past, the sooner you will do it again. This time, because of my forgetting that I was wanted, I got what was ahead of me.

CHAPTER FIVE



It had just stopped raining when I woke up at around eight one Sunday morning. Milly was about to go to church. She had asked me to take her out to town after mass and as I had other things I wanted to do before going out with her, I did not accompany her to mass. Not that I ever went to church. In fact, I did not know much beyond Our Lord's Prayer. I therefore asked Milly to excuse me and to meet me at Terrace Hotel.

I met Captain Ngugi, a friend of mine, and a man we had done a few things with, as I crossed Duke Street. He was with another man who looked every inch a cop. They asked me to a party they were going to hold in Small World Club. As I had other things to do, I asked them to excuse me for some time and promised them that I would join them as soon as I got free. I went to Kagondo Bar and was told that the man I wanted to see was not there. I always left my gun with that man whenever was drunk because I knew that I could easily be tempted to go opening bottles with it looking for fame. The man had an apartment in Kangemi so I took a matatu and went there. I found his wife, who had arrived from home about a week before. She told me that her husband had gone in the morning to Banana Hill for some other business and he had told her that he would not take long as he would report for duty before mid-day. So I waited.

At about half past eleven, he knocked at the door and came in. He was carrying a very large box that I later came to learn contained leopard skins because I was present when he sold them. When he saw me, he knew that I had gone for my gun and after five minutes he went out for it. I took it and put it in the inside pocket of my coat, which I had made for that purpose and some minutes later, we both boarded a bus for town. At the Terrace Hotel, at about quarter past twelve, I saw Milly seated alone in a corner taking her lunch. I joined her and she ordered some lunch for me. She told me that what she wanted in town now had to wait until the next Sunday. She told me then that all she would want in town was to see the film Michael and Helga in Cameo theatre as it was claimed to be very educative. I told her that the best

time to go to a film was six and she agreed with me. I asked her to join me at the party I had been invited to that morning so it would be easy to pass time. We left Terrace Hotel and arrived at Small World Club at one o'clock. At the counter I asked the cashier who knew me where Captain's party was being held. He gave me a female waiter to show me where they were. As we went up she asked me, 'Are you Jack Zollo?'

'Yes, I am Jack Zollo. What of it?' I retorted.

'There is nothing to it. I was told by Captain to hang around here until you come. I have heard a lot about you.'

But instead of replying she looked at Milly and I guessed that she thought it safer not to talk much in her presence. If there were two things Milly hated, one was to be in a bar and the other was prostitutes. You would have thought she would vomit the way she was looking at that girl. I had to persuade her to enter the club.

We reached the room and we were welcomed pleasantly. There were nine people around the table. Women outnumbered men by one. I knew three of the men and I knew four of the girls. The other two were strangers to me. All the girls there were prostitutes of course. Two of them were barmaids, and two were some of those who were always going out to town in search of men. The men I knew were all criminals. As for the one I didn't know, I later came to know that he was an accountant in a certain bank in Nairobi. I knew then why the party had taken place. The man who looked like a cop was a sergeant in the army. An odd combination anyway. Captain and a friend of his were the party bosses. I could see by the way these whores were behaving that they had been instructed to give those visitors a good time. After introductions, we got busy drinking.

For no reason at all I felt very uneasy. Everything that I drank turned to pure water without having any effect on me. I tried brandy but all in vain. I felt my heart beating more rapidly than usual and that was one of the few bodily signs I hated. They were discussing a very interesting topic but that too could not make my heart rest. Milly was also deeply in it and she was the only one who was not taking any intoxicants. The way she hated prostitutes, I never thought she would ever sit on the same table with them. At about half past three, a very well dressed girl came in. She looked familiar but I couldn't place her. As she came to the table, I quickly glanced at Milly, who was busy writing something on a card. The girl greeted us all and at that moment, Milly

looked up. The girl selected a seat and sat down. She did not seem new as she was known by some of the party. The one who was serving opened a bottle of beer for her, which she rejected and said she preferred a soda. She pushed the bottle of beer to me, though I was at the farthest corner from her. She showed some signs of liking me, which I feared most because of the presence of Milly. Just then I saw Milly push the note she had just written to me. No one else noticed except the new arrival who seemed to be taking more interest in me than was necessary. I read it silently: Darling let's go. I don't like this place and I can see you are not having fun. I took out my pen and wrote below her lines. A very swell idea. We will leave at half-past four sharp. I gave it back to her and it was only the new girl who noticed this. I could tell by her curiosity that she could have given anything to know what was on the card. After a few minutes, she asked, 'Who is Jack Zolo among these three visitors we have here?' I felt my heart skip a beat. One of the other girls pointed at me and told her. 'This one. Don't you remember him, he passed us at the door of Bamboo Night Club last night.' She seemed very pleased to meet me. No one in the party seemed to be suspicious of her inquisitiveness and they even seemed to like it. She said she had longed to see me for a long time as she had heard a lot about me in the past.

Prostitutes and criminals are alike. They like boasting much though I didn't like it. If you have a prostitute and you happen to have a lot of money, her full day's work will be to boast that she is kept by a tough criminal. When a job is pulled every prostitute knows which gang committed the crime. Criminals also did the same thing. Whenever they get money, the first place to go to is to those bars. There are certain bars that they frequent a lot. The same prostitutes are friendly to the cops. When the criminal is in, she is with the cops. When he comes out and because he has much money to waste, the girl goes back to him. And we never learn. Not unless you have gone through the amount of trouble I am already in. I knew that in those days I was the most talked about criminal because I was new and had gone into big money.

So when this girl asked about me, I thought she wanted to win me for herself though I still smelt a rat. She then stood up and said, 'From now on, Zollo, every bottle of beer and whatever else you'll need will be paid for by me.' She took out from her handbag a one-hundred-shilling note and gave it to our server. 'If he drinks and completes that, ask me for more,' she said. She then went out as if for a short call. When she closed the door behind her,

I asked the rest of the girls who she was. One said she was a common prostitute, the other said she worked in a certain bar in Jerusalem, and the third said that she sold Ambi perfumes. I was sure then that none of them knew for sure who she was. I felt more uneasy until I sent one of the girls to find out where the girl had gone. I opened another bottle with my teeth. I filled one glass and drank half of it. Milly was watching me very closely. She could see that I was far from my usual mood. At that time, her handbag was on her thighs and her watch said it was about eleven to four. 'Only a few minutes more dear and we shall be miles away,' I told her, bending close to her ear.

Suddenly, I saw the door open very slowly and at the same moment noticed a very ugly mouth of a machine-gun protruding. I acted as quickly as lightning. I took out my gun with one hand while the other hand was opening the handbag on Milly's thighs, and as the door opened wide, I managed to put the rod there and press the buttons of the handbag. I told her, 'If you are searched, just say it belongs to me!'

No one noticed what I did except Milly, for they were all facing the door. Then the holder of the machine-gun came into the room. He looked at us one at a time and the machine-gun lastly rested on me. He had a cop's face alright. He told me, 'Jack Zollo, you with a three-piece suit and a red neck tie, you are the one we are after. Then two others came in and seeing where the machine-gun pointed, they followed suit.

'Put your hands behind your head and hold them together. Then turn round slowly and face the wall.'

I did so without the slightest hesitation. I know the times when I am beaten, and this was one of them. One of the cops came to me and searched me expertly and satisfied that I was not loaded, went a few steps away from me. Then I heard a voice of a new arrival ask, 'Is he the one?'

'Yes, Sir.' He talked to me. I turned and saw he was a police inspector. I was then ordered to get out of the room and as I passed him I heard the machine-gun man ask him, 'What about the rest, Sir?'

The Inspector said, 'Well, I don't think the rest are involved. We got the one we had come for, leave them alone.' I was glad then for I knew Milly would not be arrested. Without the rod, the case against me was not half as serious as it would have been. Outside the door, there were three more uniformed policemen. One had a pistol hanging from his waist. When he saw

me coming he held it in his hands as if waiting for an order to eliminate me. There were two patrol cars and I was ushered into one under heavy guard. As we started moving, the other car followed us. I looked out of the windows to try and see if I could see Milly for the last time. She was not there. Within a short time I was in a police cell in Central Police Station. I knew that the girl had wanted to make sure I was Jack Zollo so that she could pass positive information to the police.

In the cell I met three other people, two of them nattily dressed and one shabbily dressed. I was very annoyed with myself for not taking action as soon as I had felt uneasy.

‘Why didn’t I agree to go away as soon as Milly wrote the note to me?’ I asked myself.

I sat in a corner by myself. I had no particular need of hearing what the rest were saying. I remembered all the crimes I had committed since I ran away from home. I remembered how often I had been warned by friends that I was one of the most wanted criminals, remembered all the fingerprints that had been detected from the so many cars I had broken into, recalled all the people who had mentioned my name to the police when they were arrested. Now, here I was locked in a police cell in Central Police Station awaiting almost a hundred and one cases and most of them needed no more evidence than the fingerprints that had been detected. “How shall I account for all those?” I asked myself.

They know me by the name of Jack Zollo so I must not admit that name. From now onwards I’ll be Albert Wanjohi,’ I concluded.

At about half past five, my cell was opened. They called loudly for Jack Zollo but I did not answer though I almost did. When no one answered, the constable went away as he did not know who Zollo was. Then one of the constables who was present at my arrest came. He looked so annoyed that I thought he would burst. He opened the cell and pointed at me, then asked, ‘Aren’t you the one we’ve just brought in?’

‘I am the one, yes.’

“Then why didn’t you answer – when this officer called you?”

‘He didn’t call me. He opened there and called someone else and when he was satisfied that he is not here he went away.’

‘Aren’t you Jack Zollo?’

‘No sir, I am Albert Wanjohi.’

‘But you are the one we have just arrested, isn’t it?’

‘I am not very sure about that. I was arrested about two hours ago.’

‘Yes you are the one. Come out immediately and follow me.’

So I followed him. I was taken into an office where I found six people sitting round a table. Two of them were uniformed: a Superintendent and the Chief Inspector who arrested me. I was given a seat opposite them but two constables stood behind me. One of them talked.

‘Sir, this man says his name is not the one you had given me. When he was called by the name he didn’t answer.’ He was telling this to the Chief Inspector who then turned to me and asked:

‘You say your name is not Jack Zollo?’

‘It is not, sir.’

‘What’s your name then?’

‘Albert Wanjohi.’

‘Let’s see your identity card.’

‘I don’t have one.’

‘And your driving licence.’

‘I don’t have one either. I don’t even know how to drive.’

‘You are not a driver?’ he asked in a surprised voice. ‘And we hear you are one of the smartest get-away drivers? Think twice before you open that mouth of yours. You might admit it after a hard time young boy. Just talk while you have time.’

‘I am telling you the truth, sir.’

Then one of the civilian-clothed cops took out a photo and threw it across the table to me and asked me whether I knew whose it was. To my great surprise it was one of my photos. How they had come across it was, for a while, beyond my knowledge. Then I remembered I had taken out six copies of the particular copy. It was passport size and two had gone to different friends. One had been shot in action and one was in prison. It was likely that it was in the possession of the dead one. Giving them those copies was one of the fatal mistakes I’ve ever made in my bloody life. At the back of the photo was scribbled the name Jack Zollo in a writing I knew I would refuse to recognise as having ever seen. I threw the photo across the table back to him. He asked me, ‘Is that your photo?’

‘Yes it is sir.’

‘And is that your name on the back?’ The S.P. asked me.

‘That name is not mine, sir.’

I then saw him look behind me and before I could guess what he was up to, I felt a heavy blow on the right jaw and the next second I was on the floor. I would not even think of screaming, every part of my body was receiving repeated strokes. Wherever they got whips from was beyond my knowledge, but they were the ones working on me. I could not cry out even if I wanted to. After two minutes, which seemed to me like years, they stopped to ask me if I would alter my statement.

‘Are you beating me to death just to admit a name that doesn’t belong to me?’

In that position I could see a board with some photos pinned on it. It carried a list of the most wanted people. Each photo had a name below and on the second line I saw the name Jack Zollo. There was no photo. Then I remembered the photo I had just seen had a very tiny hole at the top. They noticed my interest and I was deprived of it with a stroke.

‘Are you Jack Zollo or not?’

‘I said I am not. If I were, I would say so. What has a name got to do with my arrest?’

Then it started all over again, but this time a bit harder. I lost consciousness. When I regained it I could hear very distant voices talking. They became clearer and clearer as I recovered wholly. They asked me again but I did not reply. I was so annoyed that I had decided not to talk any more. If they thought the body they were working on could speak, then I would also wait to hear it talk. After a short time I was taken back to my cell. And that was the price I paid for the name Albert Wanjohi.

I did not discuss my case with anyone in the cell as most people do when locked in, trying to find solutions. One thing, I did not know why I was arrested. I had committed so many crimes and it was hard to know which had resulted in my arrest. Again, even if I thought of employing an advocate, it would be a waste of money. No advocate could explain why my fingerprints were found on over ten tourist cars where property had been stolen. No advocate could tell the court why my fingerprints were found on the driver’s mirror on a car stolen outside the University College, later abandoned after committing a robbery in Westlands. No one could talk for me out of the fact that a simi possessing my fingerprints was found at the scene of robbery in Westlands. There were many others, some even worse. So the only solution

was to escape. But how was I to do it? Bribery was out of the question, fighting it out was also out, running out of the crowded court would mean asking for a load of bullets in my spinal cord, a request the police never turned down.

‘So what do I do?’ I asked myself. ‘This is what I’ll do,’ I answered myself. I’ll meet my problems bravely, wisely and calmly and by doing so I’ll make my life easier.’

The following morning I was called out and had my fingerprints taken. At mid-day a parade was held outside the cells and I was asked to select the position I wanted. Taking off my coat and giving it to someone else, I selected a position between two men of my size. The European I had already forgotten about, for it was a long time since we robbed him, came. He did not go far. These white people have sickening memories. All those years and he could not forget my look. Instead of touching me the way he had been instructed to by the Chief Inspector in charge of the parade, he gave me a heavy blow that felled me. I felt for my gun where I used to keep it so as to shoot him to hell, but it was not there. They even read my thoughts for such a remark was made by the Inspector. The white man then went out.

‘What do you say about the identification, Albert?’ the Inspector asked me.

‘What can I say? Wasn’t it meant to identify me? I never saw that idiot in my life.’

At least I noticed that my name had stuck though it wasn’t all that important any more.

‘I am going to write on this form your exact words. They might be brought up as evidence against you if you don’t take care.

‘Write every word you jolly well please and don’t forget to write how that colonialist behaved. It might be the cause of my being rude.’

Two more parades for various robberies were conducted but all the people were new to me and none picked me out. In the late afternoon, the white man we had robbed in Thika was brought. He identified me as one of the four people who had robbed him of his money. Funny how the police work. They’ll never give you rest if they really mean to go after you. So I was accused of the two robberies, but all the same, I knew more cases were ahead of me.

Milly brought me some milk, bread, cigarettes and soda for lunch. She was crying so much that she could not tell me anything. It was her first time to

have someone related to her taken to a police station. She was also shocked for she was now sure I was a criminal because of the gun I had dumped into her handbag. I told her that I would be taken to court the following day and from the court I would be remanded in custody, so if we did not get more time to talk, she could visit me in custody. I did not know where I would be taken. The following morning I was taken to court No. 18, where I was put in the dock.

‘Albert Wanjohi, you are accused that on such and such a date, with others not before the court, jointly armed with a pistol and simis you robbed Mr. Margraves of Lava’s Wool Limited of 33,000 shillings and in doing so you used violence which is contrary to Section 296 of the penal code. Do you agree with the charge?’

‘No, I don’t do such things,’ I answered rudely.

The second charge was read to me and after pleading ‘not guilty’, the judge went on. ‘Okay, your case will be heard on 3rd February next year. You will therefore be remanded in Kamiti Maximum Security remand until then. Your case will come for mention on 14th November this year.’

Before I could open my mouth to try and defend myself, I was pulled out of the dock. As I was being shown to the door out of the court, I saw Milly standing up, her hands hiding her weeping face. She really was sharing my troubles.

While I was being taken to the ground-floor, I asked Milly whether she had heard where she would come to see me but all she could manage was a nod in reply. I told her to take it easy and went away. The cells are underground and so we had to go downstairs. Those remanded in custody were put together. They did not scrutinize the offences so I was put together with drunkards, vagabonds, impersonators or forgers. Some also had come from remand for the mention of their cases. So we were many.

I had 300 shillings on me and I offered fifty shillings for food. We sent a warden who was kind enough and he brought us our orders. I supplied the food to all without caring who was who as I felt I had no more need for money for I was sure that that was the end of my freedom for the next thirty years. That very day, over five people had been convicted on different cases of robbery and none had got away with less than 18 years in prison. What worried me even more was the fact that none of them had more than one offence. Furthermore, they had robbed without using any weapons. How

many years would I get, I who had robbed using deadly weapons? I nearly hit the ceiling.

At twelve, more drunkards were ushered in, those who could not afford to pay their fines or who found it better to go into prison for one or two months than to pay 60 to 100 shillings out of their pockets. Some were still drunk and did not even know what was going on.

I got an idea. I would try to escape. I would call out for a warder and ask to be allowed to go and pay my fine. I would use the name of one of the drunkards and since those who took fines did not know any of us, I might get away with it. If I was caught, that would make no difference since I was going to be imprisoned anyway. So I approached one of the drunkards who was getting a little bit sober. I pretended that I was waiting to be called. I introduced a good conversation and tried to be friendly. Then I told him I had some cash and if he would agree to refund the money once we were out, I'd go and pay for him. We both agreed and agreed on where we would meet after leaving the cells. After getting his name, I called the warder in charge. The man had been fined 60 shillings and his name was Jadiel Gichoya. I was therefore taken from the underground cells to the floor where the fines were being paid. Two people were paying their fines. The warder was still behind me holding the files of Jadiel Gichoya. I took out 60 shillings and held the money. Every minute that passed seemed to me like a full hour.

At long last, the warder handed over my file, but the clerk first stared at me as if he was suspicious. Or may be my fear told me so. We were standing on the corridor. At the far corner I saw a senior prison officer coming towards us accompanied by the Chief Inspector who was in charge of my identification parade. I looked the other way so he would not recognise me. When they reached where we were they stopped and the prison officer started talking to the clerk about a certain person who had escaped without paying his fine. He gave the officer some files and I heard him mention a name. The officer went away after warning the clerk to take care in the future. I was already sweating. Some yards from us another Chief Inspector from Central Police Station met them. They stopped. I heard the Inspector ask the Prison Officer about the files belonging to Albert Wanjohi who was to be taken to Kamiti Remand Prison to await his trial. This Inspector said he wanted it changed for they wanted to remand this Wanjohi in police custody for they had just got other reports about him and he had to be taken to Nakuru for further

identification. He would also help them identify some other criminals who had been arrested early that morning in Nakuru and who had just been brought to Nairobi.

‘There’s no objection to that,’ the S.P. said. ‘Only make sure you bring him to the court when the time of mentioning his case comes. Let’s go down and see.’

So they all went down the stairs towards the cells. I took out a handkerchief and wiped off the sweat flowing on my face. The clerk then started working on Gichoya’s file. I put the sixty shillings notes, which had almost turned wet in my hands, on the table. He counted them and put them in a drawer. He acted as if he was doing everything to deliberately delay me. I was now sure that if the officers had gone straight to the cells, they were already there, calling my name. But I guess that they had to go for my files from the S.P.’s office. Not that it would take long.

The telephone bell rang. The clerk put down his pen. He talked and talked as if he did not want to put the phone down. I could hear the distant voice of a girl asking to be taken out for lunch. The clerk, winking to himself, agreed and told her to wait for him outside the courts in three minutes time. I thought he wanted to postpone my paying the fine until two, but instead he now took his pen and worked as a computer. I blessed the girl for waking up this women-hungry clerk. I was given my receipts and the warder escorted me to the door.

I crossed the road and moved as if I had forgotten my life some place and I was afraid that someone might steal it. Some distance away from the court I looked back. I was sure something very nasty had started. At the main entrance, I saw two police inspectors and the senior prison warden with a hell of a lot of other cops. They had already discovered my trick and were trying to see whether they could see me around and take me back. They were wrong.

‘Well, to hell with what they’ll do with Jadiel Gichoya,’ I concluded as I disappeared.

Opposite Tusker House, I boarded a bus for Wood Street. My heart beat faster than usual. My temperature was very high for I was not feeling well. I saw that the curtains to my apartment were slightly drawn and I knew then that Milly had not gone to work. I knocked at the door twice and it opened.

Milly stood there surprised, as if she was staring at a ghost. She didn’t

know whether to laugh or to cry. All she could manage to do was to open her mouth wide, saying nothing. This was one of those times when someone clearly sees better with her mouth. When she finally recovered, she allowed me to enter. She was now able to talk. I could see that her eyes were swollen because of crying.

‘How is everything, Milly? Any trouble since I went?’

‘As if you don’t know that I have not reported on duty for two days?’

‘Is there anything I can do about it?’

‘Yes, phone them and give them an excuse. If I do it myself I’ll be asked endless questions.’

I went into the bathroom and after taking a shower I changed into another suit. I also took a pair of goggles and put them on to disguise myself a little. When I was ready, I told Milly to go with me to the telephone booth, in Section I. At Mirangini Bar she gave me her boss’s number and I dialled. A moderate English female voice answered.

‘Hello, East African Airways, can I be of service to you?’

‘That is his secretary, that means he is not around,’ Milly told me. ‘Leave him a message.’

‘Yes please,’ I continued. ‘Can I talk to your boss?’ ‘Sorry he is not around. He has gone out for lunch.’

‘Sure, I should have thought of that. Can you take his message?’

‘I would be pleased to if you don’t mind.’

‘Okay, tell him this. Miriam Nyambui has been sick for the last two days. She couldn’t notify him and there was no one she could ask to send the message. I arrived today and found her seriously ill in bed. This is the first thing she asked me to do.’

‘Rest assured that I’ll pass the message and send my best wishes to her. Tell her it is Eva.’

‘Eva, who?’

‘Just Eva. She’ll know right away.’

‘Thanks. I’ll also ask her to let me thank you personally. You sound very kind.’

‘I’ve got to sound kind on the phone, that is part of my training.’

‘So I am likely to meet a different person from what I expect?’

‘I don’t think you’ll get the chance. So long.’ She hung up and I hung up too. I had forgotten Milly’s presence while I was talking to Eva. Instead of

meeting a smiling face, I met a sad one. As I left there I knew I would never be allowed to meet Eva and I did not care either.

I did not feel safe at the bar as I feared I might meet a person who knew me. I told Milly we should go back home immediately. I was hungry because I had not eaten more than half a loaf of bread for the period I had been in police custody. Back home I was given a heavy lunch which I really enjoyed. Milly was a very good cook, in fact. After that I went to the bedroom to rest my limbs for the first time in two days. I had not slept for more than three hours so I was feeling sleepy and very tired. Milly followed me into the bedroom after washing the dishes but by that time I was in dreamland. I woke up at half past seven feeling tired but after a shower, I felt surprisingly well. I was given supper which I ate with a good appetite. Milly liked that.

‘Where’s the thing I put in your handbag?’ I asked Milly who, instead of replying, went to the kitchen and came with it. Women are funny.

‘Did you get trouble anywhere?’

‘No, I came home straight. I didn’t even say goodbye to your friends in the bar. But yesterday on Government Road, I saw the girl who gave you away. She entered Kony Pot Restaurant. She was lucky I didn’t get near her, I’d have ripped her into pieces.’

‘Forget all about her. She is a policewoman and that is her duty. It was all my fault. I should not have gone there had I followed your wishes. Anyway she’ll live to regret it one day.’

‘What happened at the court? I was planning to come to see you in Kamiti tomorrow. I don’t even know the way there.’

‘To be frank with you Milly, as you are the only person I can trust, I escaped and I guess right now every policeman and policewoman is on the look out for me. If I am caught I guess I’ll be shot on sight.’

Then I told her the story of how I managed to escape. She listened very patiently and when I had finished she asked me, ‘What are you proposing now? Will you be patient enough to stay indoors until they forget about you?’

‘That is one of the problems that I have but before tomorrow morning I’ll have a solution.’

Then she brought up a problem she had not raised since we started living together.

‘I want us to wed Jack. We can’t stay this way any longer. My mother is also pressing me about it. I know if we don’t marry soon, one of these days

we will both regret it. I might be in the family way and might very easily lose my job. I guess you already know I can't lose it if I am Mrs. somebody. I want you to think about it before you think of anything else. I haven't met your parents yet. If by bad luck now you were imprisoned, where could I go? I am always telling my mother that I know your parents and I hate repeating the lie. Consider that before anything else.'

When problems start, they follow each other as if they had been called for. The idea of getting out of town for a time was the one that had occupied my mind. Now here was another just introduced and which obviously clashed with the first one. I was proposing to run away for a while and she was proposing a wedding. What was I to do? Vote on it. No! Even if the vote came out in favour of a wedding, I could still overrule it. There was therefore no need of voting. Slow and sure wins the race, so I would talk to her slowly. I couldn't sleep and even if I wanted to, Milly was not giving me time to. She pressed on about the wedding. But I had already decided. I would get out of the town for some time, say six months. By that time the police would have met boys so much tougher than Zollo, that I'd have become a once-upon-a-time story.

I told Milly. 'Look here Milly, you know without my telling you of my affection for you. Now supposing we made arrangements for a wedding and I got arrested on the eve of the wedding day, could you stand such shame? If at present you are not in the family way, there is still plenty of time for us to arrange things.

If I don't take care, the next time you hear about me, I'll be rotting in prison, which I am sure you wouldn't like. For your information, almost every cop in this town has my photo and is looking for me. You know too that I cannot stay indoors for a period of even one month and if I do our neighbours here will become suspicious and there might be a leakage. Surely, it is better that I be a thousand miles from you but safe instead of being thirteen miles from you in Kamiti, but a helpless prisoner, deprived of all my rights. While free we could arrange to meet somewhere secretly and do what we want together no matter how far I may be. There is nowhere I can go in this big world further than thirty years' imprisonment. If you don't know, that is how long I'll be imprisoned when I am caught on my unlucky day. I think the best thing is for me to get out of this town for a certain period of time, not less than six months. I shall be in touch with you and as you have a job that

pays well, you will push on well. You will miss me, yes, but not as much as you'd miss me if I went behind the bars for 30 years. So let us skip the subject of wedding. If you don't see my point, we will follow yours but I am quite sure we shall later be sorry about it,' I concluded.

I could see by her reaction that I had won the battle.

'Where are you proposing to go? I thought they planted policemen everywhere. Which is that place without cops?'

'I could get out of Kenya for a while.'

She was surprised. That idea had not occurred to her.

'Get out of Kenya? I guess you are overreacting or you are crazy. Where to?'

'I could go to Zambia or to Congo. I will never forget you wherever I go.'

'It is not a question of forgetting me. I am worried about your safety. How can you manage to stay in another country where you have no one who knows you or can help you?'

'Did I say I want to go away to look for help from anybody? I want to go to a place where nobody knows me. Whom do I depend on here except you? I can also find another you there,' I said jokingly, but she did not like the joke.

'You aren't fully decided then? Zambia or Congo, which is which?'

'One of the two.'

'And can't I be told?'

'I haven't gone yet. I'll write when I reach where I'll go. My question is, do you agree with my proposition or are we going to talk about it until tomorrow morning?'

My watch told me it was about one and a half hours past midnight.

'I don't think I can do without you, I'll be very lonely.' 'Then in that case all I have been talking about can be termed as useless, eh?'

'Sorry, I didn't mean it that way. I do agree with you but do me one favour before you go.'

'What is it? If you are sure it won't ruin any of us I am ready to.'

'I want you to go to your home and bring me two of your relatives, your youngest brother and sister. The two you told me are in lower primary. Once they are here, I'll arrange everything else concerning their education. Also find me a maid there and come with her. With those here I'll be able to wait for you for as long as you don't think it safe for you to come back.'

The favour she wanted meant that I would have to stay a few more days in

Kenya which I detested. Things always go wrong at the eleventh hour and I have been aware of that for a long time. But I decided that if that was the only favour she wanted, I had no objection. It would relieve my mother the burden of school fees for two.

‘Okay Milly, I agree with you. I’ll have them come here and soon after I’ll be off.’

‘Thank you, I only wish you a swell time.’

‘Are you going on duty tomorrow? Or should I phone your boss?’

‘No, there is no need. The message you left yesterday is enough to give me off duty for a week. I’ll report back there when those two kids you are bringing are in school. I am going to St. Teresa’s to see the headmaster about it. Which classes are they in?’

‘I am not sure. You’ll know for sure when they come but my guess is, the boy is in Std. Two and the girl is in Std. Three. This time tomorrow they will be here. Remember it is a burden you are placing on yourself. You may regret it later.’

‘That’s nonsense. Anyway let it be my business. Your only part in it is to bring them here as soon as possible so that I may resume my duties.’

CHAPTER SIX



The following morning we woke up as usual. Milly wanted to go to St Teresa's to see the headmaster and I wanted to go out to see a friend of mine who owned a Volkswagen saloon car. I wanted to borrow it so as to go home in it at night. At the same time I wanted to see a certain Sikh in town who modified stolen cars for I wanted him to tell me how much he would charge me to change the colour of a car, the number plates, and the road licence. At New Stanley Hotel, where my friend Munene, the owner of the Volkswagen, worked, we talked for thirty minutes. I would take his car at six from his home in Ofafa Jericho. That settled, I went straight to the Sikh. I reached there as he parked his car outside his garage. We had met many times before so he now took my hand and directed me to his office. We sat down and I lit a cigarette.

'How are you, Mota, for so long?'

'I am pretty fine and pushing on with my job.'

'I see. I've got a little problem. I want you to modify a car for me. Give it new number plates, road licence and whatever else you think is necessary. I want it for travelling a long journey.'

'What make?'

'I am thinking of a Volvo.'

'Have you got it ready?'

'No, but that won't take me two days.'

'Are you running out of this country or is it for sale?'

'I am not selling it. I want to have it for a period of time, say about one to two years. Then I get rid of it.'

'Do this. I would have charged you 2,000 shillings cash but I'll give you an alternative. I need a Volkswagen car, a saloon, not very old. If you don't have a place to go for it, I'll show you an Indian who keeps his carelessly. By the time you bring it, your Volvo will be so ready and good with everything that you'll not be able to recognise it yourself. Do I make myself clear?'

'Very clear in fact, Mota. Today or tomorrow I'll bring one of the cars, the

following day I'll bring the other. On Friday, I want to be as far away as the Volvo can take me. And just for asking's sake, who is that careless Indian?'

'He always parks outside Liberty Cinema. No one will notice you I am sure. I have been looking around there several times. He even leaves it there when going home. They use it on the cinema business only. Most of its drivers are Africans so you wouldn't look suspicious. I can assure you that.'

I took out a bunch of master keys and the Sikh showed me the one that is most suitable for Volkswagens.

'Okay, I'll see what I can do about it today or tomorrow,' I told him and stood up. He wished me good luck and I went away. He knew I needed good luck if I was to survive.

I looked at my watch as I reached outside and saw it was half past ten. I was holding a folded umbrella and a raincoat with a hat in my left hand. I had carried them as I was sure it would rain. I entered Jevanjee Gardens and walked across towards Mocha Restaurant. Soon heavy drops of rain started falling. I unfolded my raincoat and put it on. I buttoned its hat so that only my eyes remained uncovered. That was one of the things I liked most at the time. I wanted the weather to remain that way and I wished the rain would fall continuously for as long as it wanted. I felt completely disguised that way. I was thinking of the two cars I was to steal.

'If it is possible I would like to go home sure that the Sikh is working on my Volvo after having taken a Volkswagen to him,' I told myself. I decided to go and see the car which he told me was always parked outside Liberty Cinema. One thing I was sure of was that if an Indian gave you a secret about another Indian, he must be sure of it. I had dealt with many and whatever they had told me always turned out to be true. I believed for sure that the Volkswagen he had told me about was actually there and that if I went there, good results would certainly follow. He had given me the car's registration numbers so it wouldn't be hard for me to identify it. Within forty five minutes I was standing outside Liberty Cinema reading the posters for the film showing and for the next attraction. I had already seen the car parked between another Volkswagen of the same colour. It rained so heavily that not many people crossed the roads or went from here to there. The place was very quiet. There were people on the opposite side sheltering themselves but no one seemed interested in the cars. I watched everyone in sight until I was satisfied that everyone was busy in their own businesses. I felt for my master

keys and selected the one the Sikh had recommended for Volkswagen cars.

A tall brown man in a raincoat smiled at me as he passed me but I didn't smile back. I guessed he smiled because we both had the same type of raincoats and umbrellas. It was a coincidence which would have made anybody, even a fool, smile but not a person who was about to risk his life stealing a car.

I opened my umbrella and went into the rain towards the car. The key fitted and I entered without looking around. I inserted the ignition key and checked the petrol gauge and found it had enough petrol. I switched on the wipers and when the windscreen was clear I reversed the car then shot off. No one raised an alarm and so I slowly drove out of Pangani towards the city centre.

The roads were not very busy so I drove at an average speed to Mota Singh's garage. It was still raining heavily so I was sure it was hard to meet anyone who would know the car and look at it suspiciously. I used the back door and when I hooted twice Mota Singh himself opened the iron door for me. I parked the Volkswagen where I was directed to and by the time I took out the ignition key, his boys had already started working on most of the car's body. I was surprised to see how they worked. I stood there my mouth wide open and within less than fifteen minutes, the car was no longer light blue. Their working speed was incredible. Mota just stood by me smiling broadly. I guessed he was enjoying the way his boys worked. The old number plates were now nowhere to be seen. He then took me by my right hand and once again we sat in his office. He certainly liked my piece too.

'Did you meet any suspicious person anywhere?' he asked me after a short silence.

'No, in fact, it was a very easy job. The rain played the best part. If I knew right now where I'd get the type of Volvo I am interested in, I'd go for it now.'

'Let me see,' the Singh said and bit his tongue slightly, as if turning over matters in his head. I started thinking of the biggest car parks in town and the places where the best cars could be found. I thought of Ambassadeur Hotel lastly and decided I'd go and try there. Then the Singh stroked his finger and told me, 'You have done a good job for me and I feel I owe you something. Do you know Exotica?'

'That place they call Coffee House?'

‘Yes, Coffee House.’

I said I knew it. So he continued to tell me: ‘A friend of mine left his Volvo there. I was talking with him this morning. He is leaving for the U.K. next week and he is selling that car. Frankly speaking he didn’t buy that car so it isn’t any loss to him if it is also stolen. It hasn’t travelled even for one year. It is new and I am sure it will give you the best service you need. Try and see whether you’ll get him.’

I stood and told him that I would be back any time. I guess my star was still up. ‘If I slip,’ I thought, ‘it will be the end of me.’ At Exotica I saw the car. I felt a lot of heat in my body and I wondered why that should happen while it was raining so heavily. I looked this way and that way and, satisfied that there was nobody around, I went to the car and stood by it. I was holding my umbrella partly protecting myself from the heavy rain and partly protecting myself from being seen. Ever seen a child hiding his face with his fingers or closing his eyes thinking he would not be seen? That is what I had done. Or do you think an umbrella could hide a structure standing beside a car? As I opened the door, I felt a heavy arm rest on my shoulder.

“What are you up to mister? Whose car is this you have just opened?”

I looked at his hard face, he looked as if he would swallow me in one gulp. He was thick-set, about five and a half feet tall and looked like a light heavy weight boxer. I judged right then that if I tried being tough, I didn’t stand the slightest chance. He swung me round and pushed me, and my umbrella fell down. Two people who had just parked their car some yards from us stopped to see what was going on. I picked up my umbrella as the thick-set man came at me again.

‘I’ll take you to the police right now for attempting to steal my car. Come on, enter here.’

I did that without any questions for I wanted us to get away from that place because people had started crowding. Some were saying I should be taken out and be beaten but the Indian did not take notice of them.

‘If you try anything, I’ll work on you before we get to the police station or stop the car and shout out that you are a car thief. So if I were you, I’d keep still.’

He started the car and then turned it to find his way to the nearest police station. A police 999 car passed by and my heart skipped a beat as he tried to stop it. I was not trembling at all, even though I knew that if he took me to

the police I would go in for good. Then I suddenly remembered what the Singh had told me about the car not being legal and I felt braver. I asked him, 'What are you planning to do to me?'

'I am taking you to the police.'

'Why? What have I done to you? Yes, I'd have stolen your car, I don't deny that, but you still have it. Let me go my way and I will never attempt it again.'

'Shut up! You are the ones who have terrorised this town by stealing cars. You are going in anyway so stop tales.' When I was sure he meant to take me to the police, I tried the card I had kept close to my chest.

'Listen, I know who you are and I had come to steal this car under instructions. One thing I am sure of is that you are leaving Kenya for the U. K next week.'

I looked at him closely to see his reaction, which was so visible I could have noticed it even without looking at him. He parked the car at an angle on Kimathi Street, looked at me and asked, 'Who instructed you to steal?'

'Someone who knows you also stole it a few months ago. Someone who knows everything in this car is fake or forged so if you take me to the police, both of us will either be in or I'll leave you there, and it is very likely that I'll leave you there. Therefore it is for you to decide. Mine is attempted stealing while yours is stealing plus forgery.'

He had now turned white but I didn't give him time. I made up a few other things from nowhere which I could see hit the mark for he started trembling. It was still raining and the streets were busy with traffic. I felt safer seeing people around for I could tell by the way he looked scared he could try anything to avoid blackmail. I had also seen his name on a receipt that was hanging from the glove compartment and when I told him his name, he became even more frightened. I told him I knew the real owner of the car and that it had been stolen within a short time after the owner had bought it. I also said I knew for how long he had stayed with the car. Having pressed him that much and noticing the incredible fear showing in him, I decided to give him a few minutes to sweat it out thinking. I knew for sure that if I opened the door and went away, he wouldn't interfere with me. I knew too that if he interfered with me, it would certainly not be in the way of telling me to go with him to the police. He was now having a hard time and I was not going to let him get away with it. Just imagine! He knew he had stolen that car and yet he was

ready and willing to take me to the police for only attempting to steal it from him. To let him get away with it for nothing was to act foolishly. He sighed deeply and then he looked at me. 'What do you propose? I quite understand you are well informed and I believe you were sent to get me, but tell me, what do you want to do?'

'I am stopping the first 999 car that comes here. You were taking me to the police yet you knew you are a thief too. You didn't know I knew the much I do and a lot more that the police will like to hear. I am sure that your story will not stick but mine will. Whenever you see that somebody is merciless, show him no mercy either and I mean what I say.' If ever you are asked to fetch a coward, just go round the town looking for a guilty Indian and I assure you that you'll win the first prize. Right then, this one was trembling so much that the window glasses where his right arm rested vibrated loudly. Every element in his body showed fear. At the same time I was not forgetting the fact that I was blackmailing him. One thing I was sure of was, even if I hit him on the face right then, he could not hit back. He was completely at my mercy. He looked at me again and said, 'Listen young man, we can understand each other without inviting trouble. I am quite aware that I am already beaten. Forget about the fact that I would have taken you to the police, just tell me what you want. Please leave the police out of this.'

'Okay, you agree that this is not the first car you have stolen, don't you?'

'Yes. I...'

'You also agree that if we go to your home right now with the police, they will recover some other things that will put you into even more trouble?'

'Well, I... , like what?'

'You are not licenced to carry a gun or are you?'

To my surprise I saw him look at the left hand side of his inner coat pocket where he had a gun. I too looked there wide-eyed and frowning as if I was indicating its position and he stared vacantly in the air opening his mouth wide. I believe most people see with their mouths better when surprised, shocked, frightened or delighted.

'Well, I agree you know too much and can ruin my life, but let's come to an understanding. Is there anything I can do to make you forget all that?'

'I will tell you what. I was not intending to steal your car, I was opening it to wait for you inside it as I didn't know for how long you would stay in the hotel. I have been watching you for some hours and the time I wanted to talk

to you I saw a Singh come to you. You talked for some time and he went away. I have been paid to ruin you. I have a brother in the police force and I have been instructed to tell him everything. Anyway I know more about you than you'd even guess. Before acting I decided I should let you know but before I got you in a good corner you got the better of me. I am getting 3,000 shillings if I put you in. I have been given 1,000 shillings already and the rest two will come when you are in. Do you understand me?'

'But why doesn't the one who employed you go to the police himself or just phone instead of employing someone for such a fee?'

'He told me he is very close to you, and according to their custom, if you personally harm a close friend or a relative of yours you'll either die very painfully soon or run mad. When you employ somebody, his blood won't harm you. He is a Singh, anyway.'

I added that to lend my statement some weight and it did. He nodded his head several times meaning that he knew who had sent me. I was sure he did not mean Mota Singh otherwise I would have committed a bad sin.

'Tell me what you want then, I have other things to do.'

'Do you want to tell me you are buying me off? That I should not continue with it?'

'Yes of course, if we understand each other, that is.'

'Okay, the first thing I want is this car. You haven't bought it so there will be no loss on your side. The other thing is, I want double the amount I was to be given after completion of my mission.'

Brother, whenever you ask for anything, ask for double, you may surprise yourself and get it. When I told the Indian what I wanted, I had thought he would jump up in shock but believe it or not, he took out a pouch from the inner pocket of his coat and he gave me 4,000 shillings. He then left the ignition key in its place, opened the car, and after wishing me good luck, walked away.

It was my turn now to see with my mouth. For not less than a minute, I stayed there holding forty one-hundred shillings then realising my mistake, I put it in my pocket and took the driver's seat. I set the car in motion and in three minute's time I was in Mota Singh's garage. The rain was still falling heavily as I left the garage going to take a bus for Wood Street. I had passed the hardest test.

I arrived in Wood Street at about three. I was very hungry but the weight

of the money I had obtained for nothing and the fact that I had secured the car of my dream made me forget my hunger. Milly was not there so I went in the kitchen and fetched myself some food. When I finished eating, I left the plate on the table and went to the bedroom. I counted my money again and was sure that I had forty one hundred shillings. I lifted the pillow and put it under. I then took off my coat and hung it on the wall, then lay on the bed with my shoes still on. Many thoughts concerning my safari so occupied every corner of my head that I dozed off without knowing.

Milly woke me up when she came at six o'clock. I woke in a hurry as I thought I was late. She told me briefly what she had been doing the whole day and that the transfer of both children had been granted. She had also some forms that said they were to start school in St. Teresa's in Stds. Two and Three. So the only thing that remained was to bring the children. I gave her a fake story of my day's movements and the only true part was about the borrowing of a car. I told her I would bring the children that night any time and then I prepared to go. I could see she was delighted but I couldn't see the reason why. Under the pillow I counted ten one hundred shilling notes and put them in my pocket. I told her to take care of the rest. I then took my gun and set off for Ofafa Jericho where Munene, the owner of the Volkswagen I was going to borrow had an apartment. It had grown dark by the time I reached there and the street lights were shining brightly. I was still wearing my hat and my raincoat even though the rain had stopped.

The car was parked outside his house and I passed it as I went to knock at the door. It was not new when he bought it but the owner, a certain European, had taken great care of it. Munene also serviced it well. The door opened and Munene's wife welcomed me. Her husband was not there but had left the car keys with the information that if I arrived I should take it. She tried to persuade me to have supper but I refused as I was late. It was around half past seven and by that time I had planned to be somewhere near Murang'a. The tank was full so I didn't need to buy petrol.

I passed Broadway stores at Ruaraka around eight accelerating the Volkswagen to its maximum speed. The car could run alright but not as fast as I wanted it to. As it struck nine I was refilling the tank at a Total petrol station in Murang'a. From there it was a short journey, about fifteen miles, to Kiru. At the post office I was stopped by a policeman who none-the-less didn't check anything. He only asked me where I was going. Another cop

appeared from behind the post office building. The one who had stopped me now let me go. It had started raining as I crossed Mathioya River and I knew I would go through a tough time as the road was normally muddy. At Nyakihoi two buses were stuck in the mud, one was right across the road. The only passengers were three turn-boys and a driver in each bus. I guessed the passengers must have set off on foot to the town as it was about seven miles away. I got out of my car with my torch and went to talk to the occupants of the buses. They showed me a route that had been made by small vehicles through a garden planted with maize. It was a tough place to pass and at first I feared I would too get stuck but I didn't. My Volkswagen twisted from left to right, sometimes roaring, the rear wheels going round and sliding on the ground. I reversed it a little and when I engaged the top gear the car skidded right and left several times. Finally I got to the road on the other side. I stopped to light a cigarette. I smiled as I started off again. The road was tough alright but I managed it at a speed of ten miles an hour. At Kaweru all was quiet but some yards from the shopping centre, at a place called Ichanjeru, a bus and a lorry loaded with bananas to the top were stuck in the mud. I found a way by the side and I used it. At the junction I decided to follow the road through Gaitwa market as it was the one to my home. It was tougher than the one before but at a slow speed I managed it. I arrived at Thuita shopping centre at around eleven and within five minutes I was hooting outside my home. Mother had just gone to bed as she told me later and she woke up as soon as she heard the hoot. She was very glad to see me. My father was not there. But then he was rarely at home except during the holidays. His school was forty miles away. My other brothers and sisters woke up to greet me and I chatted with them a little. The only ones who were not there were the very children I had gone for. I told mummy to wake them up and dress them as soon as possible. She got surprised but was too smart to start asking questions. She dressed them as fast as she could and when they were ready she said so.

‘I am going with these two. I have prepared everything for them and the day after tomorrow they will join St. Theresa’s school. Do you have any objections?’

‘Why should I object, I guess you know what you are doing,’ she answered.

‘By the way, which classes are they in? I told the school that Wambui is in

Std. Three and Richard in Std. Two.’

‘They are in Std. Four and Std. Three respectively. I am sorry, I had to make them repeat their classes.’

‘Well, it’s alright. That doesn’t make any difference.’ A few more minutes and I told my mother that she should let us go. She tried to persuade me to spend the night there but I had enough reasons to object to her requests. We all walked to the car, about seven yards from the house. I put both children in the front seat and I took the driver’s seat and started the engine. I reversed the car and turned it, ready to go. I then waited for them to come and wish us good luck. When we were through, I released the clutch. The rain had stopped falling but the road was as tough as before. I went through the same hardships but after the struggle we were safely back in Murang’a town. From there, the road was without much traffic and we drove without any trouble to Wood Street. It was around four o’clock in the morning when we arrived.

I never saw Milly as happy as she was that day. She didn’t even go back to bed. The children were also too delighted to sleep so the only person who went to bed was Zollo.

I woke up very late the following morning. Milly and the children were not there but she had left a note on the table saying that she had gone out to town to buy the children uniforms. I took my breakfast and after dressing up took the car to the owner at New Stanley Hotel. From there I went to Mota’s garage. He wasn’t there and so I waited for him for over thirty minutes before he came. He was very glad to see me. He opened the garage and I stared at a post-office-red Volvo instead of the white one. It had some other number plates and another road licence. To my surprise I was supplied with its Log Book. As I drove it out of the garage to a world of other cars, I was feeling very safe. Tomorrow, Thursday, I’ll be as far away from Nairobi as the Volvo will take me,’ I told myself as I parked the car outside my apartment in Wood Street.

When Milly came in the evening she had bought everything the children wanted. They were happier than ever. The problem of the maid was to be solved by my mother who had promised to bring Milly one as soon as she found her.

It was time now for me to get ready to leave Kenya. I had received very many reports from friends all saying how eager the cops were to take me to the gallows. I knew it would take cops only a short time to locate me if I

didn't leave soon. I was also aware that it wouldn't be hard for the cops to spot me in one of my trips to and from town. I carefully packed my valuables in a suitcase, including the gun and took the keys with me. I knew that Milly would never interfere with the box. I left her and the children saying she would hear from me once I was out of the country. I left her weeping.

That evening I parked my car outside Haitian's Club and tipped a watchman to keep an eye on it. I did not want it stolen at the eleventh hour. I met Ndung'u, a friend of mine, with Njoroge, an acquaintance of mine and a close friend of Ndung'u's, as they were about to enter the club. They seemed in such haste that they almost did not notice me. One took my left arm and the other my right arm looking so happy, as if they had met their saviour. There was a man in this club who owed me about a thousand shillings and as I needed money I wanted to know if he would give me back some of it. I got 500 shillings out of him. I ordered beer for the three of us. While we were drinking we started talking. They had received the news that I had escaped and they told me the police were looking for me everywhere. They told me it was advisable not to stay around Nairobi area.

After some minutes Ndung'u added, 'Zollo, I think we better get out of this town for some time, every cop here is looking for us. We were almost arrested a few minutes ago. Njoroge has just stabbed a cop and if we are caught God knows what will happen to us. The cop could die and the world would fall on us,' he concluded seriously.

'Where can we go? Which is the best place?' I asked that in order to find out how far they had thought about it. On my part I was glad for I knew if we three ran out of Kenya, we would easily settle down anywhere. Ndung'u especially was a very nice boy but I didn't like Njoroge very much. He used to drink too much for my comfort.

'If you ask me, I would prefer Mombasa. I was there for two years and noticed the cops there did not interfere with citizens, unless we go there and start messing up the town,' Njoroge told us.

They then both looked at me as if they wanted me to approve the suggestion, but instead I drained my glass and refilled it, emptying my bottle. Ndung'u asked me, 'What do you suggest, Zollo? I think you are in a worse jam if what I think you have done is true.'

'My idea is different and I don't think either of you will approve of it. It is true that I am in a very bad jam and if I am caught I'd go in for 30 years. My

idea is not only to get out of this town, but out of this country as well. I want to go to Congo and spend the rest of my life there. I have only a little capital but it will push me until I get settled. If you'd join me, I'd be very glad because we would join ideas and get settled more easily.' I wasn't surprised to hear them jump to the idea. One thing, Ndung'u liked me as he was one of my gangsters and we had pulled a lot of jobs together. We therefore agreed that we should leave that very night. I could see that they were drunk as they had been drinking the whole day. In resisting arrest, Njoroge had stabbed a cop and had run away. At eight, we all entered the car. They told me that none of them would like to go for their clothes as they had enough cash to buy new clothes when we arrived at our destination. I found that rather odd but I didn't tell them so. As I started the car I decided that I should not leave Kenya without telling my mother so instead of driving towards Nakuru I found my way through Ngara, past Muthaiga Police Station where the police were getting ready to set a road block, then past Broadway Stores, then on toward Thika and Murang'a. It was about seven past eight. I was feeling very tired as I hadn't had enough sleep for a couple of days and the beer I had taken had started taking effect. All the same, behind the steering wheel, I was always sober.

The Volvo did far better than the Volkswagen I had the night before and despite the rain the mud from Murang'a to Thuita did not hamper the Volvo. At Nyakihoi, in the same place, two buses were stuck. Each had not less than thirty passengers who could not leave the buses and set off on foot as they had luggage and the distance from there to their homes was no joke. Within a few minutes from there we found ourselves in Thuita, but my two companions were far from being awake.

I told my mother about my plan to leave Kenya for a short period and I gave her the reasons. I also told her it was one of the reasons I had taken the two children to stay with my future wife. She told me that if that was the case she had no objection but she advised me to take great care of myself. We talked for about an hour, then I asked her to let me go. She bade me goodbye and wished me good luck.

I drove from Thuita to Gakindu, some nine miles away. It was muddy and the road was at its worst and before we reached Gakindu I had sweated it out for hours. My boys were still asleep and I was at times surprised that they never woke up even at places where the car would enter a hole and then leap

into the air.

I filled up the tank at Gakindu and the journey from there to Nyeri was easy. Once in Nyeri I took the road to Nakuru. My boys were still asleep. They only woke up when we reached Thompson's Falls. I was very tired. I drove from this to that corner of Nyahururu looking for a lodging. It was then that Njoroge noticed where we were and asked me, 'How come that we reached Nyahururu before Nakuru?' He sounded very surprised.

'Be good and sleep old boy. If you make me talk you will regret being in a ditch!'

I was now on the road towards Nakuru as I had decided that at Nyahururu there was not a good lodging that was not occupied. The hotels were opening as we reached Nakuru. I parked the Volvo outside Amigo's Hotel facing the road. Even in angle parkings, I never parked my car straight. I always entered in reverse so that if I wanted the car in a hurry, especially if I was chased, I did not have to reverse the car, I had only to get in and shoot off, leaving the people seeing with their mouths.

In the hotel I ordered a glass of milk and swallowed it greedily, hot as it was. Then I went to the bar and persuaded the cashier to sell me one bottle of brandy. That too I swallowed greedily. There were two male waiters and three maids. When they saw the way I was dozing and moving they knew I needed some sleep. They told me there was an empty room and I could use it if I wanted to. I felt tired and sleepy after driving a journey of about 200 miles.

My idea was that we would set off for the Uganda border as soon as darkness fell. I had therefore plenty of time to rest. Going upstairs I had to be supported by a maid on each side and a man behind. When we reached the room, they laid me on the bed and instantly I was fast asleep. As I passed out I heard a distant female voice saying, 'Never joke with men. Just look at this man and imagine he was the driver!'

I woke at half past three, then went to the bathroom and took a bath. After the bath I felt so fine that I could drive twelve good hours non-stop. When I went downstairs, I found Ndung'u and Njoroge still drinking. They were surrounded by prostitutes on a certain table near a corner, and as I was feeling hungry I did not join them. I went to the hotel and ordered a heavy meal. When I was alright I went back to the bar. The three maids came to me and started asking me about the journey which had made me so tired. I gave them

satisfactory reasons. I joined my boys who now welcomed me with two bottles of beer. I did not want to drink because I knew the driving would be tough. I rejected the introductions they wanted between me and the dames they were with. I told them, 'I have't come here to know anybody, and if I want to know one, not of this class.' I meant every word of it. Then things started happening. Two men who occupied a table a few yards from ours called one of the girls. As she stood up to go Njoroge reached for her arm and held it. I didn't interfere because I knew he was drunk. Then Ndung'u grabbed his arm and told him to let the girl go for if she wanted him she would come back. Five minutes passed and the girl still sat with the two men. One of the girls on our table told Njoroge to forget her as the man who just called her was the girl's boyfriend. I wished she had not opened her mouth. Njoroge shot off towards the table as if he sprang out of a spray gun. 'What do you mean by his girlfriend? Is he going to pay all the money I have spent on her?' He was speaking so loudly that all the people in the bar looked towards him. He reached for the girl and seizing her by the neck pulled her out of the chair she was sitting in. None of the men did anything. I felt so bad that I nearly hit him but I struggled with my temper and kept cool. The 'owner' of the girl then stood up but was held back by the other. I could see that whoever these two gentlemen were they were not the cheap type. Even after manhandling the girl, Njoroge would not sit. He went back to the man and shouted that if any of them claimed the girl as his, then he should stand up and prove it with fists. I knew it was useless to try to cool him down because the more you tried to dissuade him the worse he became. People smartly dressed the way we were ought not to have behaved that way. I knew the only alternative was to leave that bar as soon as possible because if the other men got annoyed there was sure to be a fight and when it broke out I would have to take sides. I went and held Njoroge by the collar of his tweed coat and told him: 'Listen Njoroge, you shouldn't behave that way. What's a woman after all? The time for us to go has come and you have to leave the girl here whether you like it or not. I am going out and if I start the car before you have arrived, I am going alone, and remember if you start a fight you'll sweat it out alone. So if you are coming, come. If you are not, good bye and good luck.' Then I turned to Ndung'u. 'That applies to you too.'

I did not say anything else but turned and went out. I did not even look behind to see what was happening. I went straight to the car. I opened the car

and once in the driver's seat I inserted the key. As I started the engine I saw them in the veranda running towards me. They knew me too well to think that I was joking. I knew that even the little delay had been caused by them settling their bills. When they took their seats, I moved the car and turned to Kenyatta Avenue. At the door I saw one of the men watching us and I got a feeling that he was taking our car's registration number. It was not yet time for us to resume the journey, all I wanted was to take Njoroge out of that place. I knew there was likely to be trouble. One thing, you already know that I was among the VIP's wanted by the Kenya Police and if a fight broke and police arrested us, we would all sink. I had very many cases waiting for me and I was not yet ready to plead guilty or not guilty. It was also the reason I had decided to set off for another country.

I parked the car outside Tours Night Club and as there was a boogie we went in. I guessed that a dance would do Njoroge some good. I was even toying with the idea of running off without him if he didn't behave himself. As it turned out, we never got the time. Within minutes of our arrival Njoroge was busy talking to two boys we met there. They were so happy together that he even forgot he was drunk. For no reason I started feeling uneasy and whenever I got such signs there was always trouble ahead. I looked at my watch and saw it was around five. Within two hours we would be off for the Uganda border.

Then I saw two men coming towards me and I knew right away that there was trouble. Surely, the way Njoroge had behaved and the way I warned him about my going alone must have made the people suspicious. The two reached me and one said, 'Excuse us Mwananchi, we would like to have a word with you outside. We are police officers and we have been sent to take you for questioning. It won't take long.' I knew it was not a request but an order. I was lucky that I had left my gun in Nairobi. As I ascended the few stairs from the dancing hall, I saw Njoroge at the far corner wrestling with two more men. Two others joined them and he was overpowered. When we got outside I saw Ndung'u sitting in a Police 999 car parked outside the club. I was ushered into the same car, then I saw one of the men Njoroge had quarrelled with. I later came to know that one was a police Sergeant and the other a constable. By the time Njoroge was brought to the car, he had been worked on. But he was still resisting arrest and whenever he got his hand free, a cop would lose a tooth and one had badly swollen lips. In a fight

Njoroge can take two men without any assistance and they would know they were fighting with a man. Now, a trail of trouble started a trail of sleepless nights too. In the police station we were asked who owned the car and I said I owned it. I was asked whether I wanted it to stay where it was or whether I wanted it brought into the police station, and I said it should be brought to the station. I gave them the keys. I had trusted the Singh who had worked on it. He had also assured me not to fear anything. To look less suspicious I had to take the risk of giving them the keys. They told us that they suspected us of being robbers from Nairobi because of the way we had behaved and that all they wanted was to check whether any of us had a past record or was wanted by the police.

‘So we want your fingerprints. We will send them to the C.R.O.’s head office in Nairobi. If anyone of you is clean we will release him. If you are wanted by the police from any corner of the world, that is where we will take you. Do you agree?’

‘We agree, sir, but make sure you don’t delay us much. We are from Nairobi alright but we are not criminals as you suggest. Anyway we have no objection to our fingerprints being taken.’

I was the one speaking as the others had been drinking the whole day and it seemed as if the beer they had taken had suddenly started taking effect immediately after our arrest. I said all that because I knew, they would take our fingerprints with or without our consent. There was no point in arguing with them anyway. So far they had spoken the truth.

They could not take our fingerprints at that time so we had to wait until morning. We were therefore locked each in his own cell. In my cell, I got busy thinking. I was quite sure that if I didn’t do something and my fingerprints got to the C.R.O. it would no doubt be the end of the road for me. I had so many cases awaiting me that if I was taken back to Nairobi I would run mad. Remember I had escaped from the law courts only a few days ago. Even the Nakuru police would be thanked by the Chief Commissioner himself if they got me there. The trouble was what was I to do? I had money alright, over 3,000 shillings but where was I to start if I was to get out by bribery?

Already the Police Superintendent in charge of the station knew that three people had been arrested and were suspected of being some of the most famous criminals in Kenya, so if one just vanished and the remainder were

found guilty, the officer on duty would have it rough. So I ruled out the possibility of bribing. Escaping from the cells without outside help was also out of the question, there was no need of even thinking about it. Had we all been in the same cell we might have risked fighting it out with them, but as it was, each was in his own cell. So I was left with only one alternative. To try as much as I could to spoil my fingerprints.

‘How can it be done?’ I asked myself. I remembered that some people had told me that after smearing your palms and fingers with ink used for taking fingerprints and then pressing your hand on your head, the lines made by the hair would make a great difference when the prints were taken. But then unless the person taking the prints is blind how on earth can you do it? They had also told me that if you pressed your palms against your trousers or coat just before the prints are taken they would again be different. But that too stood no chance of passing undetected.

‘So what can I do?’ Then an idea came to me. I had a razor blade that I had bought to cut a badly broken nail on my left hand for it pained a lot when touched. I thought if I could scrape off the upper skin on my hands there would be a difference in the prints. I was lucky for the blade was in my coat and I had it in the cell. It was new and it started doing the job well. Painful as it was I did not mind it, for it would help me. If it failed I would go in anyway, so it was better to try.

It took me hours of pain to complete one hand. When I was through with one I could not hold the razor blade in it. In fact I bled so much that I thought I would faint. I didn’t know a hand, hard as it was, could bleed so much. At around ten my cell was opened and three people were thrown in. One was too drunk to realise where he was and he started urinating soon after the door was locked. Luckily two of them were the boys Njoroge was talking to at Tours Night Club. They had also been arrested as suspects and they admitted to me that they had committed the crime they had been arrested for. I gave them my story too and then told them about what I was planning to do and what I had already done. They pitied me very much as they realised I must have been standing great pain. I showed them the hand I had already worked on and told them I was unable to do the same to the other. One of them volunteered to help me and he did a very nice job. It was not as painful as the first one and didn’t bleed as much either. By mid-night they were all asleep except me. The hands were paining too much to allow me to sleep. I only managed to

doze in the eleventh hour.

Early the next morning, tea was brought. Our cells were unlocked and we were told to take a cup each. I could not hold anything as my hands were swollen and were paining too much. So, I sat and watched the others, enjoying their poor breakfast. My two friends had become sober now and they started realising the fatal mistake they had made. I didn't want to speak with Njoroge. I would not even have liked to be near him if I could have helped it. So much trouble lay ahead of us and he was still behaving in a manner that raised suspicion. I didn't even answer any of them when they asked me why I wasn't taking tea. Njoroge then joined his two friends and they got busy talking.

'Someone is bringing us a hell of a lot of trouble because of a mere prostitute,' was all he kept repeating.

At around nine that morning, a police inspector came and called us by our names. I had given a false name and was fearing that, if they looked at my driving licence, they would prove me a liar and I would look even more suspicious. So far, the police in this station did not regard me with too much suspicion. They knew that I was sober when they arrested us and I was the only one who hadn't resisted arrest in any way. I was the first to be called. I hesitated. They called twice, 'Richard Mwangi!' I instantly remembered that that was supposed to be my name, but instead of answering, I walked around, pretending to be sick. I had washed my hands with cold water so that you could not have easily noticed anything wrong with them. Then I went to the toilet so that they could call another person. I did not want to be the first. They called Ndung'u while I was in the toilet. Then an idea came to me. If, while the officer was taking Ndung'u's finger-prints I went and smeared my hands with the ink on the roller, the officer could not detect anything. So, I shot out of the toilet and went to where the ink and roller were. I took the roller and rolled it on each of my hands. I endured the pain. Then I stood by, ready for my turn. When it came, I courageously pretended not to know how finger-prints are taken and I had to stand more pain when each of my fingers was held tightly and pressed on the papers. By the time the officer was through with me, I was sweating all over with pain. I was then taken back and locked in my cell. A Chief Inspector came to my cell and started questioning me. He wanted to know whether I was really a criminal and if not, who I was and where I worked and if I did not work, what was my business, and so on.

From the way the Inspector was talking to me, I could tell that he liked me. I guess it was because of the way I was dressed, very smart, and my manner of talking, very polite, and of course, the Volvo outside. Anyway, I told him that I had two garages in Nairobi and that I specialised in secondhand cars, that I could even sell him one at a low price. I added that the garages were jointly owned by me and Mota Singh, and he could phone him if he so wished. I deliberately gave him the name of Mota Singh because I knew the Singh would support my yarn if they phoned him. Before we parted, I was sure he was satisfied with my story and we had even become friends. I can talk myself out of anything, if only I am given a chance to.

When lunch came, I couldn't eat. My hands minus the skin could not stand anything hot and no spoons are supplied in police stations if you don't know. So, that time too, I merely watched the rest enjoying their lunch. Njoroge was always the first to finish his meal. He either had a lot of experience in police custody, or he was greedy, or most likely, both. For breakfast and lunch, I smoked cigarettes which I had managed to smuggle in. Having cigarettes in police cells depends on the inspector on duty. If he is kind, you'll get any amount you want, if he is unscrupulous, you won't get any. You might even miss lunch. The one on duty right then was a Luo, with long unbrushed teeth that protruded from his closed lips. He would have preferred a horse to a Kikuyu. Evening came and I could only manage to eat a toast that had been brought for another convict by relatives. The following morning, we were all called. I was sure that the results had come and it was time to prepare for the best or worst.

First Ndung'u was called. 'Have you a criminal record?' the Inspector asked him.

'No Sir.'

'If you decide to talk in the last minute, it is up to you. All I want you to know is that the Head of C.I.D. would personally like to see you and this Njoroge. If he doesn't come in person he will send his top men. I am made to understand that you are among the most wanted criminals in Kenya. Do I make myself clear?'

He then told us to follow him to an inner room. Nothing concerning me had been said so far and I had started getting hopes. In this room, there were four more people. They introduced themselves as a Superintendent of police, a Chief Inspector with C.I.D., and two inspectors, also with the C.I.D. The

Superintendent asked for Ndung'u and Njoroge who were then given seats further in the corner. I was given mine away from them. The Chief Inspector I had spoken to the night before entered the room at that moment. He looked at me and smiled, took a seat and faced us. He certainly liked me. My boys were told the same story by the S.P. They were to be locked in until either the Assistant Commissioner of Police came or sent his junior officers.

They were taken to the cells. By this time, Njoroge had already been charged with causing bodily harm to two police officers while resisting arrest. Then when they had gone, the S.P. turned to me.

'Richard Mwangi, you are a good man but in the wrong company. One thing we are going to charge you with is failing to have an identity card and you are a grown up. You haven't taken one in your life, have you?'

'I haven't, Sir.'

This now was proof enough that they had searched for my fingerprints everywhere without success.

'Well, it is nice of you to admit your mistake. Your fingers are clear but I would ask you to take care you do not join the wrong company. By the way, when we checked your prints we found a lot of sores, why is this?'

'Sir, I suffer from leprosy, even my feet are like that and my body is sometimes affected, a very strange disease.'

They pitied me a lot. Not one of them was smiling when I told them that story and I could see they feared I might infect them. The Chief Inspector told me that he had checked the story I had given him over the phone, and he was told it was true. They discussed what should be done to me and came to the conclusion that even though the report had said we should all be detained until the A.C.P. came, it was not right to detain an innocent person. If there had been anything wrong with me, I would have tried to resist arrest like the others! I was given the keys to my car and my cash and the Chief Inspector came with me as far as where they had parked my car. We talked for about two minutes, which to me seemed like two days. Then I started my car and set off. Once in town, I went to the post office and bought a money order envelope, put 300 shillings in it and addressed it to the Chief Inspector. I also wrote him a short note.

Thanks for your much kindness towards me. I am not bribing you as I am already out, but it is just a sign to say that I am much longing to see you once again and very soon. So long.

Richard Mwangi.

Then I entered my car and headed for the Kenya-Uganda border.

I had planned with the others that we would travel at night but after being released, I did not care what time of day it was. I arrived in Eldoret at around half past ten. From there, I travelled to Bungoma and then reached Malaba. The latter is the border town between Kenya and Uganda. I was stopped and my car searched, checked and rechecked but I didn't know what they were looking for. I had never gone to another country, so I had never crossed any borders. In fact, I was following a map I had copied from an atlas. I did not have any travel papers but I managed to buy my way through. Money can open borders. I reached Tororo, went straight to Jinja and then on to Kampala. I did not stop in the small towns unless it was very necessary. I arrived in Kampala at around four and decided that I should spend the rest of the day there, or stay for two days if need be. I found my way to Rhino Hotel and found my car a parking space. This hotel was one of the biggest in the town. I had always thought it wise not to use small hotels while driving a stolen car. People in these big hotels are never suspicious, even if one parked a Benz. After all, they are built for them. I entered the hotel and booked a room in the name of Charles Lukindo, a Ugandan I had gone to school with. I had about 6000 shillings in Ugandan currency, which I had changed from Mota Singh and wished I had asked for more as I had come to like the town. I was sure that wherever I went, no policeman would be suspicious of me. I wouldn't fear them either as I was not wanted here. The only thing that I was to remind myself was that I was Charles Lukindo. But that was not difficult because I never took a name of somebody I did not know. In most cases I used the names of my younger brothers. This always made it easy for me to remember the name I had given. I bought myself a pair of imported shoes, which I liked, as I hadn't seen one of the type before, and that relieved me of a hundred and fifty shillings. The hotel was also expensive and my bill was running high so I decided to leave the town on the third day. I had spent two nights there and had enjoyed the hotel's services. You can rank it with the New Stanley Hotel in Nairobi, or it could be a little bit better.

I emptied my pockets of the Ugandan currency by filling up the tank. Then I set off once again, through Masaka, Malaba, Kalaba and reached Kisulu. Kisulu is on the Uganda-Rwanda border. Here a good Samaritan advised me that if I wanted to exchange money, I was to contact some Indians who

owned shops there. I also wanted my car serviced as it had already travelled a long distance. After some hours rest, I took off for Kisenyi, which took me about six hours. Kisenyi is on the Rwanda-Congo border. It is the town I liked best among all the towns I had passed through on the whole journey. First, it was much easier to change money. Secondly, I noticed that people here were not curious about strangers. And thirdly, people spoke Swahili which, of course, made me feel better and able to find my way about. I now had Congo currency. I spent two days in Kisenyi. The only thing that beat me was that here, they drove on the right. To get used to it was very hard. I would drive for miles keeping right only to find myself suddenly keeping left. Cars from the opposite side would come with their full lights on, to warn me that I was on the wrong side.

After two days, I prepared to take off for Bukavu, about 280 miles away. This is a large town and very tricky to a stranger, with more layabouts than the rest of the towns through which I had passed. People also seemed to realize quickly that I was a visitor and they would volunteer to guide me in order to rob me. But I was a different type of a stranger. I was not bom there, but I soon found my way round. Here, I was prepared to stay for a period of time. I got friendly with a girl who was working in a certain bank. I had seen her at a bus stage waiting for a bus in the evening, and I had stopped for her. She entered my Volvo and told me where she was going. The problem was that she spoke French and I spoke English. She also knew some Swahili but it was very difficult to understand what she was saying.

Anyway, we got along very well. She had her own apartment a few miles from the town but I can't recall the name of the location. I managed to tell her, in Swahili, that I was staying in a lodging and that I was paying a lot of money per day for the bed and the meals I was taking there. So, we agreed that we should go to the hotel and book off, then go to her apartment. I used to wake up early to take her to her place of work and go for her at lunch time, and then go for her in the evening. My car still had Kenyan registration numbers and I always noticed people staring at us, wherever my car passed them. I was fearing that it might cook some trouble for me but it didn't. Then I decided it was foolish to stay all day at home, waiting for the time when I would go for my mistress. Once, I tried to stop at the bus-stage to see if I could get some fare-paying passengers and I was surprised at the way they jumped into the car. I did it several times that day, going to the centre of the

town and back, and even going to further distances. Brother, I had opened a well for drawing francs! I would find myself with a lot of francs. I was making more money with that matatu business than my mistress was making in a bank. She didn't know until very late in the week what I was doing during the day. She did not comment on the idea and even if she did, I would not have heeded. During the time I stayed with her, the name Linda was the only one I knew, and she knew me as Albert. I stayed with her for two months and within that time, I had written three times to Milly and twice to my mother. I had also sent each the latest photographs I had been taken in Bukavu.

CHAPTER SEVEN



Congo, a place of music! Every night-club I visited had its own band which was as expert as the best bands in Kenya. Strip-tease joints everywhere you go. Then the fashion, far much better than what we had in Kenya at the time, or as far as I knew. Then, I came to know an Indian who owned a hotel there. He was from Kenya and his brothers still live in Kenya. He also had another hotel in Mombasa by the same name. I just happened to be in town one day, when I noticed a Mercedes Benz 280 with Kenyan registration numbers. I followed it until we reached a big hotel and as the driver parked it, I quickly parked mine beside his. When he too noticed my car's registration numbers, he came to me smiling broadly as if he had at last met his long-lost brother. He addressed me in Swahili, taking me into his arms as if he was overjoyed to meet me. We entered the hotel and people stared at us, surprised as we switched from Swahili to English. Most of them must have thought I was Afro-American. In fact, in this part of Congo, people speak a little Swahili. It was, therefore, not very difficult to talk to them, especially those who had been born and raised there. Those who had been born in the interior of Congo, like the mistress I stayed with, could not talk enough Swahili to explain anything.

In the hotel, we went into a private room where we were followed by the manager of the hotel who ordered lunch for us. It was a very clean hotel and the private rooms had sofas and some speakers, concealed in the wall, brought very sweet orchestra music.

After sitting on the sofa, we started talking. I gave him a fabricated story of how I had left Kenya, being on the wrong side of Kenyan politics, and that I had fled for my safety. I told him where I was staying with a girl I had met two months back. I also told him that I had been in Congo for two months and had no job, and the capital that I had was now giving way.

'I have been trying the matatu business here but it looks to me a bit strange,' I said.

'With a car with a foreign registration, it is strange alright. You see, with

that car, wherever you go, no one would know who you are. They may think you are an ambassador, or a big man on his own business,' he said.

'How can I get a job here?'

'It is very hard to find you a decent job here. You know they speak French and everything here in the offices is run in French. You have more education than most of the people in those offices, but in a different language. I have several American and English friends here but their secretaries are all French-speaking. They also run their offices in French.'

'What other jobs can I do around? I can't stay idle and spend money the way I do. I am willing to take anything.'

'You can take driving for instance. I have a Greek friend who wanted me to give him one of my drivers and I promised to get him one, but as it is, you must get some documents authorising you to be employed. A work permit. But that won't take time to get, so it is no problem. Are you interested in the job, by the way?'

'I told you I can take any job. I am not known here so I have nothing to worry about.'

'Alright, tomorrow we will start arranging everything. Today, we drink to our meeting in a far country from our beloved Kenya.'

After lunch, we started drinking. They have very fine drinks there and if you are not careful, you can drink until you are no longer able to stand. Music was still floating from a band playing below, through the concealed speakers. We talked of Kenya and how businesses there were fine; we talked of the hotels he owned in Nairobi and Mombasa and he was glad to hear that I knew all of them. Hours later, we parted and agreed to meet early the next morning. I entered my red Volvo, and keeping right, found my way to my mistress. I found her worried because since we met, I had never failed to go for her after work or for lunch. I had also never gone home late, so she had enough reasons to get worried. With the little French I could muster, I apologised and then gave her my story. I was mixing French with Swahili words I was sure she knew. She told me she knew the Greek millionaire who was to employ me and I could see she was happy about it.

I was somehow tipsy and I guessed she liked it.

The following morning, I woke up earlier than usual. Linda had prepared breakfast and after taking it, I selected a suit and put it on. We entered the car and after taking Linda to her place of work, I went to Hirji Shah's hotel. He

was ready, waiting for me, that early morning. We talked for some minutes and then entered his Benz. The first stop was in a studio, for a passport-size photo, which the Indian said should be developed with immediate effect and he paid double the price for it.

We were told to wait for about four hours, so he suggested that we should go to the Greek. It was a long way out of town to a very big farm.

It took us about forty minutes, driving at high speed, to get there. When we reached there, the gate was opened for us and the guard saluted. We met the Greek as he was about to go out but when he saw us, he stopped and stood at the verandah of his villa. He was a fat man of medium height, with a balding head, with grey hairs at the temples. He greeted us joyfully and Hirji introduced me. For some reason, he seemed undecided as to whether to think of me as his future driver or, as just another big shot from another country. I was very natty in fact, though I'm sure he had seen smarter ones. We were welcomed into a very large sitting room which had more than five sofa sets. There was a television stand at the corner of the room and beside an easy chair, was a very large radiogramme. There were some records on it. His wife, not as old as he, came and greeted us. Two boys and a girl also came in. One of the boys, I guessed, was my age but the other was a bit younger. We were introduced and they were glad, as I was later to learn, that we could all speak English. After a few minutes, the others went away and left the Greek, the Indian and myself. Hirji gave him my story as I had told him and the millionaire sympathised with me. He also said he was glad to have me as his driver and he promised that in the evening, he would supply me with every document needed from the Government. All he asked for was my photo. 'You'll like staying with my family, I assure you,' he concluded. So I promised that I would go there the following morning with all my belongings. He called his elder son to show me the room in which I was to stay.

Later, we went to the studio and collected three copies of my photo. Hirji gave me one and he kept two. We then went back to the hotel. It was about lunchtime and I didn't want to stay long otherwise my mistress would start worrying. I therefore took my Volvo and went to the bank where Linda worked and waited for her outside for about two minutes, then she came. I drove with her to Hirji's hotel where we took lunch. After lunch, I took her to work and drove home to rest and think about my new job. It was odd that I

was to be employed as a chauffeur. I had never thought that throughout my life I would ever be employed by an individual. But now, I didn't worry much as I was not known here.

In the evening, I went for Linda. We were now understanding each other better than before. I was faster in learning French than she was in learning English or Swahili. That evening, we talked a lot using the little Swahili she knew, and I using the little French I knew. To come to an understanding, we had to repeat our sentences several times. She was not happy about my leaving her and her apartment, but I reasoned with her, and she understood. I told her that I would never forget the help and kindness she had showed me and that she would remain my girlfriend. She helped me in packing, and in the process, saw one of my photos which she said she should keep so as to remember me whenever she looked at it. The girls here are as beautiful and kind as Ugandans or the Banjunis at Lamu.

The following morning, we woke up early and took baths alternatively and after dressing up, had our breakfast. I could see she was not glad now that I was about to leave her. One thing I was sure of was that, even if love was one reason for her not wanting me to leave her, having somebody to take her to town and back was not a very bad idea and she knew very well that she was going to miss that. I dropped her at her place of work and I could see that it was through a lot of struggle that she did not weep. Not many girls ever wept when I said I was through with them. If you ask me why, I will tell you. It is because I am a sucker number one where they are concerned. Outside the bank, I wished her a good time, and in French, I said, 'Au revoir', which means, 'good bye, till we meet again'. At the hotel, Hirji himself was not there but had left a message. I was given a card written in English: 'No need waiting for me, go straight to the Villa and I'll meet you there sometimes before lunch.' It was signed, 'H. Shah.'

I filled the Volvo with petrol and set off for the place where I was to start working. I had then got used to keeping right and so I increased my speed.

At around nine, the gate to the Villa was opened for me and the same guard saluted. I wondered whether he would salute me that way whenever I passed, or he would stop when he realised I was just one of the many employees around there. I found a place and parked my Volvo. The millionaire's daughter I had been introduced to, called Hellene, came out of the Villa and when she saw me, she entered the car. She showed me a parking

at the back of the Villa where there were more cars. She spoke fluent English and I was glad that we understood each other. She then called two of the many maids and spoke to them in French, then turning to me, she told me in English that the maids would help me carry my luggage to the room I had been shown. In fact, there wasn't much luggage to be carried as I had only two suitcases.

The 'room' that I was given was very well furnished but too big for a single man. It had three bedrooms, a sitting room, a dining room, two bathrooms and two toilets. It had a kitchen and a store too! All the rooms were furnished with the necessary items. There was a small television in the sitting room, a side-board and a revolving wine cabinet, but empty. There was a large wardrobe and dressing table at one corner of my bedroom.

Then, I came across one of the most expensive things in the room, the carpet. This made me realise that millionaires have a lot of money to waste. I can never buy such fine material just for stepping on. Oh no! Not me, not even if I came into as much money as that Greek millionaire. The curtains were not only expensive but part of the decorations inside the house. I don't know if I can make you see the full picture of the house, but on my part, I've never been inside such a well furnished house and I don't think I ever will now that I am out of crime. All the keys to all the rooms were left in the key holes and I collected them all. They all had numbers so it was not hard to pick one from the other and after all, I did not need to lock all those rooms. I convinced myself that none of the labourers would even want to help themselves to any of my belongings. In fact, I was the most well provided for employee there, I almost believed I belonged there.

When I had arranged all my suits and shorts in the wardrobe, I heard a bell ringing. At first, I thought it was the telephone as there was one in the sitting room, but when I went out of the bedroom, I knew it was the door. When I opened it, I saw the millionaire's elder son. His name was Karamikos. He told me his father wanted a word with me and so I followed him to the sitting room where his father was. On a coffee table near him, I could see a red thing which looked like a driving licence. When I sat down, he pushed it towards me and I picked it up. On the cover, it was written 'Les Pase'. It was the work permit, authorising me to be employed, but also showing that I was a foreigner. It had my photo and name, 'Albert Ngure'. After examining it, I put it into my pocket and I looked at my employer then said, 'thank you.' The

trouble with me is that I am never able to address anyone as ‘Sir’. Not unless I am in trouble and the circumstances force me to. He did not seem to mind it.

‘From tomorrow you start your job. Everything about you is now complete. You have nothing to worry about and with the les pase, you can get a job anywhere, provided that you are able to do it. You are as free as any citizen of Congo.’

‘Thank you very much. I am very glad to have you help me and I promise I’ll serve you to your satisfaction. I’ll be always at your service,’ I said.

‘I know you’ll like this place even better. I regard you as my son here and I hope you’ll get along with the rest of my children. Is that red Volvo with a foreign registration number yours?’

‘Yes it is mine. I had bought it in Kenya from an Indian who was leaving Kenya for the U.K. They cost a lot of money.’

‘Would you like to be given this country’s registration numbers or you prefer it that way?’

‘If it is possible, I would be very glad to have them changed. Everyone stares at me wherever I pass,’ I said.

‘That is easy. I’ll have someone come for it tomorrow and it will have been changed by the time it comes back in the evening. I don’t even think you’ll need it much as I have a car for my personal driver to go wherever he wants after work. Karamikos will show you. Your working hours are not many. In the morning, I leave here at quarter past eight and I reach my office at nine. I take lunch there so you don’t have to come for me at lunch time, unless I call you. So, after taking me to the office, you’ll be driving back home and take my wife out if she wants to. If she does not need you, you can rest until you come for me at four. The only thing I’d ask you is to make sure you keep time. My sons here can drive themselves out wherever they want to. They don’t use my car or my driver’s car. My car is serviced twice a week and I’ll show you where you’ll be taking it, that is on Tuesdays and Saturdays. You’ll know the rest as you get used to living here.’

‘I hope so,’ I said and that ended the conversation. As he stood up, he turned to his son and told him to show me round. He then went out of the room and I heard him climbing the stairs. When he had gone, Hellene and her other brother came into the room and greeted me as if it was their first time to set their eyes on me. I could see that she and her brother enjoyed having a

driver who could speak English as they did not seem to like the little French they knew. Most of the drivers I later saw on the farm were over forty and I was only in my early twenties. Karamikos told the rest that he was told to show me round and they all said that we should all go together. To go round the farm needed a car and a competent driver and Karamikos volunteered to drive us. There was a farm-car, a Peugeot family car, and we used it. If my estimate was accurate, there were about one thousand labourers, including their wives and children. They lived in their quarters on the farm. Later, we drove home for lunch. I was so surprised that I had nothing to say. I never thought a single man could own such a large farm. I did not forget the fact that he was a millionaire, but all the same, the land was really big.

After lunch we all went to our rooms and before I dozed off, I thought of my past and the things I had gone through, until I was forced, by circumstances, to leave Kenya. Now I was in a country I had only read about in Geography books, years back in school. I was in a millionaire's estate employed as a chauffeur, occupying one of the most expensively furnished 'rooms'.

'Shall I ever want to leave this place where I feel so secure and go back to a Kenya where every cop would draw his gun wherever I was sighted, a Kenya where I would no doubt live like an antelope, watching out every minute whether there was trouble around?' I asked myself. 'Why not spend the rest of my life here? But why should I? I am only an employee and can be sacked any time the boss feels like it.'

That night, I wrote home to my mother and to my future wife Miriam. It was a Sunday and I was to start my job the following morning at eight. I woke up as the telephone rang. I went to the sitting room and picked it up. 'Hello, Albert on the line.'

'Hello, you sound as if you've been asleep. How do you feel?' That was Karamikos. He had come to like me very much and he never regarded me as an employee. The others didn't either.

'I am alright Karamikos, I just woke up as the telephone started ringing. What can I do for you?'

'I was thinking we could go off to town for a ride. There's a good film at Cameo Theatre and we could book in at three or you don't feel like it?'

'That's one of my hobbies, brother, and it is one favour you've done me that I won't forget soon. I'll be along within ten minutes.'

‘Make it faster than that if you can. We must be back at seven for supper. By the way, we’ve never driven in a Volvo and we guessed it would be a good change if we drove in yours. That is, if you don’t mind.’

‘I certainly don’t mind, brother, I’ll only be too glad to have you in my car. You and who else are in the company, I wonder?’ ‘The three of us. We call ourselves The Greek Trio.’

‘I’ll be along in five minute,’ I said and hung up. I went to the basin and washed my face. I brushed my teeth a little then dressed up in my best suit and taking my car keys, I went out, closing the door behind me. They were all standing beside my Volvo. Hellene was leaning against the car on the left side of the driver’s seat. They greeted me and after I had opened the car, we seated ourselves with Karamikos and I in the front seat. I was the driver. I had started admiring this Hellene, but I did not want to show it. I know how to approach such girls. If you rush, you’ll end up with hatred and loss of a job. I started the engine and then took off for Bukavu town. We did not talk much on the way. Every time I was with them, they only wanted to know about Kenya. How people live and their behaviour. They also asked me about the tribe they read about in books called Kikuyu. They went as far as telling me that they were told the Kikuyu, especially a large group that called themselves Mau Mau some years back, fed on human flesh. I rejected all that and told them to try and learn more about the Kikuyu through me. I was a very good example of a Kikuyu to them.

When they realised that I was a Kikuyu, for no reason known to me, they liked me even better. They even told their parents about it. The parents treated me as their own son. I have never met such kind people in the time that I have stayed in this world. We arrived in the town at some minutes to four and I was directed by Karamikos to Cameo Theatre. Here, I was surprised to find how many English-speaking people there were. There was a great number of Americans and English men. There were also French men who could speak English very well. But not many Africans could speak English and the few who could were those not educated in Congo. French there is not like English in Kenya. You could find a very old African who could speak French as his own language. Great-grandfathers don’t talk English in Kenya but those in Congo speak fluent French.

The film was a James Bond and I enjoyed watching it more than anything else I had seen since I entered Congo a few months back. I was sitting

between Karamikos and Hellene but I tried hard not to touch her when Bond was kissing his girlfriend. I did not want to lose my job. Some minutes past six, we took our respective seats in the Volvo and before seven, we were back at the Villa. I would have liked to see Linda but time and the circumstances would not allow. I was not going to forget her so soon after all she had done for me. Furthermore, I did not know another female and I was not going to stay without a woman. Maybe that was why I continued seeing her for two months, until I got another. I never saw her again. Criminals move with the current if you don't know.

After supper we all went to my sitting-room where I told them stories, one after another. They liked my exaggerated stories so much that whenever one could no longer hold his bladder, he asked me not to continue with the story until he came back. The others would then snatch the opportunity to go and help themselves too. I know how to keep people busy with stories. Even in prison, you will find people surrounding me to hear my stories, especially about my experience in Congo.

They all worked in their father's offices but in different parts of the town. Karamikos was the manager of his father's businesses and he had a very big office with a lot of people working under him in one of his father's blocks in town. The rest also had their own offices but all were under Karamikos' management. Hellene, for instance, worked in a big office in one of the Stephano factories in town. As I hadn't much to do during the day, after taking my boss to his office, I moved from this to that office, belonging to the Greek trio.

After the stories and after the trio, I was left to my thoughts. I was starting on my job the following morning but that didn't excite me, since driving was not a new experience to me. I undressed and as I emptied my pockets, I came across the les pase I had been supplied with. It reminded me of Milly's bus-pass which I had collected years ago in Nairobi, and which had resulted in a very intimate friendship, then love and eventually, betrothal. I'll never forget that girl and her beauty as long as I live.

The following morning, I woke up early. At about half past seven, the telephone rang, asking me to go for breakfast. I took breakfast on the same table with the trio and I was the only employee who had that honour. The millionaire asked me whether I wanted a uniform or whether I preferred my own clothes and I said I preferred civilian clothes, which made him promise to

buy me a new suit every three months. At eight, the trio set off for town and some minutes after, I was sitting behind the steering wheel of a Mercedes Benz 300 SE for the first time in my life. It was not my first time to drive a Benz, but not a 300 SE. It rolled on the road as if they were born together and I enjoyed driving it. Some minutes before nine, I stopped the Benz outside a bank where I was directed to and where my boss had his office. Wherever we passed and there were people, they stood up and saluted the boss. I was looking at them through the corners of my eyes and I enjoyed it. The last office we reached, next to his, was his secretary's. She was also Greek and could speak both English and French fluently.

I've never been in such an office before, though I had not been to many. There were telephones all over the desk. The carpet alone must have cost a bagful of francs, according to my guess. Stephano sat on the armchair and invited me to the one opposite his and I sat on it, feeling inferior. When we were both seated, he pressed a button on the desk and within a few seconds, I heard the door behind me open to admit his secretary. That boss of mine must have been one of the kindest human beings in existence and if there are others, I can't tell. Imagine him introducing me to his secretary and furthermore, instead of saying I was his chauffeur, he said I was one of his sons, and an African, Albert Nguire by name. He then looked on, pleased, as I shook hands with his secretary, by the name of Elizabeth Makarios. Miss Makarios then produced two envelopes and put them on the table as an answer to his question on whether there were any urgent cases or matters that needed his attention. She was then told to show me around before I left. After giving me my last instructions, he set me free and once again, I was in his secretary's office.

Whichever office we now entered, everyone stopped working to stare at me, with my English-speaking tongue, as if I was one of the seven wonders of the world. None that I met in the many offices I entered could speak anything more than French and their mother tongues, and so Miss Makarios had a good job of interpreting between me and the few persons I decided to talk to, most of whom were the girls I thought or saw were attractive. I guess she liked it herself. When she had taken me to all the places in the building which she thought were necessary for me to know, she told me that that was about all. I then told her to show me the way out. On our way back to the Mercedes Benz, with a lot of people around the bank staring after us

curiously, I asked her to go with me for some coffee at a hotel. She tried to refuse, but I persuaded her, telling her that our boss was aware I was with her and he would not in the least try to contact her before she reported back.

She agreed and so, after entering the car, I started it and took off towards Hirji's hotel. Hirji himself was not there but the manager, who I think had been instructed by Hirji to give me whatever services I needed welcomed us to a private room. He spoke French and Swahili, so we understood each other well. He was half-caste but between who and who, I did not know. It is the type of a hotel in which white people are mainly customers, so they were not surprised to see me with a white dame, and especially after parking a black Mercedes Benz 300 SE. It was a few minutes past ten and within a short time our order was brought. This girl, Miss Makarios, was as beautiful as Hellene of Troy, who caused the Trojan war, if she ever existed. According to her, she was only seventeen and was not very talkative. Anyway, after the tea she asked me a few questions about myself. She was curious because she had seen that the boss trusted me with his Benz more than he had ever trusted any other person she had known before, and also because he had introduced me to her and furthermore, as one of his sons. I gave her a pack of lies which I was sure satisfied her. I told her that my father was the chairman of a political party in Kenya and was accused of conspiring to overthrow the Government, so we ran away from there to Congo, where my father left me with her boss, who was my father's intimate friend, and then he, my father, flew to England for some other businesses. I also told her that her boss had made several trips to Kenya while my father was the Vice President and he was said to have been helping my father in the conspiracy.

People can believe anything. For as long as I stayed there, they never discovered that I was only a chauffeur. In fact, I was even surprised to learn how fast the word passed that I was the son of a V.I.P. Miss Makarios was later given instructions that whenever I wanted to see the boss in his office, no appointment was needed. I was to be shown in immediately, and every worker in that Bank of Greece was aware of that fact and so they all treated me like a hot bar. I went as far as asking her where she stayed, after my pack of lies, and she directed me. She told me that it was safe for me to visit her any time when out of work and that I had nothing to fear. My story had stuck into her nerves and I could see that she no longer feared that she would be late to go back and serve her boss. At some minutes to eleven, we entered the

Benz once again and in a few minutes, I drove her back to her office.

When she alighted, I started the car again and found my way to the bank where Linda was working. As I parked the Benz, I noticed that everyone around was staring at it. There were only three of the type in Bukavu town and if there was a fourth one, it certainly never moved around in town. As I entered the bank, everyone who saw me park the Benz gave me way. If I looked the type to own such a car, I could not tell, despite the fact that I was smartly dressed. You could never be a millionaire's chauffeur and be untidy.

I asked for Linda who was called for immediately and within a short time I was talking to her, both of us seated in the car. She was more excited than ever. I told her I missed her so much and that if she did not mind we would go straight to her home from there. Within minutes, I had parked the Benz in the spot where I used to park my Volvo. Of course, you can guess why I wanted her in a private place. I was not impotent and was not going to pretend to be under any circumstances. My hunger for women would not allow me to. We stayed there until after lunch when I took her back to her place of work.

That afternoon, I went to Karamikos' office. I was not allowed to see him without an appointment but when I wrote a note, telling him that I was locked outside, and gave it to the boy who supplied the customers with appointment cards, the boy came back gasping for breath, to admit me and take me directly to his boss' office. Karamikos' office was well furnished but not as well as his father's. Before I reached his office, I had to pass through a typing pool where over ten pairs of eyes stared at me as if I carried a special message from the blue sky above. I then came to an office where a medium-aged girl was busy typing and she stood up, smiling at me, as I passed her on my way to her boss' office. I really was getting an honour I did not deserve as a criminal on the run, but I thought it was alright to get it while I could. I was very much aware that there are times when somebody suddenly becomes nobody. And in my time, I have learned one thing among others: that people thoroughly enjoy the respect they are given by others for their superiority, and also that, in this big world, no door, in whatever office, would be closed in your face if you really have the money. And by this, I mean dough in large quantities. It made me think that even the gates of heaven would slide open at the sight of a millionaire.

If Karamikos was not exaggerating, he really liked my presence. He even

claimed that I shouldn't have taken so long before going to see him in his office. He later told me that I should stay with him in his office when I had nothing else to do. I liked that. I often passed my time there, in an inner room, adjoining his office, reading foreign newspapers and American weekly magazines. That inner room was well furnished too, with sofa sets and coffee tables. It was the same place where he held meetings with his senior staff. When he did not have much to do in his office, he would come and sit with me to discuss matters of mutual interest. I liked his office better than those of the other members of the trio because here, he was the top man. The others had other people above them. The millionaire, who was their father and my boss, always told them to make sure that each earned his own dollar, and that they should not sit idle to capitalise on his gains. They were earning their dollars alright, but in their father's businesses!

Some minutes to four, I parked the Benz at the ground of my boss' office. The people there now all knew that I was a former Vice President's son on the run, and the Vice President was an intimate friend of their boss. So, when they showed me much respect, and they always did whenever I passed, I knew the reason. When now the boss' secretary saw me, she stood up and came to me smiling, to tell me that the boss was in but with his last customer, so I should wait. Within two minutes, a bell rang on Miss Makarios' desk and she went to her boss' office to show the customer out. As she closed the door behind her, I was standing near the entrance to my boss' office to make him know that I was not taking any chances with my job. When the boss saw me, he stood up and said.

'Oh, there you are Sonny, I guess we should get going.'

He glanced at his watch as he said so. I also glanced at mine and saw it was only two minutes to four and after giving his secretary more instructions, we went out. At about forty minutes past four, I parked the car outside his villa. I went out to my room and changed into a pair of Lee trousers and a sports shirt. I then went to the library and selected a foreign magazine. I took a seat and got busy reading. After twenty minutes of reading, the telephone started ringing and I went to take the call.

Karamikos had just arrived from work and was inviting me to go and play table-tennis with him. I was surprised for I did not know that there was a place there where we could play games. Games were part of my pleasure, especially table-tennis and tenni-quoit. I had learnt to play table tennis at

Eastleigh Social Hall in Nairobi. Karamikos was a good player and beat me two games to one and I knew it was because I had not had any practice in a long time. I was an expert in school, years back. Hellene and Ketro, the younger brother, were also good at it but not as good as Karamikos and I. I beat the girl two games to nil and Pietro three games to one. All the same, I liked playing with them all but Karamikos especially, as he was fast and his fastness made me gain speed. We were called some minutes to seven to prepare ourselves for supper. After supper, we went to the sitting room to watch a very interesting television programme that was showing from half past eight to nine. After the programme, they wanted us to go to my place for more stories but there was no time for that. So, I wished them a good night and went to my room.

That is how I stayed with Stephano and his family for the time I lived with them. As he had predicted, I was really enjoying staying with them. I was not regarded as an employee but as a true son of the house. The boss was well aware that I was spending most of my free time in Karamikos' office when his wife did not need me at home. In fact, she never wanted to bother me, although she would sometimes ask me to go back home after taking Stephano to his office, but only for a chat. She said she had been hearing a lot about Kenya and wanted to confirm the stories with me. But I did not believe her. I knew very well that she had other ideas about me which I did not want to entertain.

At the end of every month, I would go with Stephano to the bank and he would draw the wages of his labourers. We would go home in the evening, carrying a large handbag containing I.5m francs. The sight of all that money always made my heart skip a beat and I always noticed Stephano stealing a glance at me through the corners of his eyes. I never once showed any signs of greed or surprise as I knew he was looking for such signs to know whether I was to be trusted or not. I am not the type to fail in such interviews. I would make a good actor given the opportunity.

CHAPTER EIGHT



I was getting a little more than three thousand francs monthly but much more from other sources. Karamikos and I got so used to each other that, when one was away from the other, the other felt lonely. Pietro and Hellene too wanted our company very much but Karamikos was not giving them a chance. When not on duty, we would go out to night clubs in Bukavu town to seduce white and black girls.

Karamikos and I agreed that since he had his own car and I was supplied with a Peugeot 404 when not carrying out Stephano's duties, there was no need of keeping the Volvo. It was a good car alright, but it was idle. The following day, we went to see Hirji Shah and I told him that I wanted to sell the car. A day later, he came to the villa with a customer who agreed to take the car for 600,000 francs, whose value in Kenya money was only a little over 10,000 shillings. With this cash, I bought myself a radiogramme, the only thing that I was not supplied with, and a tape recorder. When Karamikos' mother came to know this, she got very annoyed and told me never to buy anything else with my money for as long as I stayed with them. She said she would have bought those two things for me if only I had told her that I wanted them. If I wanted anything, my only duty was to tell her and I'd get it. Hirji went to Kenya from Congo every end of the month and so I sent him to buy me everything I needed from Kenya, especially the top-ten records. I had a big selection of Kikuyu records in Congo.

Then things started happening. Hellene had fallen in love with me and I knew it. I had also fallen in love with her but I tried as much as I could not to show it. She would leave her office anytime we agreed upon and we would both go to a private room in Hirji's hotel. Our love grew so deep that she suggested we should marry. We were well aware that Stephano would not consent and her idea was that we should run away from Congo to Kenya where we would go and start a new life. She assured me that if we went there, and then wrote back to her father to break the news to him, he would send us all the help we needed. He would send us a lot of money and we could start

any business we wanted. She made sure that wherever we were alone, that was the first topic for discussion before we went to anything else. She also started warning me against going out so regularly with her elder brother. She claimed that she knew I was having an affair with her father's secretary and if I did not stop it, she would take further steps. She framed her warning in this way.

'If you don't stop the affair between you and Miss Makarios, I'll do a thing you'll regret for as long as you live.'

She told me that in a manner that told me she meant every word of it.

Some days later, Karamikos realised what was going on between me and his sister. He did not like it at all and he warned me sternly against it. He told me that he was quite sure if his father realised it too, there would surely be trouble. He told me once, 'Stick to Miss Makarios. What do you see in my sister? Elizabeth loves you more than she loves herself and I am sure your luck lies in that beautiful girl. I would not feel well when we go out with our girlfriends to always see Hellene around. I am warning you as my best friend, Albert, please do me the favour of leaving Hellene alone.'

Well, a terrible coincidence, Hellene warning me against going out regularly with Karamikos in search of dames, then Karamikos warning me against a love affair between me and Hellene! Yet, it was not possible to meet their demands. If I left Hellene alone as her brother suggested, there was sure to be trouble. If I dropped the connection between me and Karamikos, he would have me sacked and then Hellene would be a name in the past. If my boss came to know the whole thing, then there would even be more trouble for all, according to Karamikos' theory. Then worst of all, there was Elizabeth who had just come up with a proposal that it was high time we got married. If she too realized that I was a two-sided sword, she would sure cook up something nasty. For sometime after this, I tried to control the situation in my own way. I was not prepared to lose my job, so I acted as Karamikos had instructed but making sure that I reduced my going out to town from twice or thrice a week, to twice a month. Hellene was reassured after all, and Karamikos too, for Hellene and I started making love secretly.

She would leave her room at night when everyone else was asleep and come to spend the rest of the hours with me. During the day, we would pretend that we were not interested in each other, but our eyes would never stay for a minute without meeting. Elizabeth was not much of a problem and

I went along with her well, but then a month later, she started a thing I could not finish.

I had been in Congo for over seven months, my love affair with Elizabeth had gone on for about four months and by that time, her love for me had reached a breaking point. It was on a Sunday and I was resting on a sofa after lunch, instead of going to bed for a siesta when the telephone rang. Hellene told me that there was a call for me from town. She sounded hurt but I did not think anything about it. It was from Miss Makarios. She told me that she wanted to see me immediately and she asked me to go to her home. I put the telephone down after telling her I was on my way. I looked around to where Hellene had been standing but she was not there.

I went to my room and took the car keys. I never forgot to carry my *les passe* too, so I took it and put it in my coat pocket. I took the Peugeot after telling Lady Stephano that I was going out after a telephone message. I drove off at a speed that surprised the gatekeeper who, incidentally, had not ceased saluting me as he surely could not know what to make of me.

Miss Makarios was waiting for me at her home. She was all alone in the house, that was only three miles from the town centre, where she stayed with her parents. She was the only child of her parents so she was very well looked after. I could not see why she had called me so urgently for when I got there, I found her as calm as ever. In fact, there were no signs of trouble. Then after exchanging some jokes, she told her story.

‘Albert dear, I am in the family way and if we do not marry soon, I’ll lose my job. Anyway, the job does not matter much but the thing that is worrying me is when my parents come to know of it. They have gone into a lot of trouble over me and if I end up this way, it will be a real shame to them. Shame I cannot stand. Now, I want you to make your decision quickly, you have kept me waiting for a very long time and I can’t wait any longer. My parents already know about you and I am sure that if you tell them, there will be no objection about our getting married. But if they realise how I am and you haven’t told them you want to have me, I can’t stand it. I’d rather not live and I mean every word of it.’

There you are then, and that was only the beginning! You can bet for sure that I was not prepared at all to get married. Where was I to take a wife? To Stephano’s home? Not me. And I wasn’t taking any white woman to Kenya where I was wanted by the police.

‘Well, if that is the case Elizabeth, then it is high time I did something about it,’ I said. For your information, I did not mean it. In fact, I wanted to make a story for her, for a week or two, or even three, so that within that time, I would know what to do. ‘Give me a short time to prepare myself, two to three weeks, then I can talk to your parents. They will not have realised within that time, and then the following month, we could get engaged. I have also been thinking about it lately but hadn’t come to any conclusion as I didn’t know what you would think about it. So marriage will now be the foremost thing in my mind. Now, if I fail to see you within that time, don’t start worrying yourself to death. A month from today, you’ll have a ring on one of your left-hand fingers.’

I got a hot kiss for that pack of lies. If you thought that African girls are the only ones deceived in that manner, you’d better change your mind. I can assure you that they are far much better in detecting lies.

Back at the villa we took supper, then I went to my room. Things had started becoming hot. This girl had threatened to commit suicide if what she wanted was not going to be fulfilled and I was sure she meant it. But I was also sure that I was not going to get married to her. Then the thought of leaving Congo for Kenya entered my head for the first time since I entered Congo. The following morning, I took the boss to his office and after making sure he was seated in his office, I went back to the Benz and drove back to the villa. At home, the lady said that she wanted to go to town and if I was not tired, would I take her? It was a request, although I was an employee. This one did not see any difference between her first-born and me. I drove her to a market where there were only lady customers. She asked me to take some rounds in town and go for her after two hours. I went without the car as I wanted to go from street to street. Within the time I had stayed in Bukavu, I had kept myself so busy that I had not had the time to go around the town on foot. I felt my pockets for a cigarette but to my disappointment, I remembered I had left them in my sitting room. So I crossed the road to a line of retail-shops to secure myself a packet.

I stopped at the third shop and ordered for a packet of Rex, which are sold here as imported items. A woman of about thirty was the shopkeeper. She looked at me as if she had seen my photo on a wanted-by-police list, before she gave me the cigarettes. I opened the packet and selected one cigarette which I lit. I just stood there wondering whether to go to the left or to the

right. I decided I would follow the seventh man and so I smoked in silence. Then a man of about forty-five came to the shop. He lifted a small wooden barrier attached to the shop's counter and went to the side, to join his wife.

Then I heard him call the woman, 'Wambui indo ni ciaga.' That is to say, 'Wambui, I could not get the items.'

Well, you can imagine my surprise. People speaking Kikuyu in the interior of Congo! Furthermore, keeping a retail shop. What could I say or do but to see with my mouth wide open, a thing I had not done since I left Kenya. I stayed there for five full minutes without talking, undecided whether to introduce myself or not. 'Have they fled from Kenya as I have for the same reasons?' I asked myself.

Could this old man, with a protruding belly, have been on the run and decided to go with his wife? Or had he come here in search of precious stones, as most people say Congo is rich in minerals? Well, could be either or both. If it was because of money, then I believe some words I once heard a group of Luos saying, unaware that I could understand their language as much as I understood mine. One was telling the others that if you wanted to know whether a Kikuyu man was sick, go with some coins and drop them on the floor near him. If he doesn't open his eyes, he is about to die, and if he only manages to lift his head, he is critically sick. Of course, on my side, I believe them. After all, what is better than money in this world? Get a hell of a lot of it and every door will open itself when you approach it.

There came two customers in need of sugar and tea leaves. They spoke Congolese. Both Kikuyus spoke the language as fluently as they spoke their own and I started wondering whether they were really from Kenya. When the customers went, the fat man opened another door inside the shop and disappeared. I was standing at the same spot where I stood as I lit the cigarette that I had just finished. I went back two steps to look at the name of the owner of the shop and the name of the plot. When I saw that it was in French, I lost interest. I stared back at the woman, who, after realising that I was after something, talked to me in Congolese. I guessed she was asking me whether I was looking for some place or something. Then I decided to talk to her, and to talk in Kikuyu.

'Wambui, ndekeratondunindiraigwangiendakumenya, umite Kenya?' ('Wambui, excuse my curiosity, are you from Kenya?')

'Haia, Kai wi Mugikuyu?' ('Oh, are you a Kikuyu?')

‘Yes I am. I have now been here for about eight months. I never expected to meet a person of my tribe here. For how long have you been here?’

‘For about fifteen years now. Oh, open this door and come in. I was wondering why you have stayed here for so long without speaking and I knew there was something. Let me call Kamau, he will be very glad to meet you.’

She went through the door her husband had followed a few minutes ago, then called out to him loudly, as if something had gone wrong somewhere. Had her husband been as fast as I am, he would have come out running, holding a panga because of the strangled voice that came out of his wife. I heard her say in Kikuyu, ‘What do you know, the young man whom you left standing here is a Kikuyu.’

‘Sure?’ Kamau also asked in a strangled and surprised voice.

He came out of the inner room spreading his arms out to greet me, which I took with much pleasure. Most things are funny though they don’t seem so on the face of it. I felt more pleased to meet those people than I had ever felt upon meeting anybody else before. I felt as if I had met my own parents after a very long time. The next minute, I was in the inner room seated on a sofa.

‘When did you come here?’ Kamau asked me as I sat comfortably.

‘Some seven and half months ago,’ I answered.

‘Have you got a job?’

‘A very nice one, yes.’

‘Well, thank the Lord. Being without a job is the worst thing that can happen to a person in a strange country. Which part of Central Province do you come from?’

‘I am from Murang’a.’

‘That is my place too. Which location?’

‘Kiru location.’

‘My God! Which village?’

‘Thuita village.’

‘Shake my hand once again my dear boy! You are my real brother. I am from location fifteen from Mutuya village, only two miles from Thuita and my wife is from your very location but from Wahundura village; I guess it is about six miles from Thuita. What a coincidence? Where do you stay? I mean, where is your apartment?’

‘That is far, about fifteen miles out of town but I have a car. I drive there to

and fro. It is a very nice place too. I am staying with a Greek millionaire who is friendly to my father. My father brought me here to stay with him after I messed up things in Kenya.'

Brother, repeat a lie several times and you yourself will come to believe it as the truth. When I uttered those words, I had not intended to lie to these two who were ready to help me had I been without work, but since it had slipped out of my mouth, it was to stay that way. I had repeated the lie to several people so much that I now told it without a second thought. 'I will stick to my lie whether they discover it or not, as God knows I didn't intend to lie to them,' I told myself.

'Did your father come with you as far as here?'

'No, he sent me over. He had met the Greek while the millionaire was on a tour in Kenya. My father is the manager of Intercontinental Hotel and that was where the Greek had rented a room. They talked and became friends and he persuaded my father to send me to him.'

'You must be very lucky then. Do you like this place?'

'Very much, but truthfully speaking, I had just started feeling lonely. Surely, I could hardly talk to you when I heard you call Wambui in Kikuyu.'

Well, we talked for a long time and I learned that he had left Kenya over thirty years ago for a reason he did not find safe to tell me. He had gone back there after fourteen years and that was when he came back with Wambui and a young daughter. He had other businesses in that same town. They had four children who were all in school. They had not yet come back from school that time I was there. He intended to go back to Kenya when all the children were grown up. He told me he had saved enough capital to start any type of business he would find good when he went back to Kenya.

After promising the two that I would see them again soon, I went back to where Lady Stephano was. I waited in the car for only two minutes then the Lady came. She was carrying things wrapped in papers which did not interest me as I thought them womanly. About fifty minutes later, I parked the Benz outside the villa. She invited me for lunch but I had other things in mind. Also, the way she looked at me when we were alone made me uncomfortable. I thought she was getting hot pants for me and I did not like the idea at all for I owned Hellene.

I went to my house and as I opened the door, I looked at my watch and saw it was some minutes to one. I felt hungry. I changed into another suit after I

had discovered some stains on my trousers and the lower part of my jacket. Then I went back to the Benz and started it off towards town. I could now drive as fast keeping right as I could keeping left. I had already got used to it and even liked it, especially when driving a Mercedes Benz 300. Forty minutes found me outside Kamau's retail shop. As I parked it, I saw them and others staring at the expensive car. When I got out, they opened their mouths wide and with a little help from their eyes, they saw me better. I went straight into the shop and into the inner room after greeting the whole lot in Congolese. Kamau followed me into the room, then after a while, he went out to serve the customers while Wambui came in to serve me. I was hungry but did not feel it when in the company of these two. I really felt I had met my long-forgotten parents and for the first time since I left Kenya, I was supplied with a plateful of fried githeri.

“Do you own that Benz you have come in, young man?”

‘No but it is the one I am always using. It belongs to the millionaire I am staying with.’

‘By the way, I never remembered to ask your name. We must have been too delighted to meet you. My name is Joseph Kamau.’

‘Mine is Albert Ngunjiri,’ I said.

‘Albert. Now come to think of it, there was a teacher I knew in Thuita who was called Albert Kiriamiti whose wife was also a teacher, Ann Wanjiru, if I am not wrong. Do you happen to know them. His farm was facing Ndurumo river.’

There you are brother! This man even knew my own parents. I was sorry that I could not alter the story I had given him because I knew if I did, he would not believe me. If I changed it and admitted the truth, there were other things that would follow and I did not want them to know more about me. But all the same, I admitted knowing them and being a pupil of Ann Wanjiru in my lower primary school.

I left them some minutes to four and went to pick my boss. After parking the car, I went upstairs with the same pairs of eyes staring at me. I had started wondering how long it would take those French-speaking Congolese to satisfy their curiosity about me. Elizabeth did not bother to look at me as I passed her to knock at my boss' door. She was sure feeling the same atmosphere of fading love that I was also feeling. The boss was reading a newspaper which he put down when I entered. I had never met such a person

before, though I had never met any millionaire before. He never wanted to waste a single minute. I had, therefore, after realising that, decided to be knocking at his door at four o'clock on the dot.

Back at the villa, I did not feel like any company. Everything around me seemed to be darkening. There was not anything that I now saw clearly. That evening, I received a letter which made matters even worse. It was from Elizabeth. I never knew a woman could threaten a man in such a manner. She had said she was aware that I had lost my affection for her. She continued:

I am aware too that you are deep in it with Hellene. Anyway it was my fault for allowing myself to get entangled with a nigger from space. Now, I have decided to do the worst. I cannot suffer the shame that lies ahead of me. While finding my shortest way out, I decided it was advisable for me not to let you get away with it that easily. There are a lot of things in my traditional beliefs that you do not know but there is no time to let you know. Anyway, I do hope you remember me telling you to get ready to suffer the consequences if anything went wrong, and I pray that you are ready. As a person I loved, I have decided to give you three days, not three weeks, as you had asked me early this week, in which to prepare yourself for the worst, unless you can think of a wiser way to make me change my mind, which I highly doubt. . .

I read that letter several times and was sure now that that was the reason she hadn't talked to me as I went to pick the boss. She thought I had either received the letter or was about to. I was quite sure that there was real trouble ahead if I did not take action. At least she had been kind enough to give me three days in which to decide what to do.

I am not prepared to leave Congo yet, but if that is how things will go, then I have no option,' I told myself. Three days are seventy two hours, but right then, they seemed to me like two minutes.

I decided to wait and see what would cook the next day. After supper, I went straight to my room. The Stephano family asked me to join them in the TV room but I excused myself, saying that I was not feeling well. Lady Stephano went to her room and brought me some aspirins which I carried to my room and put in the sink. I went into the bedroom and lay on the bed. I smoked one cigarette after another, until I felt narcotic acid in my mouth. As I undressed around half past nine, I heard the bell ring once, then twice and once again. It was Hellene's way of ringing the bell whenever she stole a night with me and I felt a bit delighted as I knew her presence would relieve

me of some burden. I shot out to the door and let her into the bedroom and without delay, I entered the bed. She sat there for some minutes then undressed and lay beside me. Within a second, we were in each other's arms. As I caressed her, I felt my heart skip a beat every other minute. Sometimes, that sign resulted in trouble and sometimes in good luck. This time, I failed to see where luck could come from and as it turned out, I was right. After about two hours of caressing, she pushed me away from her. Her breathing became louder than usual and, as an experienced person with girls, I knew trouble lay ahead. Then she spoke, 'Albert, there is a matter I want us to discuss seriously. I told you the other day that we should run away from Congo to Kenya to get married. I told you also that my father would give us full support if we wrote back to him and told him everything. Two months now have passed and I have seen that you never considered the matter any further or if you did, you have not told me. We will take it for granted that you haven't. Things are now not the same. About two weeks ago, I realised that I was pregnant and within another month, if nothing is done, my mother, who is an expert in Health Science, will realise it. She will no doubt tell my father and the worst shall start. Frankly speaking, I can't stand such distress. You put me into it and I expect you to pull me out of it. If you cannot, then I can find other means of pulling myself out of it. But on my part, there is only one way of doing it. I came early tonight so that we can discuss everything there is to be discussed. I want to leave here knowing my fate.'

Well, when things start crumbling, there is nothing else you can do but to find the simplest way out. I had admitted this girl in, delightedly hoping that she was coming to relieve me of a burden but instead, she had added me a burden twice as heavy as the first one. Two Greek girls both crying for my blood! Good luck for me, they did not know that I was a criminal on the run and would run away any time I felt like it.

'Hellene dear, you know as much as I do about my love for you. You know too that I am ready to give any of my arms away, if by so doing, it will save you from any distress. One thing I didn't know is that you are already pregnant and truly speaking, I can't say that I am not glad as, infact, I need to have someone call me daddy. A son or a daughter or both. All I would ask you to do is to be patient for about two weeks, by which time, I will have made plans for both of us. Today is 28th July and before 10th August, we will be on our way. Do you promise to keep still until then?' I asked her, after the

pack of lies I had put in front of her.

Handling them was no problem to me. Instead of replying, she pulled me to herself and after kissing me shortly, told me, 'I knew I could rely on you. I really don't know what I would do without you.'

At last, she had accepted my excuses. One thing I had then come to be sure of was that before 1st August, I would leave Congo and leave it as I had come to it, which means I was to leave alone. The girl was beautiful yes, and she had a lot of dough when it came to that. But where on earth was I to take her? I am not the type who say they cannot marry a white girl because of this or that. No! But I was a criminal on the run. Besides, if I went with her to Kenya, she would get hell from Miriam. Miriam could even use the .45 I had left with her and that would invite the police on my heels once again. I felt I wanted to be left alone but I decided it was advisable to spend the night caressing her for the last time. I was quite sure it was the last time I would have her, so I did my job thoroughly well. The next morning, I took the boss to his office and on the way he asked me how I was feeling. I just remembered then that I had lied to them the night before that I was not feeling well and his wife had given me aspirins, so I told him that the aspirins his wife had given me had done a great deal of good and that I was feeling well but I would go to the hospital after taking him to his office. Here again was another of my mistakes. Instead of simply saying I felt well, I said I would go to the hospital. So, instead of driving the boss straight to his office, he showed me the way to follow, once in town, until I parked the car outside a private hospital. He called his personal doctor and I ended up with an injection that staggered me. I could not even drive after that. He had to support me to the car and drive me to his office. In an inner room adjoining his office, I was put on a rest-bed where I could not leave before twelve. If only you knew how much I fear injections, you would have a nice picture of me that day. I hated myself for ever opening my mouth to say I was sick. My lies always landed me into trouble. I never lied anywhere without regretting it afterwards.

I went for lunch at Hirji's hotel where I met him as he was going downstairs, from the room he had selected for himself on the second floor. When he saw me, he took my arm and we went back. Lunch was brought and we ate together. He had arrived from Kenya the day before and he had a lot to tell me. After lunch, he gave me a copy of the Daily Nation, then went off to

see another friend of his for other businesses.

After a few minutes, I also went to see Kamau and his wife and this time I met two of his children. I was on foot. I stayed with them for a few hours and as it struck twenty minutes to four, I set off, on foot, to go for my boss.

Miss Makarios didn't even bother to look at me as I passed her to my boss' office but that didn't worry me at all. She had given me three days, thinking that within that time I would go and kneel before her, apologising. She was wrong. Those three days were even more than I needed as I knew for sure that by the time her dynamite exploded, I would be miles away.

The boss gave me an off and drove me home. He was a better driver than I thought and within less than forty minutes, we were back at the villa. I went straight to my room and after changing into a pair of jeans and a Kitenge shirt, I went to my bedroom and lay on the bed, staring at the ceiling, deep in thought.

'Stephano is my boss and I am his chauffeur but to him I am no more and no less than his own son. The way he treats me proves it without his saying so. But I have impregnated his only daughter whom I am quite sure he loves best. According to Hellene and his son Karamikos, he has been advising her to take the greatest care possible of herself, as much as she can. She has obeyed him for many years, until I came into her life.' I knew for sure, through my experience, that I was the first man in her life. She was as beautiful and as sexy as Cleopatra, if she too ever existed, and she had offered all of herself and all that combination to me, a criminal on the run. Stephano had managed to change me completely from what I had been while in Kenya. He left a lot of money in my hands each end of the month and I never once thought of running off with it, a thing that really surprised me. Since I came to his villa, I had come to much happiness as I had never come across before. I had more than enough money for a young boy and because of getting whatever I needed, I felt there was no need of stealing. Now, my life in the villa had started proving difficult because of the problems brought about by my involvement with beautiful Greek girls. One had already threatened to put herself out of existence and me in a jam I did not know, but which I was quite sure was there. Well, waiting for three days to see what would happen was out of the question.

It was pointless to tell my boss. Then, this one comes to me with a proposition as difficult as the one before, but full of faith and hope that I

would get her out of the difficult situation she was already in. I loved her, yes, and I knew I was going to miss her but what alternative did I have? Today is 29th, tomorrow 30th, on 31st, my boss and I will go to town as usual but carrying an empty bag, and draw over one million francs, which will be put into the bag and given to me to take home, whereby the money will be paid to the labourers who have waited for it for thirty days. That excluded me as I always got mine from the bank. And those were two of the three days I had been given by Miss Makarios, to prepare myself, before her dynamite exploded. 'Okay, this is what I will do. Tomorrow I will go to the Immigration Department and get a pass to fly to Kenya with immediate effect. After getting it into my possession, I'll then book a flight for the following morning at around half past ten. With all my luggage locked in the Benz's boot, I will drive the boss to his office as usual. But after getting the money into my possession, instead of driving home, I'll drive to the airport and I'll be in time to catch my plane. I'll write a letter and post it to my boss at the airport. After all the kindness he has shown me, I can't feel human to just vanish without a word. The lady likes me too but she has other ideas about me that I do not like so I might as well forget her as soon as I leave the villa this last morning. Karamikos is a true friend, yes, but I am sure he will not forgive me after doing what I am proposing to do, so I might as well forget him. As for Retro, in these latter days, I have not liked him and he has not liked me either and we both know it. I also know that he will say very bad things about me, but that will not worry me as I will be miles away.'

That was all, plus the hope that all would go well in the remaining days. 'If the two then committed suicide at the same time and day, what do I have to lose?' I asked myself. 'No one will ask me to pay for their coffins nor the shrouds. After all, even if they wanted to, where would they get me from, for as soon as I leave Congo, I'll cease being Albert.'

Early the next morning, I woke up and after taking a bath, I put on the latest suit the boss had bought me and which had cost a lot of money. I could never have afforded it on my own but that was nothing to my boss. After breakfast, I went to the Benz and sat behind the wheel. When my boss came, the first thing he did on seeing me was to commend me for being smart.

Some minutes to nine, I parked the car outside the bank. I went up with him as usual and winked at Miss Makarios as we passed her. She would have swallowed me in a gulp had I been pint-size. When my boss was settled, I left

him and went back to the Benz which I started again, but this time drove towards the Immigration Department! Like in any other office in Congo, everyone here spoke French and it proved a bit difficult to explain clearly what I wanted. Then, by luck I came to know that the head of that department was an American but to get into contact with him was a bit hard. I wrote a note in English which I gave to his secretary and asked her to take it to him, explaining to him how hard it was for me to talk to his people there, as I couldn't speak French. After a few minutes, the secretary came to show me to her boss' office. I produced my *les passe* and after two or three hours, I left the Immigration offices with everything I had gone for.

I parked the Benz outside the offices of Sabena Airlines at around one. With all the passes I had, it was not at all difficult to buy an air ticket for the following day to Entebbe. My idea of landing in Uganda was to make it a bit difficult for them to trace me, once they realised that I had run off with the money. That ready, I went to see Kamau and his wife. I felt I should tell them that I was going back to Kenya although I was not going to give them any reasons.

I gave them the first story that came to my mind and after making sure that they were satisfied, I left them, promising to visit them the first thing when I came back, which I knew I would not. From there, I went to Karamikos' office so that he would not be suspicious. I had stayed for some days without visiting him in his office and he was complaining about it. We talked about this and that but he soon realised that I was not in the right mood, so he left me alone to read the Newsweek magazine I was holding in my hands. There was nothing I could do to rest my soul and I knew very well that whatever I did in those offices of the Greek trio, was for me, the last.

I had lunch with Hirji at his hotel. I was very lucky in Congo as most of the things I got there were free. Imagine an Indian supplying you with free lunch and accommodation in his hotel, any time you need it, just because you happened to be in a car with a Kenyan registration number in Congo! If you meet your enemy in a strange country where you need each other's assistance, be assured that you'll forget your enmity. This, I have proved beyond reasonable doubt. After lunch and after a little rest, I drove Karamikos back to his office, then I went back to rest, waiting for the time to come when I'd go for my boss. I knew that it was my last day to be in the hotel.

'If I ever meet Hirji Shah again, it will be in Kenya, not in Congo and still, it will have to be accidentally. By that time, I'll not be Albert Ngunjiri. That will be a name in the past,' I told myself.

CHAPTER NINE



At 4.45 on Wednesday 30th, in the evening, I parked the Benz outside Stephano's villa and as he went out of the car, he invited me for some coffee. The lady was there waiting for him as usual and after taking him into her arms, she directed him into the bedroom but what for I did not know. After coffee I excused myself and went to my room. The Greek trio had just arrived from their offices and Karamikos wanted my company that evening which I did not like as I had a lot of things to do. Then I decided that I should do him a last favour.

At around six that evening, I drove with Karamikos back to town in search of an African girl he was always after. We reached town only to find that the girl was not at home. Her brother told us that she was at a party. The party was in an apartment belonging to an African boy, her secret love, by the name of Rashid. We were not allowed into the party because Rashid, the host, knew Karamikos and the love affair between him and the girl. But we managed to send another girl who had just come out of the room to call the girl we were after. When she came out after about five minutes, she was followed by Rashid. When we insisted on going away with her, Rashid and his friends tried to interfere. To get her out of the place resulted in a terrible fight which forced me to draw a Somali knife I always carried at night. The fight ended up with me stabbing two boys and another girl pretty badly. The fight reminded me of Kenya where I often fought for girls. I did not care whether I stabbed them to death or not. I knew that the following day, I would be as far away as the Sabena Airlines would take me. Karamikos knew I could be tough but not to the extent of being ready to shed blood. He told me so later.

Karamikos phoned back home to tell his mother that we would not be in for supper so we ate in town. When he had done all he wanted to do in town and with the girl, we drove back to the villa. It was late and no one was awake when we arrived. We parted outside and I went to my room. I had a lot to do as I needed to pack. I had two suit-cases into which I fitted all I wanted

to carry. I had a radio that I could not leave behind and a record-player too. That night, I had deliberately forgotten to leave the Benz's keys where I always left them and so I still had them. I took the two suit-cases and went out with them. I looked around and being satisfied that there was no one awake and around, I put them into the boot of the Benz. I also put the radio and the record player into the boot and locked it. The following morning, I would wake up as usual. Back in the bedroom, I undressed and got into my bed. Then I remembered that if I didn't write a letter to my boss at that time, there was no time to write it the following morning. So I got out of bed and, in my pyjamas, went into the study to fetch some paper and a pen, and I sat down and wrote the following letter.

30th July, 1968

My dear Stephano,

I hope what I am about to write to you will not surprise you very much. I am sure you must sooner or later come to know the truth.

Before going further, I want to let you know that I have very much enjoyed staying in your villa with you and your whole family, and your treating me as your own son has been very nice. I am sure that to you, I was not a chauffeur but another one of your sons. In my past, I have done a lot of things that have resulted in a miserable life, a life without rest and I can never hesitate to tell you that it was at your villa, after a long struggle, that I had to find rest.

I am quite sure that had I got the type of life I experienced in your villa, I would not have done the things I have already done. I would not have done what I am about to do now, had it not been for your daughter, Hellene. Your personal secretary, Miss Makarios, is also concerned. (I have left a letter she wrote to me in my former study on the table). You will see for yourself what was in front of me.

I have put your daughter, Hellene, too in the family way and she has also warned me in the same way as you'll see in Miss Makarios' letter. Hellene's proposition was that I should run away with her to Kenya without your consent. I would have done it as I loved her very much, but in Kenya I am a man on the run and I'll frankly tell you that as I leave Congo, I do not know where my next stop will be, but I am quite positive that it will not be Kenya. I therefore decided that running off with Hellene to a place I didn't know was to put her into a lot of trouble which I'd rather she did not get into.

She had told me that if I did not run off with her or if I did not do anything about it soon, she would commit suicide.

I had asked her to give me about two weeks in which to prepare myself, so you have plenty of time to stop her. I pray you'll get this letter in time.

I am now off to a place I don't know but I am well aware that I will never come to a place half as fine as your place. I have run off with over a million francs but that to you is not even a handful. Believe me or not, I wouldn't have touched a single franc had it not been for your daughter and your secretary. Anyway, to forgive a wrong is the best revenge and I hope you'll forget about all that. May the Lord bless you and your family for as long as you live.

With kind regards,
Albert Ngure.

After reading the letter once again and satisfying myself that was all I wanted him to know, I put it into an envelope and sealed it. I then took out the letter Miss Makarios had written to me and put it on the table where the boss would find it easily. Then I put the letter I had just written in the jacket that I would wear in the morning and I went back to bed. There wasn't much time to sleep anyway and early that morning, I woke up and after taking a bath, I dressed up and went for my breakfast earlier than usual and I waited as each member of the family came to the table.

The Greek trio left for town soon after breakfast and we followed them minutes later. My boss did not look suspicious at all but had he been very observant that day, he would have seen fear written all over my face.

As it struck five minutes to nine, I parked the Benz outside the bank. I took the empty large bag and we went up to his office. I noticed, with a lot of fright, that for the first time, Miss Makarios was not there. The boss did not seem to have noticed the same thing and if he had, he ignored it. After getting settled in the office, he took the intercom and dialled a number I always saw him dialling, every end of the month when we were to draw wages. A huge, smartly dressed man knocked on the door after a short while, the same man who always brought back the bag filled with dough, came in and after a short briefing from the boss, went away with the bag. That day, he seemed to have been delaying the money deliberately. He kept me waiting for so long that I

feared that the plane I was going to fly in would leave me behind and I started wondering what was wrong. I was surprised to realise that he was even faster than ever that day, when later he knocked at the door once again, with the bag now full of cash. He put the money on the table and after stating the amount there was in the bag, left. The bag had something over 1.5 million francs in notes. The boss then looked at me as if asking me whether I was satisfied and I almost told him that it was more than enough for one person.

‘Will you drive home straight or you’ll first have some rounds in town?’ he asked me.

I looked at my watch and saw it was some minutes past ten and my plane was taking off at half past ten. Had he known, he would not have asked me the question as the answer was obvious. I was even feeling delayed. I eyed him again for the last time then said, ‘I guess I should run along. I’ll come back to town after landing the money safely home.’

So, I took the 1.5 million francs all in one bag and went out of the office. Miss Makarios was not at her desk and I felt my heart skip a beat as I remembered that it was the end of the three days she had given me.

‘Maybe she is hanging somewhere from one of the trees around her home,’ I thought as I started the car.

At the airport, I parked the car in a vacant place which was one of the greatest mistakes that I ever made in my life of crime. Going in my boss’ car to the airport was fatal, as I later came to realise, for once he phoned home as he usually did whenever I drove home carrying money, and found that I had not arrived, the first thing he would do would be to notify the police. If they then recovered the car abandoned at the airport, the rest would be easy. They would know at once that I had flown off with the money and could have the police waiting for me at the first landing. As it turned out, I was right.

Before I left the car, I opened the bag and put as much money as I could into my pockets. I was selecting the notes that had the highest value. I closed the bag, got out of the car and went to the boot and took out my luggage. I saw two African boys passing by and I employed them to carry the suitcases to the office. In the booking office and after the usual formalities, I was declared ready to leave, any time my flight was ready. I then gave an attendant in the office the letter I had written to my boss, for postage.

When the time came, the speakers called out for the passengers of the plane I was flying in and we all went in. Whoever took my suitcases and the

rest of my luggage into the plane is beyond my knowledge even today. Within a few minutes, I was seated comfortably in an aeroplane for the first time in my life! I was feeling pretty hot and sweat had just started gathering on my face to start flowing when I saw what the others were doing to prevent it and I followed suit. There was a switch just above me that brought cold air into the plane when worked on and I pressed it, as I saw others doing. Brother, it nearly gave me the shock of my life. Too much cold air hit my body and I nearly froze. I had pressed the switch to its maximum. An air hostess who realised what was going on came to my aid. She balanced the goddamn thing, smiling and at the same time, apologising as if she was really concerned. I felt better after this. I took a magazine to read but I could not. The only thing I could do at that moment was to pray that the airliner takes off so that I would be as far away from Bukavu town as possible. The plane, a Boeing 707, carried a hundred and eighteen passengers with a crew of twenty as it left the ground of Bukavu, that day of 30th July, 1968.

As it took off, I felt as if I would vomit. Then I saw that there was a plastic bag in each seat for vomitting into, if you felt like it. They certainly knew what people felt like as the airliner left the ground. I did not vomit. In the air, I was kept busy by some hostess who must have realised that I was somehow uneasy. To me, it was quite impossible to know one from the other. I also realised that those hostesses are so kind and willing to help and keep a lonely passenger busy, that you'd think that they had fallen for you. If you are a sucker, you'd end up messing everything after asking one for a ride. If they are not trained that way in college, you cannot make me believe they were not born that way, always willing to discuss whatever topic you bring up. In the air, they kept me informed that we were in such and such a place and were so many minutes to our first landing. I was really enjoying it.

Our first landing was in Bujumbura in Burundi. I had been informed about it by one hostess some five minutes before. She had also helped me to fasten my safety belt. My mind was wholly occupied with the thought of whether or not my former boss had discovered my trick and had arranged an ambush for me at the airport. I was relieved as we landed and took off again after some time.

In the air once again, the hostesses kept me busy. My fears were also over as I told myself that had Stephano realised that I had taken off by air, he would have arranged for me to be arrested at the first landing. I was also able,

after that, to read the two magazines that I had. It was in the air, after this first landing, that I was able to plan how I would go and exchange the 1.5 million francs into Kenyan currency at Kisumu. I had by then known many and easier methods of exchanging money. I had learned them from Hirji Shah who was very good at the game. There were many Indians who had businesses in all the big towns between Congo and Kenya and who would exchange as much money as you brought to them, at a profit. 'For my 1.5 million francs, I wouldn't ask for much,' I told myself. I was well aware that the francs in Kenya were worthless, so if one agreed to part with twenty five to thirty thousand shillings, it was okay with me. Not that it would have exchanged for more than that had it been done legally; those francs are damn valueless. Going home to Miriam with such an amount in eight months was not bad. I was sure that by now the police had stopped looking for me seriously. There certainly must have come up another gang which could be on top of the 'wanted by police' list,' I thought as the airliner cut through the clouds.

Such were the thoughts that had occupied my mind as I sat comfortably in my seat, staring vacantly at a Drum magazine. After satisfying myself all was well and that I was the luckiest boy of my age in existence, I looked up, saw a huge man, followed by almost every crew we had on that plane, coming directly towards me. The uniform he wore was giving my eyes a tough time, especially the twinkling laces on his cap and his jacket. He was the captain and his coming made me know that there was something wrong on the passengers' side, as everyone kept very quiet and very still. He came straight to me and when he stopped by me, everyone on guard stood by. He asked me in French whether I was Albert Ngunjiri, which I agreed to without hesitating. He realised I could not speak much French so he switched to very poor English. One hostess volunteered to interpret after her boss' request. These hostesses are either bilinguals or multi-linguals for your information. Then this followed: 'Albert Ngunjiri, I have received instructions from my superiors to leave you at our next landing which is only ten minutes from now. It will be Kigali in Rwanda. I am very sorry that you'll have to be delayed but I must follow those instructions. When all is well, you'll follow us. There is a lady who will explain to you better the reasons of your being left behind at that airport. Any objections?'

'None whatsoever Captain. Whatever it is, it is not your fault,' I told him politely. Everyone in the place was looking at me curiously. I knew why I

was being left behind but no one else did.

Well, you can guess or imagine how I felt without being told. If you can't then I guess you have never known trouble in your life. When the captain disappeared, the hostesses came to me looking undecided on whether to pity me or to laugh at me. One of them asked me if I had any idea as to why I was being left behind as it was not usual to see such a thing in their airline. But I told her that I had no idea and whatever it was, it was not serious. It was a lie they would discover within less than ten minutes, a thing they would discuss on their way to Entebbe and on their way back to Bukavu. The loud-speaker spoke to warn the passengers to fasten their belts and I followed suit. Within a few minutes, we landed at Astrida.

I was the first passenger to be given way to alight. As I reached the top of the ladder, I was surprised to see my luggage on the left side of the ladder and as I descended the stairs, I got what can be called the real surprise. It came as I stepped on the ground of the airport, and I always pray that God helps me never to come across such a thing for the rest of my life. Three African police corporals armed with machine guns, and two white police inspectors also armed with machine guns, and all pointed my way, accosted me! Wherever they had sprang from was beyond my comprehension. I did not even get time to reach my luggage. Far in front of me stood another white officer with a pistol in its holster on his right shoulder fastened to a belt which was tied round his waist. He was the first one to talk to me.

'Are you Albert Ngole?' he asked.

'Yes, I am. What's the meaning of all this, Chief Inspector?'

'Jest follow me and I shall shee yah.'

I was shown the direction and I followed him with all the arms pointed at me, every passenger and every pedestrian looking at me as if I were an ape who had at last managed to talk. I had never seen a person guided in that manner. The pedestrians were being asked with the mouths of the machine guns to clear the way and most of them nearly melted away, fearing that the guns might go off by accident. I was ushered into an office some minutes later where I met an old woman seated in an armchair, behind a table with seven different telephones on it. I am not sure they were exactly seven as I was too shocked to count them. I guess I only imagined the number. She gave me a seat in front of her which I took bravely. Only the white officers entered this office. The Africans were left in the waiting-room. Then the old woman

started asking me questions. She spoke fluent English.

‘Are you Albert Nguire?’

I got very annoyed for being asked this question so many times. I knew that if I denied it, it would make it a bit harder for me. But I also wanted to show them not to ask stupid questions.

‘If I weren’t, I wouldn’t have been brought here! Don’t you trust this bunch of cops you sent to arrest me? Just be kind, old woman, and explain the meaning of this to me.’ I did not care about how I talked as I knew the three officers could not understand English clearly.

‘Play it cool, young man, and you won’t put yourself into any trouble; play it tough and you’ll regret it.’

‘What a merciless old hag?’ I asked myself.

All of a sudden I thought that in a condition like this, one needed someone on his side, and through my judgement, if there was one who could be on my side, it was to be a female and especially this one, despite her rudeness. But she must have motherly love.

‘Sorry maam, I just got a bit confused. These people here came for me as if I had assassinated a president. They almost made me lose hope. Do excuse me maam,’ I apologised.

It worked alright. The lady brightened up and I could see that, even if the rest did not understand, they must have realised that we had come to an understanding.

‘Well, thank-you young man for your quick decision. You agree you are Albert Nguire, don’t you?’

‘I am, maam.’

‘I got a call from Bukavu instructing me to have you detained here until our next plane to Congo arrives. I am instructed to have you taken back to Congo with immediate effect. No reasons were given. The plane arrives here in an hour’s time so please be patient until that time. By the way, have you involved yourself in politics? I have seen such cases before and if it is politics it will be somehow tough.’

‘No politics involved maam. I am also not aware what it is all about but I have no worry in the world. I was only disappointed by the way these people handled me. You’d have thought I had committed a massacre in a president’s camp, the way they escorted me here from the airline.’

‘Well, I wish you good luck. You really need it, judging from the way they

talked about you. In the meantime, you'll go back to the waiting-room and if you need help, you can ask to be allowed to see me here.'

She then spoke to the Chief Inspector in a strange language and I was shown my way out to the waiting-room. I was shown to a lonely corner from where I could see some people waiting for the departure-time of their planes and others waiting for the arrival of their friends and relatives. Everyone here stared at me. The African cops with guns were standing only about three feet from me with their rifles and machine-guns pointed at me. I don't recall having ever been so annoyed in my life as I was right then. One thing that made me even more annoyed was the fact that I had run away from Kenya because of this type of life, guns always being pointed at me as if I was not born of a woman. I had fled Kenya to Congo where I had a good chance of changing to a normal person, as I sometimes thought I wasn't, but because of my hunger for women, I had messed up everything in my country of refuge.

'What will happen to me if I am taken back there? I have already written a note confessing that I had fled from Kenya as I was wanted by the police. So, even if they do not intend to ruin me in their country, which is likely, they will certainly throw me into the hands of the Kenya Police, after they get the money. And then, supposing the two girls have carried out their intentions and committed suicide?' I wondered. It was tough alright. I had talked about their coffins and shrouds, I guess it was high time I thought of mine. 'Me, going to meet Stephano and his family again? What type of a life have I led myself into?' I asked myself all this as I sat, not comfortably, on a very well-padded form, and for the first time since I was born, I felt like weeping.

I tried to read the magazines I had but could not, for every time I looked up, I was met by the ugly muzzles of the machine-guns, just a yard from me. I got so annoyed that I talked to the Chief Inspector who was some yards away from me.

'Hey chief, can't these bastards of yours let someone read? Where can I go with all these guns pointed at me and there's only one way out? Tell them to stay some distance from me and use their eyes. Do they think that I can just vanish into thin air?' The chief inspector talked to them and they moved back a few steps, but with the guns still pointed at me. It was like putting a piece of meat some distance away from hungry dogs. They can never shift their eyes from the meat even if you shout at them from another direction. This is one of the few incidents I will never forget. Do you follow?

After about twenty minutes, I saw the door of the old woman's office open. She came out and I saw that she was tall and huge. She was old alright, judging from the grey hairs on her head, but she looked young for her age. She passed near me and asked me whether I was getting any trouble from my guards and I told her about the African cops.

'These guns may go off, even accidentally and end my life. Tell them to try to at least relax.'

She talked to the Chief Inspector who in turn talked to his cops who then stood at ease. Then I asked her where the lavatories were. I had my own intentions. If I entered one, they would have to use a fire brigade to get me out. If I was going back to Congo, I was to go there unconscious, I told myself. She showed me the direction of the toilets and as I stood up to go, the two corporals with machine-guns came forward. She talked to them and as I went, they followed me. Before I entered the toilet, I noticed that one had stationed himself on the left and the other on the right side of the door. I locked the door from the inside and sat on the basin and tried to urinate. I only managed a few drops, no doubt out of fear. But I continued sitting on the basin. As I looked around, I saw a window above my head on the opposite side of the door. A man bigger than me could pass through that window. Immediately, my brains started working. I stepped on the basin and reached the window. When I looked outside, I got hope. I managed to hold tightly on to the window frame and lifting myself up, I managed to get to the top and flush the toilet before dropping out. It was a short drop which I managed without any problems but in the process, a handful of franc notes and some cigarettes fell out of my pockets but I did not waste my precious time collecting them. Once outside, I felt as if I had fallen into another land without inhabitants. No-one could be seen around. Apart from the back of a tall building about a hundred yards away, the land was flat and I could see some distance away. Beyond the wire fence, there was a road and I hurried in that direction. I found my way through the fence and as I reached the road, I heard a car coming. It was a taxi! What luck!

I hailed it and it stopped. I entered it and told the driver only one word: 'Town!' He spoke to me in a language I could not understand and thinking that he was asking for money, I took out a 100 franc note. I spoke to him in English and I realised he could not understand. I tried Swahili, which to him seemed new too, then I switched to my poor French which seemed even more

complicated to him, so I was left with only one alternative, gestures.

At the sight of the 100 francs, he shook his head, I took out two more and he still shook his head. The thought that I was getting delayed made me take out a bundle of 1,000 franc notes and he smiled at the sight, picked them up and put them in his pocket. He released the clutch and in a few minutes, I found myself in Astrida. I wondered why such a short distance should cost so much but then came to know that francs here were as useless as cowrie shells in a stone building.

Once in town, I moved here and there looking for a place in which to hide. I had by then realised that I had no money to spend in this country as I had Congo francs. I was going round just to try my luck. After a time, I got tired of walking from this place to that and stopped at a shop that had several customers who talked in a language I had never heard before. They too could not understand me. As I stepped outside that shop, I saw a man coming towards a car park, a few yards from me. At the same time I heard someone whistling an English song but could not tell who it was. The song was I have lived a life of sin in this world I am living in, by Jim Reeves. Then I suddenly realised the tune came from the man who was about to enter the car. The thought came to me that if that man could whistle that song, he must know some English, so I shot towards him as he started the car. When he saw me, he backed the car slowly and aimlessly to the shop where I was standing before, looking at me all the time. But still I followed my man. When I caught up with him, he said:

‘Jambo.’ Very happily, I replied, ‘Sijambo.’

Well, at long last I had someone who could understand me. We talked a little and I gave him part of my story. He was the owner of the shop. He now asked me to come inside the shop where we continued talking. He was from Uganda. He told me that he had a friend who worked with East African Airways and who would arrive the following day as some people had started exporting Kenyan meat to that country. He told me an E.A.A. plane came to that country with the meat twice a week. He later took me into an inner room in the shop where he brought me some bottles of beer. He had some employees because his shop was too big for one person to operate. Then I decided that I would trust this man and I told him my story without leaving out anything. ‘If he wants to give me away, let him do it,’ I told myself. He looked at me as I told him the story and after I had finished, he sighed and

said:

‘So you are the man who has escaped from the airport? Well, you are safe where you are right now. They are broadcasting it on the radio every thirty minutes, giving your description. A very poor one in fact. Every cop in this town is looking for you but that should not worry you.’ Then I took out all the money I had in my pockets. I had not spent any, except the amount I dropped at the toilet-window and the little I gave to the taxi-driver, so I still had 300,000 francs on me. I put it on the table and asked the man to exchange it for Kenyan money. He took it and promised to do his best. In fact, I did not mind whatever he would bring back, provided that it was in Kenyan shillings. The best part I wanted him to play was that of making sure that I got out of this muddle and back to Kenya. Do you, the reader, pick anything there? If you don’t, then you have not been following my story. I badly wanted to find myself back in Kenya where I had run away from some months back, and where I was wanted by the police. I had now messed up things in two countries so, even if this man had brought me 500 shillings in Kenyan currency, I would not have minded, provided it was Kenyan money.

In the evening, my man came and woke me up. I was lying on the only bed in that room. He asked me how I was feeling and I told him I was feeling very fine.

‘The cops are still looking for you. They have put road blocks on all roads going out of the town. The radio says a taxi-driver told the police that he picked a man around the airport who paid him a lot of foreign money. He says the description fitted the man he picked there. But you can count on the fact they cannot move from house to house, in this large town, looking for you. They talk of you as being a most dangerous man and so if any good citizen sights you, he should contact the nearest police station. I am not a good citizen so put any bad ideas about me out of your mind.’

Then the man, Silvester Mukasa by name, took out a bundle of Kenyan currency. The sight of Kenya money made me grin without intending to. I had stayed with valueless francs for a long time and so the sight of Kenyan shillings, whose value I well knew, was a pleasing sight. I took the money and counted 8,000 shillings. It was a wonder alright but up to now, I had come across so many wonders that one more was nothing. Things were going more smoothly than I had anticipated and I started feeling that I would go back to Kenya. ‘That is as much as I could get. I have many friends so it was

not very hard to have it exchanged, but all the same, not many could have done it as easily,' Mukasa told me. The following morning I woke up at around nine. I felt fine and after taking a bath, I felt even better. Mukasa brought me breakfast and then gave me news in brief. He told me that the papers had written about me and carried a police description of me. The radio said nothing, just as I had expected. At around ten, Mukasa came back accompanied by a huge, smartly dressed man whom he introduced to me as his friend working with E.A.A. His name was Davis Kiwanuka. He had worked with that company for a very long time and had lived in Nairobi for over ten years. There's no corner in Nairobi that he did not know and we talked much about the Kenyan capital. Mukasa had given him my story and so there was not much I could add, and at last he told me, 'Rest assured you'll take your supper in Nairobi today. You can depend on me.'

'But I do not want to fly straight to Nairobi,' I told him, 'there are some things I would like to pick at Entebbe and from there, I can find my way to Nairobi.'

'That will be our first landing so that should be alright. Don't bother about it any longer. It will be as easy as talking.'

'Thanks a lot brother, I'll be much delighted. I just don't know how to thank you. I've never met so much kindness in my life. But frankly speaking, I fear going back to that airport. I might be spotted and if that happens, I'll be sunk.'

'No one is aware you are going back there. After all, that is the last place they would expect to find you. We are leaving at midday, so you'd better get ready. It is worth the risk anyway.' In fact, he was right. They thought and believed that I would want to be as far from the airport as possible for my safety. At twelve, I was among the few passengers who were seated in the E.A.A. airline. I had no luggage and I looked odd. Three hostesses were back-biting me, saying they had never met a passenger with no luggage at all, not even a bag or a newspaper. I looked odd alright. These hostesses were all speaking in Kikuyu, though one was a Mkamba.

In the air, I felt happy that I was out of the muddle I had put myself into and I felt I owed those two Ugandans everything. Then I thought about myself. Surely, I had often put myself into many problems and trouble-spots but on the other hand, I had always found ways of pulling myself out of them. Twice, I had been able to escape, in a professional way. If life in crime was

life in the legal armed forces, I don't see why I should not have been decorated. I remembered all the rifles and machine-guns that had been pointed at me less than thirty six hours ago and I smiled. I will one day revisit Astrida and see what they did to the window I escaped through.

I could not help laughing out loudly when I imagined the look on the faces of the African cops, with machine-guns waiting for me outside the toilet, once they realised that I had gone. If they did not lose their jobs then, they never will.

The plane touched down at Entebbe at 3.30 pm. I alighted with the hostesses, their mouths wide open, laughing. My sight must have been one of the funniest they had come across in years. As I went away, I turned to them and in English said, 'You may laugh as much as you want, but if only you knew what I do, you'd be filled with tears in those small, opium-addicted eyes of yours. If you don't have anything more funny to laugh about, follow me and I'll show you greater fun in your lives. I promise you this, when I arrive in Nairobi tomorrow, the first thing that I will do is to complain about your behaviour today to your boss and I will make sure you regret every word you have said about me during the journey. And one more thing, I am a Kikuyu from Murang'a and before God I swear this: whenever and wherever I meet one or the three of you, you will wish you were not born. You will then never forget our meeting, that is, if you will live, and for your information, I know Nairobi inside out. Also remember this, I was born of that category of men, slow to forgive, ever ready to revenge and never able to forget a wrong.'

I turned and entered the depths of Entebbe town. The trouble with me is that I am the revenging type and whenever I swear to do something, anything, I never get settled until it is accomplished.

I spent the night in Entebbe. The Muganda who had helped me leave Astrida had flown to Nairobi after telling me where I could find him once I was back in Nairobi. The following morning, I booked a train for Nairobi and within fourteen hours, I found myself back in the city, after a period of more than eight months. As I had no luggage and nobody to meet me, I went straight out of the station, hired a taxi and told the driver to take me to St. Teresa's Church in Eastleigh. I did not want him to know where I stayed. I have known too many taxi-drivers employed by the C.I.D., to take chances. From there, I walked for two minutes to my apartment.

Things change in a very short time. The neighbours I had left there were no longer there. I now met new faces. None of the former occupants of the rooms had owned cars but now, I found two cars parked outside: A Peugeot 404 Saloon and a Consul Cortina. I also noticed that the place looked much cleaner than I had left it and to my further surprise, we had a different landlord. Milly was not there but the children were. It was a Saturday. When they saw me, I guess you can imagine their reactions without being told. They were so happy that they called a neighbour, who was their friend, to introduce her to me. She was the wife of a man who was later to become a great friend of mine. The children had changed greatly. Town life is no joke, if only you get what you want. Those children were very healthy.

CHAPTER TEN



It must have looked odd to the children and to whoever saw me arriving at my home, completely empty-handed, after a period of over eight months. Odd especially, to the woman who introduced herself to me. Very odd to the maid Milly had employed, because she had better understanding than the children. Still odd that, before I left for Congo, I had collected all my clothes and parked them into two large suitcases which I had taken with me, and now I did not come back with them. As I sat comfortably on an easy-chair which I had not left when I went away, I was deep in thought, wondering how I would explain the loss of my clothes to Milly. The children and the rest of the people did not matter much, as none knew much, but Milly did and she was sure to insist on knowing why I had come home empty-handed. I was even glad that I had not found her at home. The suit I was wearing then was the best I had ever had in my life, the one bought for me by Stephano. But that alone would not account for the disappearance of the others, I told myself. To make the children and the maid less inquisitive, I took out a hundred shilling-note and gave it to the maid, instructing her to buy whatever the children wanted to have and to keep the change. That trick worked surprisingly well. About Milly, I would have to wait until she came.

I selected a few records and played them on the player. The maid brought us tea. She was a good cook and I liked her tea. Passing time until Milly came was no problem as I kept myself busy, listening to all the new records that had been bought. Milly knocked at the door as Skeeter Davis was singing 'In the Misty Moon Light'. When she saw me, and in my best, she flew the distance between us and kissed me, and held me tightly to herself, and caressed me so sweetly and warmly that I became suspicious that while I was away, an experienced person had coached her. She had never done it so beautifully all that time that I had stayed with her. If someone had not, then, she must have been watching a lot of Indian films. The children watched us, their eyes and mouths wide open. If they did not think Milly was eating me, then they thought we were both mad. The maid was in the kitchen washing

dishes. When Milly was satisfied, she let me go, moved a few steps back and stared at me as if trying to detect whether I had been faithful to her during the time I had been away. Anyway, whatever it was, she seemed satisfied, and for the first time, she was able to speak.

‘How are you for so long dear? I really missed you.’

‘I guess you can judge for yourself Milly. How do I look?’

‘Truely speaking, better than when you left; browner and more handsome. You really know how to look after yourself dear and I like it. Come into the bedroom so I can satisfy my curiosity. I don’t believe what I see.’

I followed her into the bedroom, deep in thought. ‘So I was browner, fatter and more handsome?’ It is always hard for someone to notice his own changes. In the bedroom, I took off my coat and tie and hung them on the wall. As I turned round, I saw Milly locking the door and I sat on the divan bed that she had bought while I was away. She had really changed a lot of things. She came and sat beside me, forced me to take off my shoes and the next minute, she was squeezing the breath out of my body. She really must have been coached by an expert. When she was satisfied and sure that I was the real Zollo, she sat up and started questioning me. I told her the story of what happened and for the first time since we started staying together, I felt like telling her the whole truth. I therefore told her a detailed story of my air trip but omitted the reason of my being arrested. I was relieved minutes later by a neighbour knocking at the door. It was the same woman who had been introduced to me. We talked for a time until night fell. After supper, we went to bed.

Days passed and things returned to normal and I became used to my former life in Nairobi. I had bought more suits and shirts with the money I had saved from my long journey, plus the amount Milly raised for me to buy decent clothes. Some days later, I asked for my gun, to make sure it was alright. I knew I would use it anytime after meeting my old friends, those who were lucky to be out of prison.

After a few months, I felt safe enough to go to town, now and then, searching for my old friends. Most of the boys had been sentenced to life; others had been killed in action, and yet others condemned to death. If you are a coward or have a soft heart, you can never continue with life in crime after seeing and hearing what the law courts are doing to your companions. Most of the boys I had been going around with were either in or dead, except

Captain Henry Kariuki Mugugu, but I did not know his whereabouts. I inquired from the many places I knew he frequented but found no trace of him anywhere. He then got a report from a certain prostitute he was friendly with that I was back in town and looking for him, and he too started looking for me but by then, I had given up hope of finding him, and had stopped looking for him.

One day, five months after I had come back from Congo, I decided to go to a film at the Cameo Theatre. Outside the theatre, a girl I had met some years back at a certain party volunteered to pay for me. She was alone so we paired up. It was around four and most people who had left their offices earlier were getting tickets for the new release of Sean Connery. After obtaining tickets, we entered the theatre and the usher showed us our seats. As I sat down, I heard a voice call me, just one row behind us but as my eyes had not got used to the darkness, I decided to first sit and wait for the caller to come and sit next to me, as he himself was accustomed to the darkness in the theatre. I had not recognised the voice and I was very surprised when Captain Mugugu and his girlfriend shifted to the two seats next to us.

‘Brother Zollo, am I glad to meet you? How do you do? I am glad to see you.’

‘Oh! thanks Captain. How do you do? I have been looking for you all over!’

We were so happy about our meeting that we had almost forgotten we were among other people. Our excitement was interrupted by the clapping of hands and the shouts from the audience and we joined them in their excitement. After the film, we went upstairs to the Verandah Bar with our girlfriends. We talked and drank beer. Later, we parted and I went back to my apartment and to Milly.

During the lunch hour, the following day, I met Captain at Queen’s Hotel as we had agreed. Captain and a friend of his, Mulwa, occupied a table at a corner. I joined them and they ordered lunch for me. I gave them my story and the experiences I had gone through during the time I was away from Kenya. I told them that I was broke and if they had a job in the near future, would they be kind enough to put me into it. They told me they had a job ready but every part had been taken.

‘However, if one of them fails to turn up, you will take his place,’ Captain told me.

As we were sitting silently, after talking as much as we wanted, and as the beer started taking effect, a tall thin man with long legs, but very smartly dressed, approached us, looking undecided as to whether to come over to us, or turn and run as far away from us as possible. He pulled a chair after we invited him and he sat down. He greeted Captain by name and I could see that it surprised Captain to see that this man knew him. Captain ordered some beer for the new arrival and we were soon deep in it together. I could tell that this man had something in mind but that he was undecided about two of us. He ordered three rounds and during the third round, he asked Captain to follow him outside. When they came back, Captain was smiling broadly and I could see that whatever he had been told had pleased him. He said, 'Relax boy, your prayers are answered. This man here is called David Mburu. He was with me in prison when I was in for two years. I was not remembering him but he knows me pretty well. You know I was a cleaner in the prison hospital and most prisoners knew me as I was helping them with smuggled drugs. When he explained to me, I knew he was with me there and I even recalled him. He is now working with a certain company here and he has a proposition to make. I told him it is alright even if he tells me the whole story in your presence. He has an idea of making easy money and he is selling it to us. I hope you are both ready to listen to him.' I could hear my heartbeat despite the loud noise from drunkards, and for about thirty minutes, we listened to Mburu.

'A really swell idea,' I said after hearing the whole story. It was only a go-and-take job, if it really was there, and as there was this other job Captain and his group had planned, we decided to pull the new one at the end of the following month. I had not much money left but I had enough to see me through the best part of the long month.

Four days before the end of the proposed month, Captain, Mulwa and I, met again at Queen's hotel to make arrangements for the job. We decided that as the job was not very difficult, the three of us plus the driver were enough. There was only one, and the best get-away driver left, a Muganda we called Simba. He was a friend of both Captain and myself and we decided Captain would contact him that same evening, telling him to have a car ready for use on that day. He was the most daring and the bravest driver I ever came across in my life of crime. Mulwa told us he had a gun and so we agreed that he would bring it on the suggested day. We parted after agreeing when and

where we would meet.

At home, I was feeling very bad for since I left Congo, I had not brought home anything remarkable. One thing I had learned was that, if you wanted your wife or your girlfriend to be faithful to you always you had to buy a present, every now and then, no matter how small provided it was a present, and you would then count on her to wish to be near you every minute. She'd love you more than her own eyes!

Even if Milly never showed me any signs of ill feeling, I could not ignore the fact that she was a woman and she would like presents too. So, when this job turned up, I was so overjoyed that I promised her and the children some presents soon. I was quite sure this job would pay pretty well as I had never attempted a job and failed.

When the big day came, I left home earlier than usual and went to town. The job was to take place outside the supermarket where an Indian was expected to take his month's savings to the bank. We were to wait for him outside the supermarket and snatch the bag as he was about to enter the car, which he always parked in the same spot. We had rehearsed our parts some days before and so it was easy for each one of us to take his position quickly. I was to snatch the bag while Mulwa was to take care of the Indian. Captain was to take care of the driver and be on the look-out for any person who might interfere with our job.

At around half past nine, the Indian came out carrying an old large paperbag, well sealed and very thick. Captain signalled me to approach the Indian and as I went three steps forward, things started happening. Before I reached him, a man, a complete stranger to me, fired two gun-shots in the air. I was about to snatch the bag, but when I saw that the man who fired was new to me, I hesitated. The Indian turned and ran off towards the market door, but before he could get away, he was in Mulwa's hands. I knew then that the new man was on our side. Before Mulwa could get the paperbag, the Indian threw it across to another Indian some yards away from us. It fell down hitting the ground hard and before the Indian could pick it up, I was at his heels. He beat me to it by a fraction of a second and picking it up he threw it back to the first Indian. Mulwa reached him as the new man fired two more shots to scare him but the Indian threw the bag again, but this time, to a group of Africans who worked under him. Before any of them bent to pick it up, I was among them waving my simi in a way that scared the breath out of them.

One of them kicked the bag with his foot, then I hit it hard with the simi and the bag rolled on the ground towards Mulwa who picked it up and we all ran towards the car.

There was a lot of noise and cries from people, shouting for help from other people, and I wondered what type of help they were expecting to get, if they themselves were only watching us while doing nothing, yet, they outnumbered us by almost twenty to one. I also wondered how big a group must be to encourage them to act against a group of only five. The worst moment came as we went to our get-away car. When our driver saw a complete stranger running towards him with a gun in his hand, pointing in his direction, he released the clutch and the car moved forward, so we had to run after it.

The driver would stop to pick up one of us, the ones he knew, but when we reached him and this other man also reached the car, the driver would move forward, avoiding him, then quickly reverse to pick us. This happened several times. It was a very bad show and even the group of citizens started throwing things at us. In the course of running after the car, the paperbag tore at the bottom and all the money fell on to the road. I guess I was the only one who saw what happened and Mulwa, still holding the paper, unaware that the money was lost, due to the fear that the driver would leave us, entered the car as it stopped by him without looking back. Captain, realising that Simba was fearing that the man with the gun was a cop in civilian clothes, shouted to him, 'This is our man. Stop and let him enter.' So he stopped and the new boy entered. All that time, Simba had thought the man was a cop. Had he been a coward, he would have run away alone and left us. When we were all inside, he drove off as fast as a cat out of hell.

Annoyed as I was, I could not help laughing when I noticed the surprise on Mulwa's face after realising that he was carrying an empty paperbag. The rest were also surprised and very annoyed but not half as much as Mulwa himself, though he was the cause of the total failure.

We parked the get-away-car at Grogan Road and dispersed. I was so annoyed that I could not talk to any of the gang. I especially did not want to be anywhere near Mulwa, who, apart from being the cause of the failure, was also responsible for bringing a new man without first introducing him to us. The thought of the money that had scattered on the road made me sick. There was money alright, and I needed it. Right at that moment, I only had two

shillings in my pocket, just enough for a few cigarettes and bus-fare. I imagined going back to Milly without a penny in my pocket, yet I had promised her a present that very morning. The very thought made me sick. Had I carried my gun that day, I would have staged a hold-up on my own, rather than go home empty-handed the way I did.

I went to the bus-stage and within minutes, I was on my way home. I knew Milly would wonder why I had gone home so early but I was prepared to give her any lies to satisfy her. After the failure, I felt I would be safer at home.

I knocked twice on the door and she opened it instantly. She glanced at me twice, as if trying to detect whether I was in my usual good mood, but what she saw seemed to have told her I was to be left alone. When I sat down, she went to the radio-stand and picked up her watch. As she checked the time, I also glanced at my watch and saw that it was half past ten. It was too early for me to have come back home. After keeping quiet for about two minutes, she broke the silence by asking, 'Aren't you rather early today darling, it isn't even eleven!'

'That's how things go. When you need sunshine, you get rain and when you need rain, you get sunshine. I just don't know what to make of this god-damned world,' I said.

I was surprised because I could not recognise my own voice. Women are really funny. Just stay with one for a month and she'll learn everything about you. I had stayed with Milly for only a couple of months after coming back, and she knew there was definitely something wrong with me. I could see she was avoiding my eyes. She then asked me:

'What were you up to darling? Did you need sunshine and someone gave you rain?' She asked me this just to tease me and that was the one thing I was not entertaining that day. I had to struggle to keep my temper low. Being made a fool of is one of the things I really detest and she was aware of the fact, but she was pretending to be ignorant. To avoid giving her a reason for buying herself a set of false teeth, I stood up and went into the bedroom.

I had left the table just in time. As I struggled to keep myself comfortable on the bed, I heard a knock at the door. I could hear her steps as she went to welcome her visitor. Then this followed:

'Hello Jane, how are you? I didn't expect you on a day like this.'

'I am very fine Milly. I told you I would come to see how you are getting

along. I phoned your place of work and was told that you are off duty. It is my day off too and as I had no engagements today, I decided to see you. I'd have arrived earlier but I had to watch a free film at the supermarket.'

I almost jumped out of bed when I heard that. The last thing I wanted Miriam to know was that there was a robbery in the town that day. 'Once she hears that, she'll no doubt know that it is the cause of my bad mood?' I told myself. 'It is funny how things go. A female arrives unexpectedly, and comes with the news I didn't want talked about in my presence.'

Milly asked, 'What type of a film do you mean? Do you mean to tell me they've started opening theatres at such an hour?'

'No, I don't mean the theatres. I mean it was a day-light robbery. I was walking on the opposite side of the supermarket when I heard a gunshot. I almost jumped, as the sound was very loud and sounded very near. Then I heard two more shots one after the other and now I could see the direction they were being fired from. A man just near me also pointed to the place of the shootings. We saw a bag being thrown in the air from one man to another. It was like a net-ball match because there was a group who wanted to be in possession of the bag, and another group, consisting of Indians and some Africans, who were doing all they could to avoid this. It was then that we realised it was a robbery. At last, the bandits got into possession of the paper-bag but as they fled to their get-away car, the bag gave way from beneath and all the money scattered on the road. It was fun to watch. The bandits either did not know the money in the bag had been lost or they feared they had taken too long, for they did not stop to collect it. I wish you were there! I've heard of day-light robberies but I had never expected such a thing. Anyway, that's police business so we can forget it.'

'Can you recognise any of them if you were asked to by the police?' I knew why Milly had asked that and I also sat up to hear the answer. It was advisable for me to know so that I could avoid her for as long as she stayed at our place. My fear was relieved by her reply.

'No, I did not pass anywhere near there, not even after they had gone. I guess if one thinks you have recognised him, he will not feel safe until he has put you out of the way.'

I was glad that she could not recognise me if by chance Miriam should want me to meet her. When she got seated, Milly went to the kitchen to boil some coffee for her and when it was ready, she came into the bedroom to call

me. Minutes later she introduced me to her visitor, whom I learned was not married, used to be Milly's classmate and now worked in Jogoo House as a secretary. She was Milly's age, judging by her appearance, a little shorter and as beautiful.

'Meet Jane Njoki here,' she told me, and turning to her, she told her, 'And here is Jack Zollo, my fiance.'

'I am very glad to meet you Zollo.'

'I am glad to meet you too, Jane,' I said and that took care of that, as far as I was concerned, but on her side, I could see that a lot of questions remained unanswered. She was staring at me as if trying to imagine me in bed with Milly. I had to pretend to go for a short call so as to get away from her steady stare.

After lunch, we played some records and at four, we escorted our visitor to the bus stage near St. Teresa's. When her bus came, we wished her good-bye. I was sure then that Milly was aware of why I had come home early, looking sick. It did not worry me very much because I knew she already knew my game, as she had caught me red-handed, before I ran off to Congo.

Two months later, it started all over again, but this time, the game was bigger than ever. I had sworn never to take another job on the face of it and, especially, before having an up-to-date meeting with the people I had to play with. I had also decided to pull one big job and give up crime altogether and settle down to business, as Milly had suggested several times. 'If I have to take a job, it will have to be a big one. A job that will retire me,' I swore to myself.

CHAPTER ELEVEN



It was hard for my companions to locate me since I had made sure none of my criminal friends knew where I stayed. You should not be surprised to hear that I didn't let my companions know where I lived. The first reason is that criminal friends are not like other friends, they are nice to each other only when they are preparing to commit a crime. The other is that I know the connection between the police and criminals. You may think a member of your gang won't talk when arrested, then one day, you are surprised by a knock at the door, and when you open it, you are met by an ugly muzzle of a gun and when this happens, there's no turning back. Try any tricks and you'll have your belly filled with lead. Every one wants to go to heaven but no one wants to die. 'So, why me?'

One bright Saturday morning, I set off to meet my mother who was coming from home to visit me. I went to town earlier for there were other things I wanted to do before going to wait for her arrival at the O.T.C. Booking Office. I got off the bus at the O.T.C. offices and crossed the road towards Damji Petrol Station. I wanted to see a waiter with whom I had left my parcel some days before at Kagondo Bar. I crossed Duke Street, now Ronald Ngala Street, at the zebra crossing and turned right. Before I had taken five steps, I heard a soft whistle some yards behind. I don't know why I turned, because I never used to turn at the sound of whistling, but as it turned out, the caller wanted me. I saw two men who seemed to be in a hurry and I recognised one, a man I had met some years back and with whom I had pulled a fine job just before I ran off to Congo. He was very smart. He had on a chrome-yellow flannel suit, a shirt with a tie of the same material, and imported dark shoes that must have relieved him of over three hundred shillings. He was an inch below six feet with a build to match the height, light-skinned and with fat cheeks. He was a bank raider you'd easily have mistaken for a bank manager.

He had been on the job for a couple of years and was admired by many gangsters for his bravery. Besides, he was one of the top gunmen on the other

side of the law. Before I knew his character and his game, I would have sworn he was a high-ranking government official.

‘How do you do Zollo? Seems ages since I saw you last,’ he said, stretching his hand to meet mine.

‘I am well, Stanley. It seems ages since we last met. How is business?’

‘Pretty good. Meet Jackson Macharia here.’ Then, Stanley turned to Macharia and said, ‘Jackson, this is the boy I was telling you about last night, I don’t think we can get a better man.’ This Jackson was almost of my build. Quite a smart dresser too. He was about five feet six, in his early twenties, dark brown, and always seduced and won women with his smile. I guess he inherited the smile from his father to cover up for the ruthlessness in him. He was a conspirator but he too could have been mistaken for an accountant who knew his way about town.

‘Jackson and I would like to have a word with you if you don’t mind and it is very necessary that we see you right now. I have tried to trace you for the last three days but no one seems to know where you hang around. Can you please spare us an hour or two, though you seem to be very busy?’

‘Truly speaking, I am not very busy at present, though I will be in an hour’s time. I am on my way to see Mwaura at Kagondo Bar. I left my parcel with him about a week ago and I haven’t had time to go for it. We could talk there in a private room as he gets my parcel ready, or do you have any objections about going to Kagondo Bar?’

‘Not the least. It is even one of the best places in which we can talk. Let us go.’

So, we set off towards Kagondo Bar. Three tough torpedoes who could not stop at anything, or so I thought.

We met Mwaura descending the steps as we went up.

‘Hey, how do you do pal? Bring the bottles of beer I left the other day! One case will do. The rest, you can drain into that protruding belly of yours. And snap it up, we are in a hurry. I’ve got to meet my mother today. If it wasn’t for her, you wouldn’t be getting free tips from me.’

This Mwaura was on my payroll and I talked to him the way I pleased. I then thought I was clever but I’ve now realised he was cleverer. He earned more money from me than he earned monthly in Kagondo Bar as a senior waiter.

Room No. 14 was empty, so we occupied it. There was a girl called Suzy

Njeri, whose work was to do the beds in the empty rooms, who used to suck me of a few pounds and I used to ride her whenever I felt like it. When she heard my voice, she sprang out of room No. 18 just opposite us as if she had been shot out of a gun. She greeted us joyfully, went and brought some more chairs into our room, then waited for our orders. She had good looks alright, like most Nairobi bar-girls. She wore an orange suit, a white blouse, women's safari shoes and a pair of transparent stockings. She was in her late teens, about five four, fat cheeks, sparkling eyes with small black eyelashes. A girl you would never get satisfied with until you touched her, if you are the sucker-type like me.

After we were all seated, she said. 'You have been lost for a long time Zollo. Where have you been?'

'Milly has been keeping me too busy to do anything else. I always tell you I have a permanent one-way traffic to follow and not a hundred and one ways traffic like you Suzy. Go downstairs and tell Mwaura that we are in Room No. 14. There are one and a half cases of beer for me here, bring us one case and share the rest with him. That is the only reason why you like me around. The Swahili say that when fools become wise, the wise are in trouble. One of these days, I'll become wise and when I do, you'll be among the ones I'll put into trouble, and make no mistake about it. You know I don't kid or don't you?'

As she stood up to go she said, 'I do know very well that you don't kid. You have told me several times before.'

As she turned the handle to open the door and go, I told her, 'One more thing Suzy.'

'Yes please.'

'When you are sure you have supplied us with all we want, get as far away from No. 14 as possible. Make sure that no one is hanging around. No one is to know that I am here, not even Miriam. So far, no one knows except you and Mwaura. If a third person gets to know, you'll give me an explanation. Do I make myself clear?'

'Very clear, my dear Zollo.'

That's how I am anyway, talking now and then about Miriam, and at the same time, frightening cowards out of their skins.

A few minutes later, Mwaura and Suzy came up carrying a case of beer. When they were sure we were alright, they went away. I took my opener and

opened three bottles. We all filled our glasses, emptied them, then refilled. It was then that Stanley talked. He was addressing me.

‘This man,’ he said, pointing at Jackson with his lips, ‘is a brother to an assistant manager in a certain bank in Naivasha. He has persuaded his brother into selling him the plans of this bank. He has agreed, on condition that he gets 30,000 shillings. I talked to him last night and it was then that I mentioned you. I told him that we would give his cut according to the take. He tried to be hard but I reasoned with him. I told him that in some cases the take doesn’t come out the way it is expected. We may go hoping to get 500,000 shillings and only get away with 500 shillings. We therefore know the amount to give our informer after counting what we get away with. Anyway, to make a long story short, he agreed. He is the type that faces facts as they are. Now, before we go further, I would like to know whether you are going to join us or not; that is, I do not want to bore you with a story which you may have rejected in your heart right at the beginning, or give you ideas for selling to another gang.’

‘Just for the sake of asking, what is the expected haul?’

‘It is five or six hundred thousand, if we stage it at the end of the month. About half of that any other time.’

The idea was tempting and I would join them. But I had learned not to jump at anything blindly. There were conditions that I had to see were met. After the failure of the supermarket raid, I got so annoyed that I swore I would never join a robbery on the face of it. I had to know who and who were to participate. First the driver, because I had come across drivers who could not wait for all the gangsters to enter the get-away car if they saw the police. Such drivers can get the whole gang arrested because once the one left behind is arrested, he gives to the police all the information he knows because of the anger he feels at having been left behind. Then I had to know who and who was recruiting who and where. If they had asked me to come with my own selected gang, I would have taken the job there and then. I have known of robberies known by more than ten people but when the time comes and only five or six participate, the rest become jealous and report the matter to the cops, and the next thing you know, you are handcuffed. So, I had to be careful. I did all the thinking within the time it took to swallow my second and third glasses of beer. Then I asked: ‘How many people are you putting on this job?’

‘Together with you, we shall be six, that is if you are in it,’ he said.

‘And where are the others? Who are they?’

‘Tell us whether you are taking the job or not. We shall tell you the rest when we know where you stand. What is the necessity of knowing if you are not joining us?’

‘I am not joining you before I know the rest. I do not want the type of shame I got at the supermarket the other day. I know you and Jackson but before I know the rest, count me out,’ I said with total conviction.

I opened three more bottles of beer while I gave him time to think it out. After a short silence, he sighed and said :

‘I don’t think you have met two of them but the third you know very well. You were with him at the super-market raid, the driver I mean. And the...’

‘That driver has my full marks, I never met a braver driver,’ I interrupted. He continued:

‘The other two are new to you I guess. One of them is called Peter Musili, a Mkamba by tribe and the other is called Joseph Njenga Kamau.’

I almost jumped out of my skin when this last boy was mentioned. I knew Njenga like nobody’s business. I had met him three times before. He was a police informer number one and I guess the best liked, because he always gave accurate information. The very first time I saw him, he was in a police car pointing out a man to two C.I.D. officers. I saw the two officers get out of the car and go straight for the man. Another officer came from a nearby shop and drove away with Njenga. They did not see me from my position but I saw them very clearly. A minute later, a police 999 car came and carried the two officers and the victim to the police station. That man is now in prison serving thirty years. The memory of that moment keeps ringing bells in my head. No one talked as I told them the story of Njenga.

I continued, “The second time that I saw Njenga was at Central Police Station. I had left home for town to watch a film at Kenya Theatre. An Indian, driving a red Citroen without a silencer, ignored the traffic lights at the junction of Government Road (Moi Avenue) and Duke Street, now Ronald Ngala Street. He was driving along and an African motorcyclist was turning left from Duke Street to enter Government Road. The Citroen hit the motorcyclist killing him instantly. His safety helmet hit me on the forehead, which swelled instantly and made me fall down. The Citroen did not stop.

‘When the police came, and as the only eye-witness, I was asked to go

with them to Central Police Station to write my statement. At the station, I was taken to an inner office where I was given a seat, pen and paper and I got busy writing. In the process, I saw the door of the next room open, a female cop passed and saluted me on her way out. I stopped writing to admire her, then I became aware that I was being watched. I pretended to be very busy writing. I turned my head slowly towards the adjoining room as if I was not aware it was even there. I saw and heard Njenga being questioned about a gang that had broken into a shop that sold watches on Government Road. His interrogators seemed to have just arrived because they had been waiting for the female cop to disappear.

‘I hated Njenga’s sight so I turned my face away from him. I did not want him to place me and I knew he did not. My ears were very alert as I wanted to hear what he would say. To my surprise, he enumerated the whole gang, from the leader to the lowest member. I was even more surprised to hear him name the Indian who bought the watches. The gang is now being tormented in prison, most of them will never be seen again and the Indian got seven years for handling stolen property. The third time is even worse! So, my dear G.G., I am not taking the job. Count me out. I don’t even want to know anything more about the plan than I do. The take-off is fat enough, I agree and I need money pretty badly in my present situation, but what is the use of it, much as it is, if you cannot lay your hands on it? I have known police ambushing many places and I am quite sure that since Njenga knows, there will sure be a police ambush, and I am not going to commit suicide. Not me! I do not even want to see Njenga for the fourth time. So, G.G., I am sorry about it. I need money, yes, but not to the extent of committing suicide. If you thought I didn’t know Njenga, you are wrong. I have seen him three times and I think those are even too many. In short, if you want to continue with it, make out a will first. I am warning you as a friend. That boy is poison. He can give his own mother to the police if by so doing, he will earn himself a pound, but not the wrong side of the police. He was responsible for the Nairobi South C Store ambush, if you must know. Watch your step, big timer, you are about to throw yourself into a pit a mile deep!’

All the time I was talking, they had listened without anyone interrupting me. Stanley is the understanding type, he trusted me not to talk for the sake of hearing my own voice. He sighed and I knew the meaning of it without being told. He then turned to Jackson and said, ‘Do you hear that? One thing I want

you to know before you come to your own conclusions is that Zollo is not the type who talks to exercise his jaws and I think that I told you that same thing last night. I also told you I don't trust that character, didn't I?

'You did, yes,' Jackson said and then turned to me.

'Okay, Zollo, count Njenga out. What do you say then, will you join us?'

'Had you fixed the day of the robbery?'

'Yes, we had.'

'And he knows about it, doesn't he?'

'He knows, yes.'

'Well, I take it on condition that we change the date of the robbery and fix it about three or four days later. Those four days will give you time to tell Njenga that your brother postponed it until further notice. And in that case, you will have to take care of yourselves after robbery. I would even advise you to take refuge in another country for some time. Do you have someone else to play his part or should I bring a companion of mine?'

'We shall rely on you to bring a nice person,' Jackson told me.

'The robbery was to take place on Tuesday, but we three can fix it for Saturday. And no one else is to be told until the big day. Agreed?'

We both agreed. Then we talked about the reason that had made Stanley pick on me, the gun. I told them I had it ready only that I did not have enough ammunition. It was a Chinese four-teen-round revolver, and was one of the best the criminals had. Stanley said he would provide me with some if I gave him a sample. We therefore decided to meet the following day at lunchtime in the same bar. That settled, we proposed to have a meeting of the whole gang on Thursday. I would come with my man and they would come with the other two. After that, we started talking generally about the various robberies each had pulled and succeeded in. We also talked about the failure of the supermarket raid. We talked of people we used to go around with and who were now in prison, serving long stretches. It was then that I remembered I had a parcel to collect and a mother to meet. I looked at my watch and saw it was some minutes past midday. We had been together for about three and a half hours and within that time, only four bottles of beer remained in the case. We had each taken seven bottles of beer and I was feeling their effect. I stood up and said, 'I guess I should get going gentlemen. My mother must be getting bored waiting for me at the O.T.C. I will meet you here tomorrow at this hour, Stanley.'

Turning to Jackson I said, 'Make sure you handle that rascal in the right manner. He might have reported the matter to the cops already. But since we have changed the date, it does not matter much, and if ever I happen to meet you with that boy, please pretend not to know me. I would rather have a rattle-snake beside me than that boy. He is worse than poison!'

I reached for the door and turned the handle, opened it and looked outside. There was a man and a girl ten feet away from me but I could not place them. If it was not for the girl Suzy having talked to me, I'd have left them alone and gone my way. It was then that I realised I was more intoxicated than I thought. When Mwaura called me towards the toilets, I knew what he was calling me for, but I was too intoxicated to carry it. I dipped my hand into my trouser pockets and fished out the first note my hand came across and gave it to him saying, 'Hey buddy, I am not taking the parcel today, my hands are not strong right now to carry that box with its weight. Keep it till tomorrow, and tell Suzy to go into Number 14 and take my share of beer. Those guys there can't give me what she does.'

Suzy hit me from behind and I staggered towards the stairs and then set off for the O.T.C. bus terminal. I left the gun I had gone for with Mwaura, so that I could carry it when I was sober.

As I went along River Road, I felt completely drunk. It was bad luck that I had to meet my mother in that condition. But I had heard people say several times that I was better in that condition. Could be because I was not hard with cash that way. I crossed Duke Street without caring about the zebra crossing, and suddenly, a car braked only about a yard from me. The female, English driver cursed me. I was scared for, if it had been a Singh, I would have been long dead.

I reached the O.T.C. booking office and looked from side to side, expecting to see my mother. Satisfied that she was not there, I turned to go outside and have my shoes polished. As I reached the door, I felt someone touch me from behind and I turned to see my younger sister and my mother. They had just entered through the back door.

I bought three tickets to Eastleigh and fifteen minutes later we were in my apartment where Milly was eagerly waiting for us. I introduced them to her, telling my mother that Miriam was the girl I was intending to get married to later that year. If men love women, be sure that I really loved that girl. It is a pity that after such a long time, she was not going to marry me. Really, things

are not always the way we want them to be.

The following day, I woke up late. I had told Milly that I should not be bothered as I felt tired. She had taken my mother and sister and the children to St. Teresa's Church. I woke up just as they arrived from the church. I took a bath and after taking my breakfast, I went to the wardrobe and selected a three-piece suit. It was the one I always wore whenever I knew I would carry a gun. I went to my private suitcase and took two rounds of ammunition, wrapped them with a piece of khaki paper and put them into my pocket. I didn't want to take any chances, so I went to a telephone booth outside Old Eastleigh Studio and shut myself inside. I dialled Kagondo Bar and a heavy, authoritative voice I recognised as the manager's, answered the call.

'Can I speak to Mwaura, please,' I requested.

'Hold on for a minute while I send for him.' I looked at my watch as I waited and saw it was twenty minutes past twelve, the time I was supposed to be in Kagondo talking to Stanley.

'If he is there and has prepared an ambush for me, this is the time to know,' I told myself. That is how much I trusted criminals!

'Hello, this is Mwaura speaking. Who is on the line?'

'Take it easy, old boy, it is your boss. Do you see any new faces around there?'

'Not what you would call new.'

'But do you recognise any as a cop?'

'No cops around pal.'

'Seen any of the gang I was with yesterday?'

'Yes, one of them arrived here about thirty minutes ago.'

'Was he alone when he came?'

'Yah, he is sitting alone even now.'

'Good. Give him four bottles to keep him busy until I come. Tell him I am just around. Then keep my parcel ready, I'll have to pick it today at all costs. If you see faces you don't trust before I come, do what you can and meet me before I enter there. Understand?'

'Yes, I understand. And there was a guy who was asking for you here yesterday about two hours after you had gone. He arrived here today a few minutes after the other guy.'

'Description?'

'Slender, brown, with rusty teeth. I heard someone salute him as Captain

Mugugu.’

Captain Peter Henry Kariuki Mugugu stands about five feet nine inches. He is a slender, shallow-faced, and long-legged character, with a pointed nose. Among the boys I knew on the wrong side of the law, he was the most educated and quickest thinker. He could spot a leakage as soon as one appeared and he always had a remedy. He spent most of his money on suiting himself with the most recent imported fittings and spent the remainder in the most luxurious hotels in the country. When broke, he could go to any lengths to get money, without caring about the consequences. Death or no death, risk or no risk, but money, if it was there to be had. Most of the characters who knew him found it a pleasure to call him Captain Mugugu in short, or shorter still, Captain. But he had never been in the army.

‘Thank you, that one is alright. Give him four bottles as well, and tell him that I will be around within thirty minutes.’ I hung up and went straight to the bus stop. A taxi passed by and I hailed it to stop. Within less than seven minutes, I was in Kagondo Bar. This Captain was the boy I wanted to join me in the robbery we had planned the day before, and I was glad that I was going to find him so easily. Within a short time of my arrival in the bar, the three of us sat in a private room next to the one we had occupied previously. I introduced Mugugu to Stanley and he said he had heard much about Stanley before and so he was very glad to meet him. Suzy came up with bottles of beer and put them on the table and said, ‘I am paying for these six bottles.’

‘Well, thank you, bring us twelve more and tell Mwaura that I want to see him.’

She went out. When I heard her footsteps downstairs, I took out my folded khaki paper and gave it to Stanley.

‘Let us see what we have here,’ he said, unfolding the paper. Captain bent forward and reached for one.

‘Excuse me,’ he said, ‘this is from a .45. They are very remarkable. Is this from your rod, Zollo?’ he asked me after examining it.

‘Yes,’ I said.

Then Stanley told me, ‘Okay Zollo, I’ll bring you three dozens on the eve of the big day. That will be on Friday. I’ll go and see my man tomorrow after our meeting. So that is settled.’

He talked with an authoritative voice and I did not like it. It was with a lot of effort that I managed to control my temper whenever I talked business

with him, and especially when we were arranging positions. He then turned to Captain and said, 'So, you are the buddy who is joining us. Can you drive?'

'Yes I can,' Captain answered.

'Look here young boy, when I talk of driving I mean real driving. Joginder Singh type, if you happen to know him. Not the local type,' Stanley told him.

'Well I guess Zollo here can vouch for me. I have driven several times, not Joginder type, but far much better than most African drivers around,' Captain said.

Then Stanley turned to me and asked, 'Have you given him the layout?'

'No, I have not. I met him today at the same time I met you, and moreover, we had agreed that no one is to be told the whole layout before the eve of the big day. But anyway, you can trust the character, he is not the type who goes shooting his mouth around.'

We heard footsteps approaching our room, so we changed the topic. We heard a knock on the door and it opened even before we asked the knocker to enter. This time, it was Mwaura. He was carrying half a dozen bottles which he placed on the table and said, 'Suzy is bringing the rest. I am sorry I won't serve you today. I have just received a call from Kenyatta Hospital asking me to go and see a patient. He could be dead because he was in a critical condition the last time I saw him, so I guess you guys will excuse me.'

I realized that he told us the story to let me know that he was going out and not coming back, so I stood up immediately and followed him. After closing the door behind me, I went to the toilet and waited for him. I forced out some urine as I waited for him and he came two minutes later. He unbuttoned his dust coat, which was part of the bar uniform, lifted the red poloneck he was wearing, and at the hips, revealed the gun. I do not know why, but frankly speaking, my heart skipped a beat at the sight of the gun, a thing that had never happened to me before, especially after getting used to the sight. He gave it to me and I put it in the inner pocket of my three-piece suit and buttoned it. I had measured the suit purposely for that work, since I had come to know that it was the best suit when I was loaded. It was very difficult for an uninformed person to detect it. I remember once being a victim of a police operation in Nairobi town and was ushered into their car. Had I been alone, I would have taken it and thrown it away but then the crowd stopped me from doing so. At the police station, we were each asked for our documents and

identity. They were searching for layabouts who were suspected of terrorising the town but I proved to be someone and was released some hours later. I said all my papers had been stolen. It was my luck, and thanks to their carelessness, that they did not search me. But all the same, I had to sweat it out for those few hours. Since then, I decided it was safer in a three piece suit. Or have you got a better reason why you wear yours?

When I was satisfied it was safe, I went back to the others. Mwaura was nowhere to be seen. I entered without knocking. Suzy was seated on my seat and had brought half a dozen bottles. As I took my glass of beer, I noticed that I was sweating. Funny that I should sweat on a cloudy day. The rod carried a lot of heat. The thought of being imprisoned for ten years, for simply being in possession of an unlicensed gun, is a shock, enough to make you sweat even in a refrigerator. I took out my handkerchief and wiped my face. When I had drained my glass, I reached out for another bottle which I opened with my teeth and started drinking out of. I was glad to see that despite the sweating, my hands were very steady. Not many criminals in those days liked going out carrying unlicensed guns. Before you get used to it, you go through a hell of a time. You think everyone you meet is suspicious whenever he looks at you. I would not be surprised if someone broke into a run if a cop stared at him. Not that I have been tempted to, but I know it can happen. Suzy turned to me and said as she stood up, 'Sit down, old timer. You don't seem to be yourself right now, sweating in such weather. You must have swallowed something disagreeable, something nasty.'

Captain, whom I guessed knew what was going on, smiled. He had known me for too long to fail to notice when I was loaded. I turned to Suzy and said, 'Okay baby, get going immediately! We have things to discuss. There are very many things that women should not know or hear being talked about. So don't hang around after closing the door behind you.'

She stood by the door and said, 'I am going alright, but I would like to see you before you go. I'll be downstairs.'

'Don't worry baby, wherever you'll be, I'll make sure I see you before I go.'

She turned, got hold of the handle, turned it slowly and after opening the door, she swung her buttocks provocatively and then closed the door behind her.

'Okay, boys ...,' I said, 'things are like that. That is the set-up.'

I turned to Captain and told him, 'Tomorrow, Thursday, we hold our final meeting here with the whole gang to discuss all the details. Come alone and it is very important that no one should know where you are. We will take lunch here.'

One thing I liked about Captain was, he never bothered asking me many questions, no matter what I brought him. He trusted me not to start anything that I could not finish and this was one of the many reasons I had picked on him. After a while, Stanley broke the silence by asking, 'What else have you got on your minds boys? I am about to go as I have a lot to do. I must see this man from the army for the ammunition. He needs time.'

'Nothing special at present, Stanley, everything else will be discussed tomorrow when we meet.'

'Alright, thank you. Let me run along and if anything else turns up, you will let me know tomorrow,' he said and stood up. As he got to the door, I said to him, 'One more thing old boy.'

'What is it that you must keep until I reach the door? I guess it can wait until tomorrow.'

'Okay, please yourself. I only thought it was advisable for you to know now,' I said in as rude a manner as he had put his question.

'Okay, you win. What is it? And snap it up, I am not intending to waste any more time on whatever you have on your mind.'

His voice was now harsh and as hard as his face. He seemed to have guessed what I was up to and he didn't like it. But despite that, I still pressed my point.

'While you arrange positions tomorrow, you'd better stay informed that I trust my .45 only in my hands. I am not very bad in frightening off people, I have done it several times before and, after all, we are not going to a battle where we need professionals.'

He murmured something to himself and then to us, and still wearing the hard face, turned the handle, opened the door and banged it hard behind him. He did not like what I had said. We heard the fading sounds of his footsteps as he went towards the stairs. I wanted him to be aware that I never gave my gun to anybody. Some people like Captain, yes, but not a greedy character like him.

We each drank a glassful of beer without talking. I then took out a packet of cigarettes and offered Captain one and selected one for myself and we lit

up. After blowing curls of smoke towards the ceiling, Captain said, 'You don't seem to trust that boy, do you?'

'I don't trust anybody,' I said with a touch of truth. 'After all, why should he assume that it's only him who can do the firing? We are going to get money, not to shoot people! Don't you like the way I handle the gun yourself? You've seen me do it several times. They say I am an expert, though I never underwent any sort of training.'

'You are quite good at it. But I understand Stanley was an inspector in the G.S.U. Isn't it?'

'He wasn't with the G.S.U. He was an R.S.M., with the army.'

'And what the hell is R.S.M.?'

'Regimental Sergeant Major. Quite a big rank.'

'And what made him be expelled from the army, I wonder?'

'You never know. According to him, another officer from his battalion stole his machine-gun and sold it to criminals. He was court-martialled for carelessness and sentenced to two years in prison. When he emerged three years ago, he joined the other side of the law and since then, he has really gone places. There's no big robbery in which he has not been taken as the machine-gun man. He has done wonders anyway.'

'But I like him,' Captain said. 'The things I hear about him make me like him even better. He has saved many from the hands of the police. I remember the story I heard about him of how he saved Karanja. It was in a certain robbery that one member of their gang was left behind by the driver. People surrounded him and started beating him. About three hundred yards away, Stanley realised that one of them was not in the car. He looked behind and saw someone being given a 'harambee' beating. He took out his gun and ordered the driver to reverse the car to the place. He took out the ignition key, went out of the car and two minutes later, he came carrying the man, beaten half to death, on his shoulders and put him into the car. He then gave the ignition key to the trembling driver and off they went. Had he been like the rest, Karanja would be long dead. That was why Karanja gave up crime.'

'Well, Captain, you don't seem to understand me,' I said angrily. 'I didn't say he is not brave, and did I say that I shoot better than him? I know he is one of the best we have on this side of the law but I meant he is tricky. Once in, never out, and to spell it clearly to you, it is to say that, if he gets hold of that gun, it will remain with him until I get tired of demanding it back, or I'll

end up with a bullet in my leg if I play it tough. And you jolly well know I would have to play it rough for I can't let him get away with it, that is, if they don't bury me before I get him. Do I make myself clear or have I made myself more complicated? The other thing that surprises me about you people is, you forget very easily. You have now forgotten where I rescued you from last year before I ran away to Congo? And not only did I take you out of the hands of a 'harambee' thrashing, but from the hands of the police and you still had a gun in your hands. Would you be alive today had it not been for me? And I only happened to see you from the bus I was in. You can't remember your own rescuer, you remember other people's. And to make it worse, you remember not what you have witnessed but what you have only heard. I'll never understand you people.'

'You've been praised enough for that act, Zollo. It is said to be an outstanding record. But the trouble with you is, you anger very easily. You should learn to control that temper of yours, otherwise you'll do something and live to regret it. What is wrong in my saying I like that boy? I don't see the point of your anger this time.'

'Let's skip the subject, mister. I guess we cannot understand one another. All I know about you is that if a hyena came to you smartly dressed, you would accommodate it in your own bed without a second thought. It is not once I have caught you admiring mannequins dressed up in imported suits. So when you talk of liking him, I very well know what you mean.'

I have never seen Captain half as angry as he was that time. I knew I had hurt him because I had spoken the truth. If you want a man to really hate you, just try to criticise his weakness. Everyone has his weakness, and admiring any smart thing, disregarding its nature, was Captain's weakness. He looked at me angrily and said, 'For the first time since I knew you, Zollo, I feel like crushing your head with a bottle ...'

He was trembling and stammering at the same time. 'But I am fearing that thing which is making you sweat on a cloudy day might be loaded. Had I been sure it wasn't loaded, we would have had a showdown for the first time.'

When he saw me continuing to smile, he stood up in a rage and added, 'Make no mistake about what I am saying. I might as well ignore the fact and prepare myself for the worst. How dare you tell me such things?'

'Relax, Captain! I am sure you can't dare risk it. The first reason being that

you know I can never hesitate to put enough lead into your belly and then beat it. The second is, you are expecting a share of 100,000 shillings within a very short time. Find someone else to bully, old pal. I just happen to know you better than you think!’

Anyway, that is how I am. I never waste a minute trying to stop a fire which someone else lights ignorantly. Instead, I add fuel to it and in such cases, I always get good results. This time, Captain only sighed and sat down. He knew I was faster with guns and fists than he was and I was quite sure he would not risk anything. Then I remembered it was against my principles to drink while loaded. I was getting more intoxicated than I wanted to. And the worst of it was the one man who might have guessed I had it had gone out to an unknown place. A man, I believed, could do anything to own my .45, whether it meant my going to hell or not, for he knew very well that I could not part with the gun easily. I stood up. I did not want to even drain the glass of beer. Sweat had started flowing down my face.

Had I tried to take the glass of beer, I would have noticed my hands trembling, and that was a sign I hated. I said to Captain, ‘Well Captain I guess I ought to run along too. I don’t feel safe with this rod in a bar.’

In fact, I never liked staying with it when a second person knew, except when on duty. I never trusted anybody that far.

‘Don’t tremble, big brains,’ Captain told me. ‘Drain your glass and let’s go. It’s high time you showed me where you stay. What sort of friendship is this. I must know where you relax those ever-tired limbs of yours. Whether you like it or not or whether you sleep out today, I will stick to you. I know it is in Uhuru Estate, yes, but what number? You either tell me or I tail you the whole day and night.’

‘Phase One, House No. 257,’ I lied. In fact, I did not even know which was Phase One or Two, or whether there were more phases than two. A friend of his had probably told him about my living in Uhuru Estate and I did not see why I should brand his friend a liar. I reached the door and went outside. Ten seconds later, he followed me out and we both descended the stairs. On the ground floor, I saw Suzy serving a customer and when she saw me, she came to me, took hold of my arm and led me to a lonely corner. When we were through, I told her to go and see what remained in our room and we parted.

Once on River Road, we turned right and at the corner, we turned towards Terrace Hotel. That is the place where I usually boarded Route No. 10 for

Wood Street. Captain was still with me. We didn't talk until we reached the stage. I wished him a good day and reminded him not to forget our final meeting the following day. He promised he would not, and told me he would tell me why he wanted to see me that same day, after the meeting. As we shook hands, a bus, followed by two others, came to a stop. It was Route No. 22 to Uhuru Estate. I remembered just in time that I was supposed to be staying in Uhuru Estate and that would always be the case whenever I was with Captain, and so I boarded it. Behind it was the actual bus I ought to have boarded, Route No. 10. Behind bus No. 10 was another bus which came to a stop, as the one I was in started moving. When we reached the River Road stage, I alighted the bus I was in and boarded No. 10. As I took my seat, the other bus arrived. My bus then started moving. I looked at the bus behind us as it came passing us. It was Route 23, also for Uhuru Estate and occupying a seat near one of the windows, was Captain. He did not see me for his interest was in the bus that was in front of us, the one he believed I was in. He was not taking chances. He really wanted to know where I stayed. What for, I could not tell. It was then that I thought he was right when he referred to me as big brains.

As I unlocked the door of my apartment, I smiled when I remembered that Captain was on his way to Uhuru Estate, expecting to surprise me. I sat on an easy chair to think. That night, I did not have much to tell Milly or the children and I went with the children to our neighbour's sitting room to watch television. The following morning, I woke up late. Milly and the children had gone to their respective duties and the maid was in the bathroom, washing clothes. When she heard me enter the toilet, she came out of the bathroom and went to the kitchen to prepare breakfast for me. I then washed my face, dressed and sat for breakfast. After breakfast, I went to the bus-stop and boarded a bus for town. I wanted to have a shave before I attended the meeting, so I went to my barber.

At twelve o'clock, I stepped into Kagondo Bar and I ordered for lunch. As it was brought, Suzy saw me and came to sit with me at the table. She said she would pay for the lunch and I was glad once again because she saved my only pound from getting 'broken'. She really knew how to bait me and knew too the times when I was broke though I tried to hide it. She then told me that two of the people I was with the previous day and a new one, were upstairs in room No. 20. So, after taking lunch, I went up. I knocked at the door and

Captain's voice welcomed me. When I entered, I saw the faces of Stanley Githenji George, referred to in short, as 'G.G.', Captain P.H.K. Mugugu and Simba, the driver. Twenty minutes later, Jackson Macharia and Peter Musili arrived. And there we were, six people, seated round a table, conspiring to commit a crime which we all knew was against the law. Stanley opened the meeting.

'I hope you are all aware of the aim of today's meeting gentlemen. At around half past nine on Saturday, we will raid a certain bank in Naivasha, and as it is, there are some things we need before the time of action. In my view, we need two cars. One will be the get-away-car from the bank after getting the money, and the other, will be parked about a mile from the town. From the bank, we will drive to where the second car will be parked and change cars. It is advisable to have cars of different makes. The reason for using the second car is because the registration number of the first one will have been taken and every cop will be on the look-out for it. Once in the second car, we could proceed on towards Nakuru without raising the slightest suspicion. Or on the other hand, drive back in the opposite direction. Have you got any objections?'

We all shook our heads simultaneously and so he continued.

'Then, we need two guns. Zollo will provide us with one and I'll take care of the other. Zollo will cover the driver and look after everything outside the bank. I'll then be covering Macharia and Captain and doing every other action needed inside. We will rely on these two, Captain and Macharia, to play their part efficiently and speedily. Make sure you take all the contents in every counter, we will throw away what we shan't need. Anyway, that will come later. The first problem right now is the possession of those two cars. At the bank, we will need a Cortina 1600. The other one could be a Peugeot. If we use a family car, we could look as if we are passengers. We will depend on you four, Simba, Captain, Macharia and Musili, to provide us with those two cars. I have been made to understand that Captain is a professional driver, so he will be a good hand to you Simba. Put new registration numbers on both cars for more security. Do you all understand everything so far?'

We all nodded.

'Okay,' he continued, 'we shall all meet again tomorrow so that we are all together the following morning.'

I thought of sleeping away from my apartment and away from Milly on the

eve of a day I was about to risk my life and I objected.

‘I don’t see the point of being together the night before. Or have you any special reason for wanting us to be together? On my side, I could get the ammunition from you on the big day at around eight, at Zambezi Motel. Or what do you others suggest? That was just my idea.’

Everybody, including G.G., agreed that that was the best idea. After making all the necessary arrangements, we ended the meeting.

On Friday after lunch, I went to town to watch a film at Cameo Theatre. I spent the whole afternoon there. As the film started showing, I felt completely restless for the first time. Maybe it was because for the last two years since I left the Congo, I had been relatively idle, that is, I had not really been involved in a major crime. Or it could be that I was over-anxious. But whatever the cause, at home, I could not read, I could not even be patient enough to listen to the records, much as I liked them. When I tried to pass the time in the bedroom, I felt as if I was being watched by ghosts and I hurried back to the others. The supper that night tasted sour and I left it half eaten, a thing I had never done before. Then I went to the bedroom and as thoughts occupied every corner of my head, I dozed off.

On the morning of 4th November, 1970, I woke up early. The maid had heated some water for Milly and I used it for my bath. I selected the best suit among those I had bought recently and put it on. I noticed I was trembling, which I didn’t like. This job involved a lot of money and the thought of it made me tremble. When the maid brought tea to the table, Milly served me a cupful, but two mouthfuls told me I wasn’t going to drink it all, so I put it aside. I took out a cigarette and lit it with unsteady hands. Its smell almost made me vomit and as suddenly as I had lit it, I crushed it into the ashtray. Milly was staring at me as I did all this. She had also noticed my restlessness the night before and although she never liked interfering with me, that day she couldn’t bear it, and she asked me, ‘What is wrong with you since last night? Are you sick?’

‘No, I am not feeling sick, I am only restless,’ I said frankly.

‘You are never forced to do the things you do. Or are you? If you suspect that what you are about to do is dangerous, drop it and if you can’t drop it, then face it like a man. Your behaviour is already giving you away.’

‘My God,’ I thought, ‘What an odd thing to be told by your girl. Surely, I must try not to show it.’

I could not find the right words to answer her, much as I tried. The fact is that my behaviour the night before and in the morning was completely strange and out of character and this could have been noticed by any observant person, but I could not help it. It was a pity that she did not realise that I risked all that to keep her happy. When she saw that I had nothing to say in my defence, she continued hurting me with some very sharp remarks that she must have thought about the whole night. Let me tell you one thing before we go on, however big or superior you might be, president or vice president, your wife can never recognize it. If you do something she regards silly, she will jolly well tell you it is silly. Or at least, that is what Milly was like. She did not seem to realise how much other women feared me. Most of those who knew me would have been so surprised that they would have been left speechless, had they heard how Milly talked to me that morning. She had me completely rattled. When the E.A.A. car hooted twice to call her, I could not help smiling. She had been quite a nuisance that morning. But as she went, she wished me a good day and I was glad to see that after all, she was really sympathetic.

The maid, who by then had got used to me, asked me why I was not drinking tea. I was about to answer when I suddenly remembered that she had asked me the same question another time, when I was to pull another job which had resulted in total failure and death for one of the boys. I thought that if I answered her again this time, the same results would follow. Funny that I had come to believe in superstitions after all. I looked at her and met her steady gaze, then looked away. She smiled and went away and that took care of that. I then took out my gun from the box, tucked it in the left waist band, where my trousers held it tightly against my body. Satisfied that it was alright, I went to the door, opened it and went out.

At about eight, I was reading a newspaper inside Zambezi Motel, together with the others. Judging from their faces, I could see that they too had had it rough wherever each had spent the night. Stanley, Macharia and I rode in the Cortina, driven by Simba, Captain Mugugu in the Peugeot, driven by Musila.

We told them to drive to Kinangop Road where they would leave the car parked. On our way to the bank, we would pick Captain and Musila would be left guarding the car. After the raid, we would join him in the Peugeot. We gave them a ten minutes start, then we followed. We did not go straight to Naivasha but went through Kiambu. It so happened that all along the road

towards Nairobi, people had lined up to wave at the President as he passed. Every car on the road through Limuru towards Nakuru was being stopped. We were not in the least aware of all this as we drove on, bravely. Our Cortina had two radio aerials, one on either side of the windscreen. We drove at a slow speed because of the crowds lining up the road. Suddenly we came to a spot where there were police officers. Simba stopped the car as a Police Superintendent approached us. Stanley opened the car door on his side and stepped out. The superintendent started marching when he reached a few yards from Stanley. About a yard and a half from Stanley, he stopped and standing at attention, saluted. I noticed some other police officers do the same. The ex-R.S.M., in his best suit stiffened to attention and instead of saluting, nodded.

The S.P. then spoke. 'We are expecting him in seven minutes Sir, and all is well around here.'

'Okay Superintendent, stay around and stop cars from either direction until he passes. I'll be around with my men anytime. Anything you would like?'

'No Sir, everything is perfectly well around here.' The S.P. saluted again as Stanley entered the car and slowly Simba released the clutch and set the car in motion. Another officer saluted us as we passed him and we saluted back. A mile or so from there, we found a murram road branching to the right and we took it. Away from that place, we started laughing loudly at the thought of what we had gone through. Had we shown any fear, we would all have been dead by then. They had mistaken our stolen car for a Special Branch vehicle. G.G. had certainly been quick. Had he been panic-stricken the way I was, we would have been found out. His service in the army had certainly taught him a lot. We decided to hang around on Kijabe Road until the President passed. G.G. and I left the rest in the car and went into the bush where he gave me the rounds of ammunition he had for me. When we heard the motorcycles pass, we gave ourselves five more minutes for the road to clear, then we went back to the main road and turned right for Naivasha town.

We arrived in Naivasha at exactly nine o'clock. The President had already passed there and the opening of the bank had been delayed for fifteen minutes. As the bank was to open at 9.15, we decided to give them fifteen more minutes in which to settle down, so that we would strike at exactly 9.30 am. What surprised us that day was the population of that small town.

According to my estimate, there were not less than 30,000, including the school children who had been given the opportunity to go and wave at their President as he passed. That was one problem. The situation of the bank was the other problem but that did not matter much as we were determined to raid it wherever it was. It was Barclays and it was between a wholesale shop, where a watchman was sitting outside on a stool, and a Bata shoe shop. Along the same line of shops as the Bata shop, was a hotel, a retail shop, and another hotel, plus others. On the opposite side was another line of shops, hotels, butcheries and bars and all of them were open and full of customers. Outside the bank was a group of people who were eagerly waiting for it to open. A watchman holding a club was standing beside the door of the bank, probably wondering who in the crowd could be a bandit. There were very many uniformed cops and soldiers from different forces who had come to salute the President. Most of them were not armed except the senior officers. I could see they were getting ready to leave as their mission had been accomplished. I could also detect sadly that they were not in a hurry to leave and the time for action was rapidly approaching. I checked to see the whereabouts of my gang members. Outside the bank, among the group waiting for it to open, stood G.G., looking so immaculate in his suit, that you'd have thought he was the best customer the bank would have that day. Outside the wholesale shop, Captain Mugugu was sitting on a stool where a shoeshine boy was busy polishing his dark tanned shoes while he read a newspaper. Macharia was outside the Bata shop, pretending to admire the displays through the glass. Our driver was out of my sight but that was alright because we had instructed him to stay away until the bank opened. I was seeing all this from where I was on the opposite side of the bank, outside a hotel, where I pretended to be very busy reading a newspaper.

The bank opened at quarter past nine on the dot and among the first customers to enter were my three men. A minute later, Simba brought the car and parked it at the place where we had instructed him to. I left my position and passed him and he nodded as an answer to the signal I had given him. I crossed the road and entered the bank. There were three lines of customers and I looked around to see where each of my men was. I looked at each in turn and they gave me our code, telling me all was well. I then went out and took a few rounds on both sides, along the shops. This took me about ten minutes. I entered the bank again and saw that all my men were busy filling

withdrawal forms. When they saw me, they looked at their watches and when I looked at mine, I saw it was only two minutes to our proposed time. As I went outside again, I was sweating all over and I felt I needed a very cold drink but I did not have the time to have one.

As I stepped onto the verandah, a Chief Inspector of police, with a gun inside a holster, hanging from a black belt, entered the bank. He did not even seem to notice me and I liked his ignorance but what made me worry, was how long he intended to be in there. I crossed the road to where we had parked our car, just opposite the bank, and as I reached there, Simba nodded to me indicating the inspector, and when I looked back, I saw him leaving the bank, and turn right to a waiting car parked on the side of the main road. I told Simba to start the car and park it on the side near the bank. I went back to the door of the bank at 9.30 am on the dot and when Stanley saw me, he acted as if that was the minute he was waiting for.

He fired two shots into the ceiling and in a harsh voice, commanded everyone to lie down flat and close their eyes. Outside the bank where I was, I looked from right to left and saw that people standing on the verandah were all suspicious. I took out my pistol and fired two shots on either side, some people entered the nearest open shops; others ran as far away from the bank as their feet could carry them. I then turned to the two watchmen who I believed wanted to start blowing their whistles and forced them to enter the bank where I left them lying down with the others, all under the care of Stanley. Two more shots from inside the bank told me and the driver that all was well and they were on their way out, according to plan. I also fired two shots in the air as our two men carrying bags of money came towards the car. I opened all doors wide open and they entered. When we were all seated, Simba, then the smartest and bravest driver in existence, drove off as if his life depended on it.

Once on the main road, we turned left. In the rear seat, I looked back. People had started throwing stones at us. Then I noticed a Peugeot 504, driven by a white man following us. I told the rest of my suspicion about the intentions of the white man, but they ignored it. After travelling a distance, however, they all agreed with me that the man was following us, because he increased his speed and tried to overtake us. Stanley lowered the window on his side and he pointed the gun at the white man and fired. The white man braked his car, it swerved on the road then came to a stop. Before he thought

of starting again, we were well away.

Our plans had been to follow a road just a few miles from Naivasha, that goes to Kinangop. That was where we had left Peter Musili with the Peugeot. But as the European following us was very close, we could not branch off in time, so we passed the junction. It was a very short distance but we had to react against the white man, which forced us to go ahead. After driving a few miles, we decided that we should leave the main road and use any road that went into the forest. Mugugu, who knew that area better than any of us, told us that about a mile ahead, there was a road going to Kijabe. He suggested we should use it and go somewhere where we could share our take-off then take the necessary steps.

We took the Kijabe road. The 504 was nowhere to be seen. After travelling for about three miles on the murrain road, still at high speed through the forest, we came to a place where Simba stopped the car. We entered the forest to share our money. We poured the lot from all the bags. The money was tied in bundles of hundreds, fifties, twenties, tens and fives, so sharing it was no problem. The money was so much that if it was given to one person, he would certainly have run mad. That is, if he was one of those who have money-hunger like me and my gang. I was given my share and Peter Musili's whom we had now left behind. I was also paid a share for my gun. I carried over 180,000 shillings. I put into my pockets as much as I could, then put the rest inside my shirt. I pushed the bundles of notes to the back so that my belly would not protrude. When we had done all that, and also given the share of our helper to the person who would take it to him, G.G. proposed that we should go back to the car and find our way to limuru where we would abandon our car. Each would then find his own means back to Nairobi, or wherever one pleased.

When we took our respective seats, we set off again, each over 80,000 shillings richer. As we reached the Kijabe-Limuru road, our driver stopped, according to traffic rules. When a criminal has money and there is no trouble around, he is one of the most law-abiding citizens. As he was about to start again, a police Land-Rover emerged from a corner of the road. When they saw our car, they signalled us to stop but you can bet we could never agree to do that. So, instead of stopping, our driver accelerated. We heard two bullet shots but none took effect. You can also imagine the difference in speed between a Land-Rover and a Cortina 1600, driven by people trying to save

their lives. In a short time, the Land-Rover was nowhere to be seen but we did not ignore the fact that they had a V.H.F. wireless set which would be faster than any vehicle.

Then the worst happened. After safely turning a very sharp corner at a very high speed, we suddenly saw, at a distance of only 200 yards, a crowd of people on the road, where a bus had collided with a car. We could see from that distance that there was no room for another vehicle to pass. Between us and the crowd, there was a murrum road to the left and as we had no other alternative, we asked our expert driver to try and take it. It was risky at that speed but we had to risk it. As he turned to take it, we heard the wheels squeal, the car swayed from right to left several times, and eventually it left the road. It rolled several times then stopped, standing on its wheels as if it was still on the road, but the doors were shut tight. The crowd was now running towards us as we struggled to open the doors to save ourselves, but they did not know that we did not need their help under any circumstances. So, I took out my gun and fired twice at them as G.G. managed to open the door and I followed him. The crowd, realising who we were, started running away. To make matters worse, the police in the Land-Rover arrived at the scene. When they saw us, they opened fire. As I ran away, I was sure that one or several of the bullets had found their targets. I ran off to the left with Captain Mugugu following me and entered the interior of the forest. I ran as fast as I could, still holding the gun in my right hand, ready to use it if necessary.

CHAPTER TWELVE



I did not know that forest area at all. I just ran to make sure I was as far away from the cursed car as my legs could take me. We ran for two hours without hearing anything, until we started hoping that maybe we would get away with it. Then, as we came to a clear place where we thought of resting a bit before setting off again, we suddenly heard the roar of an aeroplane at a distance. We looked at the sky, and within a few minutes, saw a small aeroplane we very well knew belonged to the police, flying very low. We were now sure that all police were on the lookout for us. Although it did not spot us, it flew over where we were hiding several times before it went away. I climbed up a tall tree to see where we were and how thick the forest ahead was. Instead of seeing anything, I heard the distant sound of repeated gunshots which I knew for sure came from a machine-gun. Then, very near where we were, I heard voices of a crowd of people. The voices were very clear. Then they started fading. I gave my report to Captain who was too worried to make any decision. I decided that we should hang around for some minutes to see what would happen. But within five minutes, I had to overrule it. About half a mile from where we were, I saw people following some dogs which were coming towards us from the direction we had left. I climbed down the tree as if I was born doing it, and unable to explain what I saw to Captain, I told him to follow me. This was one of the places and times when one blind man leads the other. I had never been in that forest before, I did not even know the area, and yet, I was now leading somebody who depended on me to get him out of the muddle we were in. For about fifty minutes, we ran as fast as the bushes could allow us and only stopped when we reached another set of tall trees. I climbed up one of the trees, exhausted as I was. I was glad I had climbed for ahead of us, was another group of people, led by policemen. The group that had been following us had changed course and was now going away from us. I climbed down after making sure that the new group was indeed coming in our direction and I told Captain to follow me as I changed course. We travelled for another hour without stopping and without coming to an

inhabited place. It was now around four. We stopped and sat down to rest but woke up instantly when we heard the loud barking of a dog. The sound told us the dog was very near and could smell our scent, so we broke into yet another run. We were very tired. 'What a day?' I asked myself. 'If only I had known, I would now be in my apartment in Wood Street resting my limbs, waiting for a chance that did not have as many risks as this. Will I ever find myself in my house again?' I asked myself as I rose from where a protruding root of a tree had thrown me.

I ran on without once stopping to look behind. After thirty minutes of running, I stopped to look behind. To my surprise, I found myself alone. Captain was nowhere to be seen. I called out loudly and hated myself for running for so long without looking behind. I called out again more loudly but no one answered me. I thought of going back to see if he had fallen at the same place I had and was in need of help but I ruled against it. About fifty yards ahead, I saw another tall tree and decided to watch out from its highest point. As I reached the tree, I realised I could not climb it even if I was told it would be the one to save my life. I was so tired that the thought of climbing the tree made me feel sick. I sat down to rest and leaned against it. I felt myself dozing, a thing I did not want as I was in an unknown forest with hundreds of policemen and citizens, and trained and untrained dogs all looking for me. I stood up and tried to exercise my tired body. When I felt a bit better, I climbed up the tree and, except for the distant roar of a car, I saw or heard nothing. I climbed down and rested for thirty more minutes.

After a short rest, I stood up and walked on. I did not know whether I was going towards an inhabited area or into the interior of the forest. I looked at my watch and saw that it was about some minutes to five. Ten more minutes of steady walking brought me to a narrow path. I was very glad to come to it, but just then, I realised I did not know which direction would take me to an inhabited area and which one would lead me into the depths of the forest. The place was dark. The sun was not visible in the forest, which was the real cause of my failure to know my way. I stayed at this point for about ten minutes, undecided as to whether to turn right or left. Then, just opposite me, but a little distance away, I saw a shabbily dressed boy of about my build, holding a panga and coming towards me. In front of him were two dogs. The dogs saw me first. They stopped and looked at the boy as if waiting to be given the order to molest me. It was then that the boy seemed to get nasty

ideas about me. He called the dogs and I heard him say, 'sh, sh, sh', pointing in my direction with the panga, which he now held very tightly in his right hand. The dogs leaped forward, roaring so loudly that I almost got scared, but I also got a nasty idea. I took out my .45 and aimed its muzzle at the leading dog. When it was about five yards from me, I fired. The bullet hit the dog in the left eye. It jumped up in the air with a single loud cry, then fell to the ground, dead. I then aimed at the second dog which had stopped dumb, after seeing what had happened to its companion. Then, as it bent its head to smell the one already dead, I pulled the trigger and the bullet found its target right at the centre of the dog's belly. The third bullet missed the boy's left leg by inches as he dropped his only weapon and started screaming. Very annoyed, I barked at him, 'If you scream again, I'll do to you what I did to your dogs. To me, you are no better than your two dogs. Shut up till I ask you to speak.'

I said this as I approached him, covering him with the gun. I was completely confused and had he screamed any more, I would only have thought better of it after putting enough lead into his belly. I am glad he did not scream. I asked him, 'What is your name?'

'Njoroge.'

'What are you doing in the forest at this time?'

'I was hunting and now you have killed my only dogs.'

'Why did you want them to attack me? You were telling them to attack me, not so?'

'I knew they couldn't harm you. They wouldn't have touched you.'

'Well, how could I know that? Anyway, it was bad luck then. I will give you money to buy others. Which is the direction to the town?'

He showed me the right side and I pitied myself as I at last decided to take the left side. I took out a bundle of ten-shilling notes and gave them to him. He was trembling so much that he could not take the money, so I put it in the worn-out pocket of his jacket. After he told me the distance I would cover to reach the first house, I left him bending over the dog I had shot last, tears flowing down his cheeks.

'At least I have proved myself a crack shot,' I thought, smiling.

I followed the path at a steady speed and after fifty minutes, I came to a road. The forest had now become clearer. I could now see small farms and houses on one side of the road. I could feel, without being told, that the chase was still hot. I went on for about three miles until I came to a kiosk on the

road-side. Far beyond the kiosk, I could see a group of people and a police Land-Rover parked on the roadside. I changed my course and left the road. After walking for about a mile, I saw a house three hundred yards away and decided to hide myself there. I was so tired that I felt as if I could sleep for two days. My pockets were full of notes and the inner side of my Trevira shirt carried even more. I was sweating so much and especially at the places where the notes touched my body that I feared the money would soak wet. As I came near the house, I saw three people, not far from there, and one of them saw me, he said something to the others who then turned to look at me. I did not know what to think of them so I just went through the gate to the house. It was fenced with wire and a neatly trimmed hedge five feet high. The owner of the house must have been a person of some means, judging from the fact that the house had a cement floor and the walls were stone-built to a height of three feet, with timber completing the remaining height. Three children, a boy and two girls, were playing outside the house. They were too busy to notice my presence as I knocked twice at the front door of their house. When I got no answer, I pushed the door and it opened. As I entered, I heard the distant barking of many dogs all running in one direction and a crowd of people shouting.

I closed the door without bothering to lock it from the inside. I walked to a window facing the direction from which the noise was coming and I decided to watch from there for I felt deep inside me that whatever the noise was, it was connected with our hunt. Then suddenly, a door just a few yards from where I stood opened. A pretty, medium-sized woman, who looked every inch a qualified domestic science teacher, stood at the door, bewildered, staring at me. She carried a baby. I could see she was so scared that she was about to scream, which of course told me that every citizen around that area had been alerted by the police. I took out my gun and pointed at her saying, 'Mum, you don't look so ignorant as not to know what this is I am holding. If you force me to make it bark, you'll be dead before you know what is going on and I guess you do not want to die. Put the child down and do as I tell you if you don't want me to harm her.'

I could hear her breathing and I imagined I could even hear her heart beat. Without talking, she put the child down and waited for my next instructions. I felt sorry that I had to do this to such a kind-looking woman but I had no alternative. I looked around the room for a rope or for anything with which I

could tie her up but without success. I went to a chest of drawers at one corner of the room and inside the third drawer, I found a tie. I went back to the woman and forcing her to lie face down on the floor, I tied her arms tightly behind her. When I was sure she could not raise an alarm, I rolled her back to the room she had emerged from. Before I left her, I told her, 'If you scream, I'll tie your mouth. Or worse, I'll close your mouth for good. So take care.'

The child started crying as I closed the door and when I tried to pick her, she showed me in every way that she did not want anything to do with me. I went to the front door and locked it lest the children playing outside should hear their young sister crying and come to her aid. I then opened another door to another room which they used as a store. In a kitchen cupboard, I found a bowl full of milk which I carried back to the crying child. At first, she refused my offer, then she thought better of it and took the bowl. When I saw she was at least cooperative, I took her with her bowl of milk to the room where her mother lay. I put her in a baby-cot just a few feet from her mother and left her draining the bowl of milk. All this took less than three minutes. As I went back to the room, I could still hear the noise from the crowd coming from a distance. I went to the window and opened it a fraction. I could now see very clearly the road and the place where the noise was coming from. Then, I saw the crowd disperse, as if running away from something. At the same time, I saw the police Land-Rover arrive at the scene. I did not know who it was, but I was sure it was one of my men who had been arrested. I was to know months later that it was Captain. I felt fear enter into every nerve of my body. I was sure the men who had seen me enter the house would now be even more suspicious. I only prayed they would delay acting on their suspicions until it grew dark so that I could leave the house. Leaving the house at that time of day was dangerous.

I was about to close the window so as to try and rest, when I saw a man coming to the gate, well-dressed, about five feet ten inches tall, with a build that was proportional to his height. He was middle-aged, I noticed, and I was sure that he was not one of the three men I had seen before I entered the house. I rushed to the door, unlocked it, and as I left the door to find a hiding-place from where I could attack him, I heard him talk to the children outside.

'Is your mother in?'

'Yes, she is in preparing our supper.'

‘Thank you. Let me see her.’

Seconds later, he was knocking at the door and getting no answer, he tried to find his way in, the way I had. He stood at the centre of the room calling out for Njeri. I came out from behind the chest of drawers, gun in hand and pointed it right at his belly.

‘Stand still old boy. Try anything and you wouldn’t get time to even regret it. One bark out of this thing means minus one life. And put this into your mind, I don’t give a warning twice. Do as I say and everything will be alright.’

I could see that I could not handle this character in the simple way that I had handled the woman, but all the same, I had to try. ‘If he doesn’t follow my orders,’ I thought, ‘then it leaves me no alternative but to let him have it. It is either him or me.’ I thought of what to do to him then remembered I had seen a cosh near the double bed in the inner room where the woman lay. Why they had kept it there, I could not tell, but I told myself it was meant for this day. I told the new arrival to hold his hands behind his head. I opened the door to the bedroom and ordered him to enter. The sight of the woman he had come to visit, lying on the floor, made him suddenly turn stiff and lower his arms. I told him to return his arms where I wanted them and he immediately did so. I pushed him deeper into the room and went for the cosh. He did not notice this as his interest was now only in the woman he probably had come to have a ride with. I stood behind him holding the cosh tightly in my right hand and the gun in my left. I then told him to lower his hands and close his eyes. As he did so, I hit him hard on the back of his head. The woman screamed out to warn him. It was too late. He fell down, unconscious. I untied his tie from his neck, for it could strangle him and tied his hands behind his back and then fastened him to the bed. I left the two lying on the floor. Passing near the cot, I saw the young girl was fast asleep, the empty bowl beside her. As I left the room, I was sure that if it came to voting, the young girl would be mine.

Satisfied that I was safe for the time being, I went to the sitting room. The money I had put inside my shirt was disturbing me as the notes had spread all round my waist. I took it out and arranged it on the table, then took a khaki paper bag that had been used to carry some sugar from a shop and put money inside. I did not disturb the amount I had in my pockets as that was alright. I went to the cupboard and put the khaki paper there, to keep it out of easy

sight. I then waited for the time when I could leave. It was around half past six. It had started growing dark. Within thirty minutes it would be dark and then I would be moving. I took out a cigarette and lit it and as I put the lighter back in my pocket, I heard the sound of a moving car just nearby. I went to the window and opened it a little bit. I saw the police Land-Rover stop at the road and four armed policemen and their Inspector stepped down. It was a distance of over a hundred yards. Then I heard a steady knock at the front door and as I left the window, I saw the Inspector and his boys running towards the house, guns at the ready. I did not even remember I had money in the cupboard. I rushed to the store where I had noticed a window facing the back of the house, and opening it, jumped through it and out of the house. It is very strange how I get narrow escapes through windows, or had my luck run out this time? I ran into a maize garden about five feet from the house. The maize was thick, and tall enough to cover a small man crouching. After about twenty yards, I looked back and saw the house surrounded by policemen and citizens, some of them armed with bows and arrows, and I thanked God for giving me the chance to leave the house in time. I jumped over the wire fence at the furthest corner. I heard a police loud-speaker calling. The Land-Rover was now very close to the house. The Inspector was appealing to me to give myself up and fear nothing as he would give me enough protection. He was saying that they were aware I was inside the house and as I had no other way out, it was advisable for me to give up before they took severe measures. The noise of the speaker faded as I ran as fast as I could away from the cursed house. I swiftly moved through the maize. I knew I would be safe for as long as they believed I was in the house. Within that time, you can bet I was not going to sleep. I came to a river, crossed it and started climbing up a hill that started from the river.

I went on without once looking behind, until I came to a road. It was so dark that you could not see anybody even if he was a few yards away. This made me feel a bit safe. I had a pen torch that I always carried but I could not use it. I did not want anybody to see me in that area. I followed the road for about two miles and it brought me to a kiosk in a very lonely place. Every time I saw something move or got suspicious, I found myself pointing the gun towards the direction of the movement. How I managed to draw it so quickly was beyond my understanding. But I was sure I would not hesitate to use it, especially in this area, where they had poured a battalion of police, and

the willing citizens, to get the better of me and my gang. The kiosk had just closed and the owner was in, for I could see the light. As I was about to knock at the door, I saw the lights of a car a distance away, coming from the direction I had come from. I jumped into the bush by the side of the road and waited. My first thought was that it was a police Land-Rover, but I was wrong. The car stopped at the kiosk and I saw it was a Peugeot 403. The driver stepped out and went to the kiosk where a tall figure had just opened the door as soon as the car had stopped. They started talking as if they had been together a while before. From their talk, I learnt that the driver was going back to his place of work in Ruiru. As soon as I heard that, I decided that I was going to get a lift to Ruiru whether it meant stealing the car or borrowing it. But right then, I was not in a mood for borrowing anything from anybody. I came out of my hiding place and went near the car on the opposite side of where the driver was to come. The fifteen minutes they stayed talking seemed to me like fifteen hours. I was pointing the gun in their direction but I was bending so that they could not see me.

Then I decided two things. If both came to the car, the owner of the kiosk would certainly suffer a broken leg as I was sure I could not handle both of them. If the driver came alone and the other man shut himself inside the kiosk before the driver reached the car, then it would be their lucky day as none would suffer. As it turned out, as soon as the driver stepped down the only stair from the kiosk, the man wished him good luck and closed the door. Well, if the driver got good luck as he had been wished by his friend, then it would certainly mean bad luck for me. But I was not ready to get bad luck in the eleventh hour, come what may.

When he reached the car, I went to him from behind and then I straightened up. I took out my pen-torch and switched it on, directing it right into his eyes. At first, he jumped in fright. But as a man, he pulled himself together and prepared himself for the worst. I then flashed the torch to the gun in my right hand and in a low harsh voice, told him, 'This thing won't go off and ruin you if you do what I tell you. You are going to Ruiru from here and I am intending to accompany you. If you do not want my company, lend me your car and you'll get it safe and sound after I am through with it. If you don't like that either, then say your last prayers and your friend's too.'

'Are you one of those people they are looking for all over this place?' he asked.

‘Curiosity killed the cat, old boy, so take care you don’t meet the same fate. Forget about whatever is going on and do exactly as I ask you to do. What is it to you if I am one of them?’

There are times when playing it tough counts, and other times when it doesn’t, but right now, playing it cool was a mere waste of time and I had not that much time to waste. I made him open the front door for me and we both entered. As he started the car, I could see he was trembling.

‘You are not going to stop anywhere under any circumstances unless I tell you to. If you let the police catch up with me, before they get me, you will be dead, though you won’t be the first one to die of a bullet today. Do I make myself clear old boy? Don’t, at any cost, follow the main road. The more risky places you take me to, the more you endanger your own life.’

He moved at a steady speed and I could see that it was with much courage that he managed to control the car. I did not know that area of the district and I was, in fact, depending on the warning I had given him. We travelled at a good speed for over thirty minutes without coming to a main road or a police station. Police stations did not matter much anyway, as I was sure every cop was out looking for us and I felt a little at home for the first time that day. Thirty minutes later, I found myself on the Thika-Murang’a road. I told the driver to stop near Ruiru, at a spot I recognised and where I knew my way around. I told him to get out of the driver’s seat and taking the keys from him, drove away and left him at a place I knew he could not easily betray me. After leaving him behind, I drove on alone and abandoned his car at the roadside near a round-about at Thika. Twenty minutes later, I was seated on a bed in a private room at the 12th December Hotel. For the first time since I left Naivasha, I felt safe. I took out every penny I had in my pockets and found I had got away with 40,860 shillings out of 180,000 shillings. I had foolishly left the rest in a cupboard at the house of my refuge. Had that woman and husband been wise, they would be millionaires. But as it turned out, the woman took the whole lot to the police. Or maybe the police found the lot looking for me in every drawer there in the house.

Early the following morning as I took my breakfast, I sent for a newspaper. When it was brought, I paid my bill and went out to book a bus for Nairobi. But I was lucky and found a Peugeot 404 family saloon that needed one more passenger. As we reached the roundabout and turned left for Nairobi, I saw ‘my car’ still parked exactly at the place I had abandoned it, which to me was

a good sign, which meant my night's movements had not been detected. It was then that I looked at the first page of the paper I had bought.

TWO KILLED AFTER A BANK RAID, was the headline of the paper. I read the whole story and understood that two members of my gang had been killed. I also read that two others had been arrested, one around Limuru and the other at Kinangop. No names had been given of either the dead or the arrested, so it was hard to know who else, apart from me, was still at large. One thing I was quite sure of, after reading the paper several times, was that one of the arrested was Peter Musili, the one we had left with the escort Peugeot on the Kinangop road. The paper had said that he had been suspected of being a member of the gang that had earlier in the day robbed a bank in Naivasha. Over 400,000 shillings out of the 580,000 shillings we had got away with had been recovered. That alone almost made me run mad. 'What a silly thing to have done?' I asked myself.

At Kariakor, I alighted from the car and crossed Race-Course Road to Wood Street, and within minutes, I was knocking at the door of my apartment. As it opened, I expected to see my mother, my sisters and my younger brother but I only saw Miriam and the maid. Milly was very happy to see me, as if she had lost hope of ever seeing me again. . . Then she started acting crazy as we sat on a sofa.

'Oh darling, can't you stop it? I couldn't eat anything yesterday when I heard the news. I thought you were one of the two!'

'What are you talking about Milly? I stop doing what? One of the what two, do you mean?'

She realised her mistake and she apologised, but a minute later she forgot again.

'When I read the paper this morning, I couldn't even speak dear. Please stop it and find something to do.'

'I wish I could understand what you are talking about. What do I do that you don't like? If you are not crazy, then I am.'

'You know Jack, I am sure you carried your gun yesterday morning and that same day I hear very bad news. Can't you see what a time I have been through, when I heard the news yesterday, and today when I read the newspaper?'

'Having a gun Milly doesn't mean I am concerned with whatever happens in every part of Kenya. Frankly, I don't know what you are talking about!'

As I said this, I noticed she was staring at my shoes which I had thought of having polished but had forgotten. They carried a lot of mud that I had collected in the maize farms the previous evening. I was not going to admit it anyhow but I was sure she knew what she was talking about. When she was later in full control of herself, I asked her where my mother and the children were and she told me they had gone to see my sister at Uhuru Estate after the first mass. Minutes later, after I had hidden my gun and changed into another suit, I lay on the bed to rest and think.

It was then that I decided that I would never rob again. I had taken the job hoping to get hundreds of thousands of shillings, enough to make me retire. I had got it alright, but through circumstances beyond my control, I had failed to reach home with the fortune. Two of my men were now dead. Two were arrested, and over four hundred thousand shillings had been recovered. 'What is the use of getting even millions if you cannot get time to enjoy your take?' I asked myself. I counted all the money I had gained through all the robberies I had committed and realised that, in all, I had stolen over 400,000 shillings and had spent the whole lot, with nothing left to be seen. I remembered all the people I had gone around with since I joined the other side of the law. About ten had been shot in action; four had been imprisoned for life; two condemned to death, and over twenty sentenced to from fourteen to over forty years. 'I am lucky to be still at large, though I had very many narrow escapes,' I told myself. 'I have a little over 40,000 shillings. As Milly suggested, I might as well find something to do. I could buy myself a Peugeot for matatu services.' I felt that what I had in my mind needed two people to discuss so as to come to the right decision. I decided to wait for the time when Milly and I were in our usual moods and discuss it.

Mother and the children came back in the evening. Mother wanted to go home with the children as they had stayed for a long time without going home. On Monday, I gave her one thousand shillings. Milly and I saw them off at the O.T.C. The same week, on Wednesday, I purchased a second-hand Peugeot family saloon car and paid ten thousand shillings cash. This was four days after we had robbed the bank. I engaged a cousin of mine, who had by then secured a driving licence but had no job, as the driver. He was to use the car for Matatu services between Nairobi and Banana Hill.

That settled, I got busy thinking about what I was to do with myself. On Thursday, I went out to town to meet a friend at Kariakor. As I looked

through the window of the bus I was in, I saw Stanley. Before it started moving, I quickly alighted and as I crossed the road, he saw me. He stopped as if his legs could no longer move. We took each other's arms without speaking. Then he told me we should go to a private place to talk. I was so surprised to see him that I could not find words. I had not expected to see any of the gang after what I had read in the newspapers.

In a private room in Kiona Bar, we talked business. I told him the whole story without hiding the slightest thing. But I deliberately omitted the fact that I had managed to get 40,000 shillings home because I hoped he would spare me some of his. By now I was sure he was the one who had got away with over 100,000 shillings that had not been recovered. Anyway, I managed to drag fifteen thousand from him. We parted and I went without seeing the friend I was going to meet. That same day in the evening, the radio announced that Stanley had been arrested. He had been arrested with over 50,000 shillings cash that he could not account for. I felt so sad that I could not eat. 'What is the meaning of all this?' I asked myself. 'One member of the gang must have squealed and now must be moving around the town with the police looking for us!' I therefore decided I would not be going out to town for a length of time. I would stay indoors until the town calmed down. Right then, it was very rough.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN



That same month, Milly was given a month's leave.. One night, and my very first night to be able to eat with an appetite since the raid, Milly started one of the few things I would not have wanted talked about at such a moment. She told me she was the one who had asked for her leave as she had realised she was expecting. She told me, 'You know I have tried to avoid this for a long time. Now that it has happened, we have to marry. You know that if I am discovered, I will lose my job. My suggestion is that during my leave, we should have a wedding.'

'Well marrying is one thing and a wedding ceremony is another,' I told her. 'Do you mean you just want us to marry or to have a wedding ceremony?'

'I mean I want a ceremonious wedding, following my mother's wishes, and it is my duty to have her wishes carried out as long as I live.'" If you knew Miriam as much as I did, you'd know that she meant every word and nothing could be done to make her change her mind. So, I decided to carry out her wishes. In fact, I loved that girl so much that every word she spoke to me, however bitter, always sounded sweet. My mother had also asked me to do the same thing before she went and my sister, Connie, had made it a song whenever we met. It was my idea of fun too, only that I was now going through a hot period of my life. It was around December anyway, so, from that time onwards, my days' engagements consisted mainly in preparing for the wedding. Milly contacted the girls she wanted to act as bridesmaids, including one who was to be the best maid. She also contacted my sister, Connie, who helped us a lot in the preparations.

I had enough money, so buying the necessary things was no problem. I had over 2,000 invitation cards printed with Milly's photo and mine on top. I bought the maids' dresses and hired enough cars and buses for transporting people from Nairobi to Murang'a on the day of the wedding. It was to take place on Saturday, 15th December, that year. Word passed round that I was getting married and letters of congratulations started flowing into my post

office box. My best man was an S.1. teacher who had left college a year before. When I contacted him, he was overjoyed. He was my classmate in secondary school.

On the thirteenth of December, everything concerning the wedding ceremony was ready. Milly was so delighted that a smile fixed itself on the edges of her well-shaped mouth for days. It was about three weeks and two days since we had pulled the big job. Everything seemed so cool, until I came to believe that I was safe.

On Friday 14th December, I went to see about the buses I had hired for transporting the wedding party from Nairobi to Murang'a and told the owners to have them ready. Milly and the maids were already in Thuita, where the ceremony was to be held. This was done to save time. Milly's mother had wanted the ceremony to take place in Nairobi but I had talked her into accepting my choice.

At about ten o'clock, the buses were all on their way to that small but advanced village in the interior of Murang'a district.

In my apartment, I took a hot bath and then selected one of my best suits. The maid Milly had employed was with me, for, in accordance with Milly, she was not attending the wedding. I put 2,000 shillings in my pocket, the gun too, after loading it to capacity, and was ready to go home to await the biggest day of my life. I had attended many weddings in my life and had enjoyed every minute I was there. Most of the people who had invited me to their weddings were workers so they did not have much money to waste on their weddings, yet their ceremonies looked so good. 'How good will mine look with all the dough I have put into it?' I asked myself.

I left my apartment at eleven o'clock. As I closed the door behind me, the maid, smiling as best as she could to attract me, wished me luck. Everyone seemed to know I needed luck if I was to survive. I went to the nearest telephone booth and called a certain self-drive car-hire in town. I asked them to have a Datsun 1600 SSS ready for me in twenty minutes. I had acquired a driving licence illegally and had paid two hundred shillings. At half past eleven, I was in their office signing the necessary documents. I told them the car would be taken back to them by my driver the following morning. We agreed and I was given the keys to the only Datsun that was parked outside their office. As I opened the door, I saw something that made me almost stop dead.

On the opposite side of the road, I saw a Ford Sports car with six occupants. It was moving at a slow speed of about 5 m.p.h. In the rear seat, between two men I recognised as C.I.D. officers, I saw Peter Musili peering in every direction. There and then I knew what was going on. He was being moved from place to place in town in search of me, as I was the only member of the Naivasha gang still at large. Every nerve in my body stood still. I have never been filled with such fear. Then I pulled myself together. I decided that since he had not seen me, there was still a chance of getting away. As I opened the door, still watching him, our eyes met. Even before he talked, the C.I.D. officers had noticed the change in his face and they looked at me. I immediately inserted the key and started the car and at the same time engaged the first gear.

Two bullets smashed the glass of the right-rear window. Two of the C.I.D. officers were now on foot, running and firing at me as my car shot off as if to save its glasses from further destruction. I saw a man on the verandah holding a pint of paper milk, intending to throw it at me. In a second, controlling the car with one hand, I took out my pistol and fired at the man. The bullet hit the hand with the litre of milk and I left him not knowing what had hit him. In front of me was a police 999 patrol car. They heard the shots and became alert. As I passed their car, they knew I was the man on the run and a bullet from one of the cops slightly touched the back of my head and passed through the glass of the left door, breaking the glass to pieces. I turned right into Kimathi Street, then Government Road, and then left, into Duke Street, ignoring the traffic lights that had just turned red to stop me. By that time, the police 999 car was on my heels, its siren moaning to the utmost and a Police Inspector appealing to me to stop, through a loud speaker in their car. The C.I.D. car was also following me. I went straight to Pangani, turned right and found my way to Kariakor where I met yet another 999 car coming from Eastleigh. Every police car in town had been alerted and in a short time, I had more than six police cars chasing me. This was when I really needed to prove myself a competent driver. At every corner that I took, people were left staring at me, their eyes and mouths wide open. I took some rounds in and out of town meeting patrol cars at most junctions and being fired at. Eventually, I found my way through Makadara to Kariobangi where I took the road that goes to Broadways Stores at Ruaraka. There, I turned right into Thika Road and at a hundred and ten miles per hour, headed towards

Murang'a. There was no police car behind me now. I had confused them around Makadara where I had knocked down a pedestrian. But my car had taken in a few bullet shots. The only glasses now remaining unbroken were the windscreen and the one on the right rear. I passed Thika as the police were setting a road block but I was sure that this was not meant for trapping me.

At about half past twelve, I was filling the car with petrol at Total petrol station in Murang'a. An attendant there asked me what was wrong with the back of my head which made me touch it. I was surprised to find blood and feel slight pain. He became even more suspicious when he saw the glasses that had fallen inside the car. From that station, my next stop was in my home in Thuita. As I stepped out of the car, children and the people at home came running, to welcome the bridegroom-to-be. I remembered the good luck I had been wished by the maid and wondered how long it would last.

After washing and changing into another suit, I took lunch with my family. After lunch, I went to see Milly. She was staying in another place with her family and I was given a very warm welcome. After discussing the final arrangements for tomorrow, I drove back to Murang'a town with my two brothers, and my best man. I intended to have the glasses of the car replaced. I also wanted to inform the car-hire company that the car would be delayed for a day.

To my disappointment, I learnt that there was no shop where I could buy the glasses. They would have to send for them from Nairobi. I could not leave the car at the garage so, with my party, I went and parked the car outside Hilos Bar. I paid a young boy to clean the car and sweep out the pieces of glass. We then entered the bar for a drink. I held a glassful of beer and noticed that my hands were far from steady. I drained it in one gulp and refilled it. Then as I picked it towards my mouth, it left my hand and fell down, pouring the beer on our shoes. They all looked at me, surprised. They noticed the change that had come over me. That sign had taught me so many things during my life in crime that I could not ignore it. I took out two hundred shillings and gave it to my friends. I asked them to excuse me and left the room. Outside the bar, I saw two men in civilian clothes questioning the boy I had paid to clean the car. As the boy turned, he saw me and pointed at me saying, 'This is the man who paid me to clean the car.'

I did not wait to hear the rest. I turned right, ready to break into a run. I

saw two policemen coming towards me but they didn't seem to be aware of what was going on. One of the men in civilian clothes shouted at me to stop. I ignored his orders. A bullet-shot echoed all around the buildings. I now broke into a run. The policemen in front tried to stop me. I drew out my gun. They jumped sideways as I fired a shot in the air. Whistles started blowing, with people gathering and running after me. Whenever I turned to fire, they would all suddenly stop and stampede backwards. The C.I.D. officers were still shouting and shooting at me. I turned left to cross the road to Majengo and a car that had just left a Total petrol station nearly hit me. I fired at the driver to warn him to take care in future, which made him swerve into a ditch. The C.I.D. officers still at my heels seemed not to tire. Everyone who saw what was happening joined in the chase. As I crossed the stream to climb the hill to Majengo, a bullet hit me on the right arm. I fell down and the gun I was holding, jumped away from me. Before I could get up to run again, I got two more bullets in my leg. I fell down flat. Before I knew what was what, every cop around was searching for a spot on my body to hit. In a few minutes, handcuffed and under heavy escort, I was in a C.I.D. car on my way to Nairobi.

Well, readers, when you hear me talk of the eleventh or the twenty-third hour, that is what I mean. You have now seen it. The next day was to have been the biggest day I had ever had, the day when I was to be united in church by a Catholic Father to the girl I really loved; the day that I was to have remembered all my life with a touch of tenderness. Now, at the eleventh hour, it had turned contrary to that and I would spend the day in a police cell where I would undergo a hell of tortures. Tomorrow would now turn out to be the day which would see the beginning of the end of the happy days. Would you have thought of it yourself? And imagine the charges that were ahead of me! I had managed to escape professionally several times, but this time, I felt I would not get a chance.

In the car, under heavy escort heading for Nairobi, I thought of the money I had spent on the preparations for the wedding; the clothes I had bought for the maids, the invitation cards I had printed, the people I had invited, the cars I had hired, the beautiful girls at my home who were all ready to enjoy the big day, Milly with her fixed smile and her most delighted mother, and lastly, of the two brothers and my best man whom I had left in a room at Hilos Bar. 'What a shame?' I told myself. 'If I did not get sixty years, then I would get

the rope,' I concluded. For the first time in my life, I felt tears flowing down my face. But at least there were people who would take the news home and have everything postponed. I thought of all this as I tasted with my tongue, the only organ in my body which was free to move, the salty water that was flowing down my cheeks. I was not arrested with any money on me as the others had been but then, I had been caught with the gun that had shot and seriously injured several people since the day of the raid. A fatal exhibit.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN



On Saturday 15th December, the day I was to wed, I was called early in the morning from the cell I had been locked in at the Central Police Station. My right arm was bandaged and in a sling. My left leg felt so heavy that I had to drag it. It was also bandaged. In the office, I was shown a seat opposite a Police Superintendent. Beside him were two other ranked officers. The uniformed cop talked first.

‘Are you the one I understand had troubled the police for a long time, escaping, shooting at them, shooting at citizens and the like?’

‘I have never had a gun in my life sir, and about escaping, this is my first time to be arrested, so I had nothing to escape from,’ I protested.

‘Listen, young boy, the trouble with you criminals is that you don’t know when you are beaten and even if you know, you just try to see whether you can get a way out. Do you want to tell me you can talk yourself out of the fingerprints that have been found on the gun you were found with? Then tell me, are all the people who saw you telling lies? Be a bit sensible young boy.’

Every word the S.P. said was true and I knew for sure I was beaten but I was not going to sing a chorus to everything he said. The Kikuyu elders say that ‘Ona igikua ni iikagia thari.’ The proverb means, for instance, that if you are fighting with a person you are sure is stronger than you, you can’t stand and let him beat you just because he is stronger than you. You must at least try to give him a punch. You may surprise yourself by actually beating him. So right then, I was depending on the saying.

When they were sure they could not drag anything out of me, they tortured me and then locked me up in a cell, a lonely cell where I was the whole day of 15th December, the day I was to wed. They did not even treat me for the bullet wounds.

For a week, I stayed in the police cell undergoing identification parades for different robberies. In some, I was identified and in others I was not. In the Naivasha robbery, I was the one they were really interested in and everyone who was outside the bank that day easily identified me, the two watchmen

being on the list. When all that was over, I was taken to Nakuru, under heavy escort, where I was charged, together with the other three who were already in. We were all taken to court and our charges were read as follows:

‘Peter Henry Kariuki Mugugu, Peter Musili, Stanley Githenji and Jack Zollo. You are all charged that on the 18th November this year, jointly with others not before the court, armed with two guns and simis, at about 9.30 am, you robbed Barclays Bank, Naivasha of 580,000 shillings cash. It is also stated that in so doing, you used violence, contrary to section 297 of the Penal Code. The second charge states that on the same day, you used a car which is believed to have been stolen. The third charge is for accused No. 4 alone, Jack Zollo. It states that on 14th December, you were arrested and found in possession of a firearm without a proper permit to possess it. A further count states that while you were being arrested, you used violence to resist arrest. The court now demands a plea for each one of you on the first charge. Accused No. 1 do you plead guilty or not guilty?’

‘Not guilty,’ Captain said.

‘Accused No.2?’

‘Not guilty your honour,’ Musili said.

‘Accused No.3?’

‘Not guilty, sir.’

‘Accused No. 4?’

‘Not guilty your honour,’ I said.

Then on the second charge we were asked the same and we all pleaded not guilty.

Then they turned to me for the other two charges to which I pleaded not guilty. That done, we were all then remanded in custody to await the hearing of our cases a month later. We were put in the same cell.

We all discussed our case. We tried to find facts with which to defend ourselves but we were very sure that we would sink. The only person who had a little hope was Peter Musili as he had not been identified in the identification parade. The police were on his side as he had helped them with information of our whereabouts. In my third week in remand, I received visitors. Milly, my brother Sammy, and William Ndegwa who was to be my best man at the wedding. They wanted to hire a lawyer for me but I refused as I knew it would be a mere waste of money. As for Milly, she did not say a single word to me. As soon as she saw me in remand uniform, which is

exactly the same as the one worn by first degree murderers, she started crying and she left fifteen minutes later, still crying. But before she left, I talked to her.

‘Milly dear, this is only the beginning, the worst is yet to come. If you have any hope of ever having me in your room again, it will not be before twenty years are over. Anyway, I am sorry for all the disappointments I have caused in your life. Men are born with a lot of troubles ahead of them and I am not an exception. I feel I should not waste your life. If you want to get married to somebody else, you may go ahead and do it. The blame is not yours but mine. Everything that I left behind is in your hands. My case will be heard on January 25th, next year, and if you want to follow the proceedings, you are welcome but if you would rather not, please yourself.’

As she went, she almost tore herself into pieces.

When the day of the hearing came, we were taken from the remand cell very early in the morning. The court was so crowded outside that you could not tell one person from another. Whatever they were there for, I could not tell. But I guess ours was one of the most sensational cases they had ever had in that court.

But inside the court, though equally packed, I saw Miriam, my wife-to-have-been, my mother, Connie and two of my brothers, and the man who would have been my best man. And as for the rest who crowded the court, I could not tell who they were and why they were there. The charges were read out again and after our pleas of not guilty, the prosecution witnesses started entering the dock, one after the other. I did not fail to notice how much hatred was written all over Milly’s face as each witness pointed at me as one of the people who robbed the bank. The witnesses were many and they could not all go into the dock that day, so the hearing was adjourned until the following morning. On my way back to the cells, I told my mother not to count on my being released but I could see she did not like the remark. The following day, more witnesses gave evidence which I was sure was pleasing the smiling prosecutor. When they had all entered the dock, the judge adjourned the case until the following day.

But that same afternoon, when everyone had gone away, we were taken back to the court and we were sentenced!

‘After listening and hearing all the evidence brought forward by the prosecution, I find that accused No. 1, No. 3 and No. 4 are all guilty of the

first charge. I therefore sentence you to twenty years imprisonment with twenty strokes of the cane. These two sentences will run consecutively. Accused number two, I discharge you under section 210 on both counts. On the third count that concerns accused No. 4 alone, I find you guilty of being in possession of a firearm without a proper permit to possess it and I therefore sentence you to three years imprisonment. On the second count of resisting arrest, I sentence you to one year imprisonment. These sentences will run concurrently with the first one. I give you all the right of appeal within fourteen days.'

As soon as he uttered these last words, he stood up and left. In the same minute, we were handcuffed and led to the cells. Musili was set free. But I might as well tell you now, that as I write this book, he is with me in Naivasha prison serving a sentence of thirty years, for another robbery with violence in Nairobi South B, later the same year.

Well, there we were. If you did not follow the concurrently and the consecutively, it meant that in all those cases, we were each to serve twenty-five years imprisonment with forty-eight strokes of the cane. The same day, we were taken to Naivasha G.K. Maximum Security Prison under heavy escort where I still am, as I write this book, always saying to myself, 'I wish I knew.'

Well then, as it was, we were given a right to appeal within fourteen days and when we appealed, the High Court was a bit sympathetic and reduced our sentences, by five years. But in those five years, we were to be under police supervision. The strokes remained forty eight. Then in prison, there is this thing we call remission. If you keep out of trouble, you can have one third of your sentence cut. That means out of twenty years, we would get a remission of six years and eight months. But I repeat, that is only so if you stay clear of trouble, which I may as well tell you is very hard. I for one, have been deprived of it for unknown reasons. What I can assure you now is that within the time I have stayed in prison, I have learnt to be patient, to persevere, to keep time and never to forget. My only regret is the fact that I had to learn the hard way.

Now that this book is complete, I find myself not knowing what to do next. I have done over eight years of my sentence and when you have stayed in prison for as long as that, you become somehow mentally confused. Not much to qualify you to a mental hospital, but enough to be noticed by any

sane person. I am in a cell where two of my cell-mates criticise me now and then about writing this book. They say I am giving most of their secrets away. There is this man called Laban Nyutu Muiruri, a man who is a hardcore, if you have ever met one. To have him reformed would cost the authorities not less than one million Kenya shillings and that should be kept in his bank account, otherwise he would still go back to the game. There is this other one called Mike Davis Thiong'o who swears that he will die a millionaire. When you ask him how he will manage it, his eyes turn blood red, his face turns as hard as granite, then with a voice as hard as his face he tells you, 'A .45 is a master key to every safe in existence. It will be my spoon, my dish and my meal!' And if you don't know, he could mean it. I never underrate these people, not now that I know them so well.

Well, what can you do to make such a human being turn to normal?

But I do not care either way because on my part, I am a reformed person. I am wholly decided to be on the right side of the law for as long as I live. The main reason is that I have learnt that crime does not pay. Another reason is that I have now learnt a lot of skills – signwriting, silkscreen printing and the art of painting – that I did not know before and I would never have got a chance to know. And please, do not misunderstand me. I would not have wanted to learn them in prison, however, no matter how much they would fetch.

Okay then, the book has come to an end. I have given it to the ex-R.S.M., better known as G.G., for criticism. Within five days, he has done all the corrections in the places he is well informed about. When he came back to me early on Sunday morning, he told me, 'Well brother, do you know something else?'

I said, 'No.'

So he said, 'I did not know you could write that much. You have really hit it while it is hot. But there is one thing I am not satisfied with.'

So I asked him, 'And what is that, old timer?'

He said, 'You haven't written anything about prison. You should at least write something concerning Naivasha Prison. We have come across a hell of incredible things. Think of it brother and write something about it. We still have plenty of time ahead.'

I stared vacantly into space for three minutes, deep in thought. At last I said, 'Prison? For God's sake don't remind me about prison, and the things

men do to others! Let us leave it at that.'

And for sure, we left it at that. But maybe . . . Tomorrow . . . tomorrow . . .
you never know !

THE END

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The late 1960s and early '70s may be remembered as the years of the great bank and other armed robberies in Kenya. This is the true story of one of the participants in some of those robberies, John Kiriamiti. In raw and candid language, Kiriamiti tells the story of how he dropped out of secondary school when he was only fifteen years old, and for a time became a novice pickpocket, before graduating into crimes like car-breaking and ultimately into violent robbery. This spell-binding story takes the reader into the underworld of crime, and it depicts graphically the criminal's struggle for survival against the forces of law.

John Kiriamiti was imprisoned on 6 January 1971, after being convicted on a charge of committing robbery at Naivasha on 4 November 1970. Kiriamiti left Naivasha Maximum Security Prison in August 1984, just five months after the publication of this fast-selling novel.

"... an unputdownable story of the life of a boy who graduated from a mere pickpocket to a charismatic gang leader. Even if you hate robbers you will enjoy reading this book."

The Weekly Review

"...an absolutely interesting novel...will captivate...readers."

Daily Nation

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